

## **Psychology and the Prevention of War Trauma**

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### **Abstract**

*The role of professional psychology in providing assistance to soldiers and veterans was highlighted by an issue of the American Psychologist devoted to a program for using positive psychology for resilience training. Shortcomings of that approach led to AP agreeing to publish another issue on alternative perspectives. This article reviewed for that issue but was not accepted by their reviewers. Since it is critical of the relation between the American Psychological Association and US military, readers deserve the opportunity to see what was rejected. Psychologists have an obligation to provide a full measure of options for addressing soldier distress including those that might encourage release from service. Psychologists also have an ethical obligation to question the rationale by a sponsoring organization, the armed services, for exposing the soldier recipients of psychological services to unwarranted risks of preventable wars. Application of positive psychology to resilience training in the current military system fails to meet these responsibilities.*

*Keywords:* militarism, soldier health, American Psychological Association, culture of peace

## Introduction

There is more than one narrative that guides the services provided by psychology to the military and its soldiers. The dominant narrative is that wars happen and that a peaceful but powerful nation such as the United States responds to the aggression of other nations or groups using military force when diplomacy or other efforts at persuasion are not successful. This view presumes decisions to engage in war emanate from decisions by democratically elected officeholders to protect US citizens. War requires a great mobilization of technology, supplies and soldiers. Soldiers are recruited for such patriotic service and undergo serious physical and mental challenges, some continuing long after the time of service. Within this narrative framework the sacrifices are justified and the building of psychological resilience for soldiers - as described in an entire issue of the *American Psychologist* dedicated to Comprehensive Soldier Fitness - makes perfect sense.<sup>1</sup> "The program's overall goal is to increase the number of soldiers who grow through their combat experience and return home without serious mental health problems" according to Michael Matthews, a professor with the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership at the United States Military Academy at West Point.<sup>2</sup>

Comprehensive Soldier Fitness is a program designed for soldiers to increase psychological resilience much as physical training is designed to strengthen their physical capacities. The mandatory program was inspired by concepts and exercises associated with positive psychology. It is intended to remind people of their positive potentials as a deterrent to the despair and trauma they are likely to face as soldiers.

There is however another narrative that casts the contributions and responsibilities of psychology to the military in a different light. In this perspective violent eruptions occur because some people are deprived or displaced and see no non-violent options to improve the quality of their lives. They see control over the resources needed to make their lives better as increasingly centered among a relatively small group of brokers of concentrated power and wealth. It is the decisions of this elite group, according to this second narrative, that necessitate violence and suggest a common root underlying war, poverty and environmental destruction. Resource depletion now causes or intensifies most overt conflicts, and serious global malnutrition affects 925 million people.<sup>3</sup> Such structural violence is neither accidental nor inevitable. Rather it is, in this narrative, a natural consequence of a system inordinately influenced by a small, interconnected network of corporate, military, and government leaders with the power to instill fear, to increase their excessive fortunes, and to restrict information, particularly about their own clandestine dealings.<sup>4</sup> With the predictable benefits of violence going to a small set of corporate and government officials, the recruitment and motivation of soldiers, and of the public, requires a measure of concealment or deception as to who will pay what costs and who will receive what benefits.<sup>5</sup> In this view the sacrifices required from soldiers not only go well beyond what resilience training may prevent, but are not justifiable in the first place. This second narrative calls psychologists to different tasks. These tasks are to draw attention to voices that have been excluded, to clarify the deep psychological and social consequences of the dominant narrative, and to illustrate for people who have been adversely affected by participation in the military the ways to resolve conflicts without recourse to killing. The resilience-training program flags a larger concern that the discipline of psychology needs to come to grips with the implications of its involvement in facilitating the psychological preparation for war.

