

Psychologists to Obama: Don't Name Torture Apologist John Brenner CIA Director

An open letter from 200 psychologists and allies who are urging Obama not to select John Brennan to be Director of the CIA.

By Stephen Soldz, Psyche, Science, and Society
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Dear President-Elect Obama,

We are writing to urge you not to select John Brennan as Director of the CIA. We are psychologists and allies who have long opposed the abuses of detainees under the Bush administration. We are just concluding a successful several-year struggle to remove psychologists from their roles in aiding or abetting these abuses. It has been a distressing fact that, while the Bush administration resorted to abuse and torture of those in our custody, often psychologists have been put in positions to use their psychological expertise to guide these unconscionable practices.

We look forward to your administration as an opportunity for genuine change -- in this case for our country to take a new direction in its treatment of prisoners. We applaud your commitment to closing Guantanamo and are encouraged by your clear statement from your "60 Minutes" interview last Sunday, "America doesn't torture, and I'm gonna make sure that we don't torture." This fuels our hope for a decisive repudiation of the "dark side" -- the willingness to use or abet illegal and unethical coercive interrogation tactics that sometimes amount to torture and often constitute cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

We are concerned, however, by reports that you may appoint John Brennan as Director of the CIA. Mr. Brennan served as a high official in George Tenet's CIA and supported Tenet's policies, including "enhanced interrogations" as well as "renditions" to torturing countries. According to his own statements, Mr. Brennan was a supporter of the "dark side" policies, wishing only to have some legal justification supplied in order to protect CIA operatives. In describing Director Tenet's views he stated during a March 8, 2006 *Frontline* interview:

I think George [Tenet] had two concerns. One is to make sure that there was that legal justification, as well as protection for CIA officers who are going to be engaged in some of these things, so that they would not be then prosecuted or held liable for actions that were being directed by the administration. So we want to make sure the findings and other things were done probably with the appropriate Department of Justice review.

We know, of course, that "the appropriate Department of Justice review" means that torture was authorized and conducted by our government.

The use of these tactics goes against the moral fiber of our country and is never justified. This is true whether these "enhanced interrogation" techniques are used directly by U.S. forces, as in the CIA's "black sites," or by other countries acting as our surrogates, as in the "renditions" program where individuals are taken to countries practicing torture, resulting in suffering inflicted by that country's forces.

We are well aware that these techniques are ineffective as well as immoral. There is extensive evidence that abused detainees are likely to say anything, true or false, to make the pain stop, leading to faulty intelligence. Furthermore, use of torture and other coercive techniques alienates our allies, strengthens the commitment of our enemies, and puts our own captured soldiers at risk.

Earlier this year Mr. Brennan argued in a *National Journal* interview that a new administration will have great continuity with the Bush-Cheney administration in its intelligence policies:

Even though people may criticize what has happened during the two Bush administrations, there has been a fair amount of continuity. A new administration, be it Republican or Democrat -- you're going to have a fairly significant change of people involved at the senior-most levels.

And I would argue for continuity in those early stages. You don't want to whipsaw the [intelligence] community. You don't want to presume knowledge about how things fit together and why things are being done the way they are being done. And you have to understand the implication, then, of making any major changes or redirecting things. I'm hoping there will be a number of professionals coming in who have an understanding of the evolution of the capabilities in the community over the past six years, because there is a method to how things have changed and adapted.

In order to restore American credibility and the rule of law, our country needs a clear and decisive repudiation of the "dark side" at this crucial turning point in our history. We need officials to clearly and without ambivalence assert the rule of law. Mr. Brennan is not an appropriate choice to lead us in this direction. The country cannot afford to have him as director of our most important intelligence agencies.

As psychologists and other concerned Americans, we ask you to reject Mr. Brennan as Director of the CIA. His appointment would dishearten and alienate those who opposed torture under the Bush administration. We ask you to appoint a Director who will truly represent "the change we need."

We eagerly await your administration and the new spirit it represents.

Best wishes for a successful administration,

Sincerely,

Stephen Soldz, Ph.D., Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis & Coalition for an Ethical Psychology

(For a full list of signatories [go here](#) .)

[Stephen Soldz](#) is a psychoanalyst, psychologist, public health researcher, and faculty member at the Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis. He maintains the [Psychoanalysts for Peace and Justice](#) web page and the [Psyche, Science, and Society](#) blog. He is a founder of the Coalition for an Ethical

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