After 9/11/01, Martin Seligman, in his introduction to the *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, described the United States as "wealthy, at peace, and stable".<sup>6</sup> This view of the United States is consistent with an effort to aid its military establishment to be more effective. The view deserves greater scrutiny since a different image of the United States might not support that goal. With regard to wealth, the view likely reflects those at the upper tip of the income pyramid since corporate wealth and the proportion of wealth claimed by billionaires has increased markedly.<sup>7</sup> It is a view that may be hard to maintain, however, against evidence that real income is declining for a majority of Americans while 49.1 million individuals in the U.S. are experiencing food insecurity.<sup>8</sup> Americans work significantly longer hours than their counterparts in other developed countries and report greater stress, higher rates of violent crime and incarceration, higher levels of homelessness and more medically underserved people.<sup>9</sup> Regarding the United States as a country of peace, this bears most heavily upon the rationale for the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program. Seligman's view ignores a record of U.S. policies and actions that will be summarized in the next section. Regard for evidence is a professional responsibility. Since such evidence is not the customary diet of professional psychology, I urge your patient attention. The evidence is critical to the argument that will follow regarding the options professional psychologists need to provide for soldiers.

### **The Historical Record**

Between WWII and the end of the 20th Century, the United States led 73 military interventions throughout the world, which is nearly double the total from the preceding 55-year period.<sup>10</sup> If we include all covert operations in which casualties occurred, the figure rises to 196.<sup>11</sup> One compelling study of U.S. involvement in ten major wars shows that, when long term unintended consequences are taken into account, most wars have resulted not only in grave destruction but in a net loss to national well-being and that most might have been prevented.<sup>12</sup> The Pentagon has an ever-expanding empire of perhaps 1,700 domestic bases - 725 overseas in 63 foreign lands with U.S. military personnel in 156 countries. The actual number is elusive and all figures are underestimates since some are secret. Official figures do not count Iraq, Afghanistan, aircraft carriers that base 1,000 persons each. Also not counted are airfields maintained by private security contractors like Blackwater - now renamed Xe Services following a scandal about its brutal killings of civilians and negligent killings of personnel. Numerous special operation forces conduct daily black operations requiring secrecy, which removes them from oversight by the democratic process.<sup>13</sup>

The United States' \$455 billion military expenditure, by 2004, had grown larger than the combined amount the 32 next-most-powerful nations.<sup>14</sup> According to a detailed study by the Political Economy Research Institute, military dollars produce far fewer jobs than expenditures in education, health, mass transit or construction.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, defense contracts are sufficiently distributed across the United States to make legislators unwilling to terminate contracts even for products the DOD claims not to need. Failures of such expenditures to achieve peace are typically used by the Pentagon to call for greater expenditures.<sup>16</sup>

What is that money buying? First, it buys an overkill capacity of hi-tech weapons of mass destruction. Second, it buys an empire. Scholars across the political spectrum have recognized that it is not defense against military adversaries but rather international dominance that is being pursued.<sup>17</sup> The U.S. is both the largest beneficiary of global inequality often enforced by military means, and the world's specialist in weapons. But to a large degree what the money

buys is unknown. The scrutiny over contracts to provide research or services in health and human services is lacking in many military contracts. Former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld told CBS News that \$2.3 trillion dollars could not be accounted for.<sup>18</sup> Career soldiers, oil executives, and arms manufacturers, who believe in the militarization of U.S. foreign policy, have replaced many State Department diplomats. The United States record includes rejecting international treaties banning landmines, antipersonnel weapons, and illicit small arms transfers. The United States also rejects jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court that was designed to try leaders charged with crimes against humanity.<sup>19</sup>

This record is consonant with a conclusion reached by the late Chalmers Johnson, a former CIA consultant and leading scholar in the history of American imperialism after the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup> He writes that this vast military empire constitutes proof that the "United States prefers to deal with other nations through the use or the threat of force rather than through negotiations, commerce, or cultural interaction" and that the Pentagon is no longer "under democratic control".<sup>21</sup> The evidence is summarized again by Anthony Marsella, one of the eminent scholars on the place of psychology in the global community:

[T]he United States meets all qualifications to be considered an 'empire,' specifically a global empire seeking hegemonic economic, political, and cultural control of the world. This evidence includes a world-wide system of military bases, an extensive military-industrial-congressional complex that shapes domestic and foreign policies and actions, and an extensive national security system that now endangers and threatens the legal rights of its own citizens.<sup>22</sup>

A critical analysis of the historical record suggests that the U.S. military has been used in the last 50 years not to protect the civilian population, but to spread weapons and to advance the imperial agenda of a relatively small and wealthy elite who are not held accountable for the wars they foment.<sup>23</sup> Most of the soldiers who have fought, suffered, killed, or been killed in this time were not members of this elite. Before psychologists decide to enhance the capacity of this military, we need to understand to what ends programs such as Comprehensive Soldier Fitness will be utilized, and whether the requisites of the sponsor have unduly influenced the design of services offered to the true clients. The eagerness of psychologists to study and promote efficiency in military organizations and motivation in soldiers has not been matched by an interest in study of the decision-makers whose actions produce wars.

### **The Military-Industrial Complex and the Selling of War**

Before a profession offers its services it has an obligation to ask whether the sponsor is acting legally and ethically. The psychology profession in general does not question undue corporate influence in the wars that the profession helps the military to wage. Criminal accountability in war has often been lacking.<sup>24</sup> Seligman and Fowler describe the military as doing the bidding of a democratically elected government.<sup>25</sup> An alternative view - supported by military leaders from the highly decorated General Smedley Butler in 1933 to the distinguished professor of International Relations Andrew Bacevich - suggests that it is typically the government responding to a powerful corporate and military sector that leads to war.<sup>26</sup> The role of undue influence by the military-industrial complex was cause for a warning by another top military leader, President Dwight Eisenhower in his farewell address to the nation.<sup>27</sup> Public endorsement of military policies has become a matter to be managed by professionals. Private companies

and government agencies alike pay millions to public relations firms that specialize in “achieving information superiority in order to impact public opinion and outcomes”.<sup>28</sup> As one example, Lockheed Martin, the single largest military contractor with \$19.4 billion in contracts in 2005, had provided contributions for the 2004 election cycle of \$2,212,836.<sup>29</sup> Lockheed also exercised its influence in a larger way by supporting the invasion of Iraq. The company’s former vice-president, Bruce Jackson, chaired the Coalition for the Liberation of Iraq, a bipartisan group formed to promote Bush’s plan for war in Iraq. Jackson was involved in corralling support for the war from Eastern European countries with promises of weapons transfers, going so far as helping to write their letter of endorsement for military intervention.<sup>30</sup> Other corporations display a similarly profitable and intimate status with government officials that are beyond citizens’ influence.

General Colin Powell, who as Secretary of State presented the case for preemptive war with Iraq at the UN, was an affiliate of the Carlyle Group, a consortium that operates internationally to secure contracts from the U.S. The Carlyle Group is a major player in the defense and telecommunications industries. It profits greatly from war, and averaged a 34% annual return for its investors over the past 15 years. Carlyle executives and advisors include former President George H.W. Bush, his Secretary of State James Baker, former Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci, and National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft. Additional affiliates are former British Prime Minister, John Major, and the former presidents of the Philippines and South Korea. The Saudi royal family and the Bin Laden family are major investors in Carlyle along with several prominent international bankers. As part of the revolving-door style politics in Washington, the Carlyle Group is managed and staffed by former employees of the CIA, the State Department, and the DOD.<sup>31</sup>

The San Francisco based Bechtel Group is one of the world’s largest engineering, construction, and project management companies. The Group consists of the Bechtel Family, 19 joint venture companies, and numerous subsidiaries. Four generations of the Bechtel family led the business through more than 22,000 projects in 140 nations on all seven continents. The connection with the military is prominent. Bechtel manages and operates Los Alamos and Livermore National Laboratories. Early business involvements include the Manhattan Project and development of over half the nuclear power plants in the United States. Bechtel’s long history in the Persian Gulf includes the building of oil refineries and pipelines, as well as highways and airports. During the 1980s, Bechtel had a major Saudi Arabian client, Bin Laden Construction, which invested \$10 million in a Bechtel subsidiary. Currently, Bechtel is collaborating on a \$20 billion deal with the oppressive Saudi government to excavate two new ports.

The U.S. government is the biggest financier of Bechtel. From fiscal year 1990 to 2002, the company received more than \$11.7 billion in U.S. government contracts - the sixth largest payout of the approximately 70 contracted companies in Iraq and Afghanistan. Bechtel’s ties to the government facilitate this process. The company’s relationships with U.S. policymakers and officeholders began when Stephen Bechtel partnered with John McCone, who later became head of the CIA under President Kennedy. In the 1970s, Bechtel hired numerous government officials including Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Casper Weinberger. Weinberger left the company to become President Reagan’s Defense Secretary in the 1980s. Additional Bechtel employers include former Atomic Energy Commission, Chief Robert Hollingsworth, former Marine four-star general and NATO commander, Jack Sheehan, and Richard Helms, who consulted on Iranian and Middle Eastern projects in 1978 after serving as CIA director and

ambassador to Iran. Helms is known for his involvement with the attempted assassination of Fidel Castro and the overthrow of Chilean leader Salvador Allende.<sup>32</sup> The exchange has been bi-directional—government officials move into Bechtel positions and Bechtel officers move into government and back to Bechtel to act as government consultants.

The highest profile officeholder was George Shultz, former treasury secretary to Nixon. Shultz moved from an executive vice president position at Bechtel to Secretary of State under Reagan and back to Bechtel's board of directors. Shultz involvement in Iraq is long and deep. As Secretary of State, Shultz sent Donald Rumsfeld to meet with Saddam Hussein to advocate for the building of a pipeline from the oil fields of Iraq to the port of Aqaba in Jordan. Also as the chairman of the International Council of JP Morgan Chase, Shultz loaned \$500 million to Saddam to buy weapons and Bechtel was one of the companies that sold the weapons. As chair of the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq, Shultz lobbied for war and wrote a piece printed in the *Washington Post* entitled: "Act Now. The Danger is Immediate. Saddam Must Be Removed," advocating a preemptive strike on Iraq.<sup>33</sup> The Bush administration rewarded Shultz by granting Bechtel exclusive no-bid, contracts for the reconstruction of Iraq, before it reduced Iraq's infrastructure to rubble during its "shock and awe" operation. These Iraq War contracts enabled Bechtel to reap record profits of \$17 billion in 2003, and \$17.4 billion in 2004. Bechtel Groups and its employees are among the biggest political donors in the construction industry. The company and its workers contributed at least \$446,000 to federal candidates and party committees in the 2008 election.<sup>34</sup> Lockheed, Bechtel, and Carlyle, illustrate typical behaviors of a more widespread cohort of military contractors, moving in and out of government, making exorbitant political contributions, and lobbying for war.

### **Media and the Dominant Narrative**

The dominant narrative of war as a necessity for protection of the U.S. affects professional psychologists as well as the public and owes much to popular media. The role of mass media in selling war is great. It should be examined in any effort to diminish the human consequences of violent conflict. The largest and most successful companies serving the Defense Department in the area of "image management" include Rendon, Lincoln, and the Edelman Company.<sup>35</sup> Between fiscal years 2003 and 2005, the U.S. government paid an annual average of \$78.8 million to private public relations firms. Each branch of the military has its own substantial public relations budget. In the five years following September 11, 2001, the Pentagon alone paid a single private public relations firm more than \$56 million and the Government Accountability Office reported Pentagon expenditures of \$1.1 billion in media contracts over a thirty months period, starting in 2003.<sup>36</sup> When "experts" promote fear and war in the media, with limitless resources and without disclosing their vested interests, the claim that wars reflect policies of an honestly elected democracy, ring shallow. It is not only the decision to go to war but also the conduct of war, particularly of asymmetric war, that assigns a major role for media. This has been well recognized by military strategists. Dissident forces often rely upon the support, the "hearts and minds" of sympathetic populations.<sup>37</sup> On the more powerful side of the asymmetry, populations grow weary of the costs, in money and in lives, of extended war. So shaping of military information to minimize the human costs and manage public concern is part of the program of the modern military.<sup>38</sup> Media commonly repeat a part of the dominant narrative that soldiers are fighting to protect our freedoms. Studies show that soldiers, no less than those labeled terrorists, are motivated and enabled to inflict violence after being inculcated with images of a demonic, dehumanized enemy. This is coupled with an identification of the self

with in-group norms for discipline and loyalty, thereby permitting a rationalization for the commission of mass violence against enemies. In this way, persons otherwise meeting the criteria for health and sanity are able to kill.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Pitch to the Soldier Class**

The special *American Psychologist* issue on building soldier resilience did not deal with the lifescape of the intended beneficiaries of the CSF intervention and how they got to be where they are. A heroic image of the warrior does not explain why soldiers enlist. Refined “ethnic” marketing strategies are used to induce enlistment. Recruitment is professionally designed using known psychological principles. It is also deceitful and unjustly selective. The amount spent on recruitment programs and marketing reached \$18,000 per recruit by 2006. A program pays civilians up to \$2,000 for referring someone to join the Army. This method enlisted more than 1,300 people and the Army increased its enlistment bonus to \$40,000.<sup>40</sup>

A Navy recruiting command study noted that family income is a key to recruitment. Recruiters target 17 or 18 year-olds desperate to escape the lower classes. Economic conscription gets easier when the economy goes bad. Recruiters present the military as the only solution. Every high school receiving federal education funds must hand over the names, addresses and phone numbers of every junior and senior student to a local military recruitment office.<sup>41</sup> Targeted communities are located predominantly in poor African-American and Hispanic communities as are the recruitment billboards. Many whose criminal backgrounds or physical condition would technically keep them out of service are encouraged to conceal information so recruiters may fill their quota.<sup>42</sup> The top twenty recruitment counties had median household incomes below the national average; nineteen of these counties rank below the median average in their own states. Schools offering General Education Degrees provided the greatest number of recruits.<sup>43</sup> No part of recruitment or training describes the likelihood of death, the consequences to recruits’ families, or the effects that the experience would have upon the remainder of their lives. Every quintile of income is represented in military service. Yet the highest levels of the upper class, which benefit most from war, are virtually absent from military service.<sup>44</sup>

### **Expanding Psychological Appraisal of the Costs of War**

Psychologists should be asking why, after such vast investments in defense, people still do not feel safe. Scholars of cognitive congruity might ask whether militarists are exaggerating the need for a “Global War On Terror” in order to justify their empire or whether war, rather than criminal investigation, is indeed an appropriate response to the threat. Psychologists might also ask whether this level of military activity meets the criteria of addiction—i.e. the state of being enslaved to a habit or practice or to something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming—to such an extent that its cessation causes severe trauma.<sup>45</sup>

Most importantly, we might ask whether we have truly appreciated the human costs and the possibility that U.S.-led wars could have been prevented. A Rand Corporation study shows how widespread are the psychological consequences, typically categorized as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), among returning soldiers.<sup>46</sup> The study provides estimates of the extensive emotional and behavioral consequences seen, not only while soldiers are on duty but long after they have returned. It notes suicides, ripple effects upon marriages and families, substance abuse and employability issues. The report notes accurately the stress of repeated tours of

duty, of the inevitable witnessing of loss of lives of comrades and of civilians, so typical of wars, occupation and asymmetrical warfare.<sup>47</sup> Finally, the report notes deficiencies in treatment facilities. As harsh as these consequences may be, the report fails to account for an even wider range of challenges.<sup>48</sup> Consistent with the Rand report are statistics showing over 20% of those who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan return with PTSD or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).<sup>49</sup> Such conditions make finding work very difficult. The Veteran unemployment rate is over twice that of the non-Veteran population. Veterans have come to comprise nearly one-third of the country's homeless community.<sup>50</sup>

Other studies indicate both a far broader range of victims and casualties than those addressed and the inadequacy of statistical data to convey the depths of the tragedy. While body armor and improved medical technology raises the survival rate from 75 percent in Vietnam to 87 percent, today, almost half of these injuries (7,159 of 15,220) are serious and life altering. Ten percent of the wounded go home with spinal injuries. Another ten percent suffer head injuries, and many suffer brain damage. Amputation rates, at six percent, are two times the historic norm. These soldiers may survive, but their dreams—of playing sports again, going to college, walking on the beach—will not. Other soldiers, not tallied in these casualty figures, will suffer from psychological trauma for life.<sup>51</sup> One type of injury surely not heralded in either recruiting literature or among those soldiers whose resilience will return them to battle is the sharp increase in double amputations and genital injuries.<sup>52</sup>

### **What Soldiers Witness**

All surviving soldiers will be left to deal with the effects of basic training. Its educational method, according to one marine trainer, is based on "a planned and structured form of cruelty" involving subservience to authority.<sup>53</sup> In the field, soldiers witness the degrading of other soldiers who do not shape up, planting of rifles near the bodies of civilian casualties, stuffing body parts of soldiers killed by suicide into plastic bags, orders that permit civilian children to be killed or orphaned.<sup>54</sup> Some witness the sadistic planned killings of civilians and the cover-up by officers as in the case of the Afghanistan kill teams.<sup>55</sup> Those soldiers who actually kill others are subject to a particularly disturbing syndrome of perpetrator-induced PTSD.<sup>56</sup>

The CSF program does not deal with abuses of authority that are typical in the occupation of a foreign country.<sup>57</sup> Rather the program proposes to increase unit solidarity and morale, regardless of the mission. Soldiers witness the disparity between official notices and what actually happens. They see flattened villages and hear the reports that the attacks were upon enemy strongholds. Many soldiers face a stress-inducing crisis over 'moral injury' after repeated transgressions of moral beliefs.<sup>58</sup> One returned infantry specialist wrote "There is nothing that I feel can alleviate the guilt for being directly involved with our illegal and immoral occupation of Iraq."<sup>59</sup>

One might argue that persons who abhor such violence did not have to join the military or might be free to request conscientious objector status. Why young people join will be addressed. The plea to follow conscience is described in the case of Lieutenant Ehrin Watada who could not meet the strict criteria set for conscientious objector status but who came to see the war in Iraq as not only barbaric but based upon deception and a violation of international law. Were such acts of conscience made legal and offered by mental health counselors as an



option for living with integrity, wars would likely be of much shorter duration.<sup>60</sup> Dubious reasons for war affect many more than those who refuse to take part. One soldier in Iraq notes the reactions of his buddies when he turned against the war:

'Yeah, but why take it so seriously? I mean you've got to defend your country either way. You've got to have the balls to go even if you don't agree with it...' These same friends of mine told me that they concede that the situation did nothing but get worse in our year in Iraq and that they didn't see how we could really 'win.' One went so far as to say he didn't believe in the war, but could never 'abandon' his country. One said he agreed with everything I said ... he just lacked the political will to do anything about it. Another stated he is in agreement with me, but said he was just going to hope that his contract runs out before they ever call us up again. All were willing to go back either for some misguided belief in honor or because they were too lazy or scared to do anything about it.<sup>61</sup>

One blog set up by two soldiers gave space for expression of soldier stories from Iraq. The soldiers were warned not to post critical accounts differing from the official story since they would suggest low morale or information damaging the reputation of the occupation.<sup>62</sup> Testimonies at the congressional hearings of the Winter Soldier present soldiers' views of illicit and brutal actions during war that are rampant but clearly not defensible.<sup>63</sup> In the few cases where atrocities are publicized, the "bad apples" that get punished are always those of lower rank and the chain of command that set the conditions for the crimes is left unexamined and unpunished. Soldiers routinely sign away their rights to contest discharge decisions. Some soldiers find a measure of personal healing in organized soldier opposition to the war.

## **Women and War**

Women soldiers are among those who suffer from PTSD in war. But much of the circumstance of their trauma cannot be addressed adequately by enhancing their resilience with a positive attitude. War itself is frequently a cause for the brutalization and humiliation of women.<sup>64</sup> Suzanne Swift, a 23-year-old Army SPC, completed a tour in Iraq during which she was sexually harassed continually and assaulted by three men in her command including her supervising officer. Suffering from PTSD, she went AWOL in January 2006 to resist redeployment with the same unit. She was apprehended and imprisoned briefly in January 2007. She remained on active duty until 2009. It does not seem likely that exercises in enhancing a positive outlook, offered by her military resilience trainer, would be the appropriate intervention. Rather, becoming active in anti-war and anti-rape protests has restored her sense of purpose in life. Her mother Sara Rich reports, "The Army has turned her into 'a fierce warrior for peace and justice'".<sup>65</sup>

A 2003 report financed by the Department of Defense revealed that nearly one-third of a nationwide sample of female veterans seeking health care through the VA said they experienced rape or attempted rape during their service. Of that group, 37 percent said they were raped multiple times, and 14 percent reported they were gang-raped. Perhaps even more telling, a small study financed by the V.A. following the Gulf war, suggested that rates of both sexual harassment and assault rise during wartime. The researchers who carried out this study also looked at the prevalence of PTSD symptoms - including flashbacks, nightmares, emotional numbing and round-the-clock anxiety - and found that women who endured sexual assault

were more likely to develop PTSD than those who were exposed to combat.<sup>66</sup> Col. Janis Karpinski testified that female soldiers died of dehydration because drinking liquids in the afternoon might subject them to rape while using the latrine at night.<sup>67</sup>

The numbers continue to rise. In 2009, the reported sexual assaults rose 11 percent, according to Department of Defense statistics. The Pentagon admits that reported incidents probably represent just 20 percent of those that actually occur. Female recruits are now far more likely to be raped by a fellow soldier than killed in combat. While proportions are higher for women, they are not the only victims. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs statistics indicate that more than half of those who screen positive for Military Sexual Trauma are men.<sup>68</sup>

Many women soldiers have been obliged to leave behind young children in order to serve. The scars inflicted upon them by the military call for something greater than their building of resilience in order to prevent the humiliation from crippling them. It calls for an end to the humiliation, something not addressed in approaches focusing upon promotion of positive thoughts.<sup>69</sup> And, the death rate for injured female soldiers is higher than for males.<sup>70</sup>

### **The War Back Home**

More than 20% of new US veterans are unemployed. A study done by the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America found that 33.8% of new veterans were unemployed for over a year since returning, more than 17% for longer than two years. Over 62,000 US veterans are homeless and, according to the National Coalition of Homeless Veterans, 1.5 million veterans are at risk of homelessness due to poverty. In total, nearly one million veterans lived in poverty over the past year.

A veteran commits suicide every hour and one active duty soldier commits suicide each day. There are now more suicide deaths among active duty soldiers than combat deaths. ... Last year alone, more than 85,000 soldiers were treated for injuries related to sexual assaults. Of course, with the way things are, 90% of sexual assaults in the military go unreported...More than 1.3 million veterans and nearly one million members of veterans' families lack health insurance. According to a Harvard study, lack of healthcare kills more than 2,000 veterans per year, far more than battlefield deaths...Not only do we fail to take care of our veterans when they return home, they are actually far more likely to die after a tour of duty than they are on the battlefield.<sup>71</sup>

While soldiers are at war, serious disruptions occur within their families. Some live with anticipatory grief fearing a death notice. Some are told not to upset or distract the soldier with problems at home. Both the soldier and his/her spouse or partner are more prone to infidelity.<sup>72</sup> Recruiters do not discuss such matters. More to the point, their remediation is not addressed by using positive psychology to enhance resilience. The high rate of soldier suicides is an area for which any effective intervention would be welcome. One woman who survived the suicide of her soldier husband has documented the circumstances of surviving spouses. She reveals the experience of many spouses dealing with a suicidal partner, struggling to find help and then living with the aftermath.<sup>73</sup> In the end, it is clear that the client is not only the traumatized soldier but the traumatized family as well.

## Positive Psychology Tools and Soldier Needs

The special issue describing CSF does recognize this ripple effect. Its response is to make the same assessment intervention more universally available and applicable to family members of servicemen. This raises the question of whether the intervention is truly up to the task. An illustration provided for the application of positive psychology brings soldiers to a repeated exercise in which they state, and continue to reiterate, a list of the things that have gone well in their lives. For example, completing the "three blessings exercise" - in which individuals are asked to reflect on what went well that day and why - for seven days. This type of exercise was "associated with increased happiness and decreased depression for up to six months".<sup>74</sup>

Surely internalized scripts may be helpful and any attention will be welcome, as indicated by the Hawthorne effect, to individuals subjected to stress in an environment with little tolerance for weakness. Any opening to discuss personal stress beats the response to "get the sand out of your vagina" reported by one soldier seeking help.<sup>75</sup> Is the accentuation of positive themes appropriate for the complex and challenging circumstances presented by repeated rape, multiple tours of duty, salvaging the remains of comrades, or of seeing the terror in the eyes of children who have just had their homes destroyed or their parents killed? Will such a program do away with survivor guilt following the loss of comrades, or perpetrator guilt, or feelings of remorse? The CSF program was never tested before its large-scale use with such problems.<sup>76</sup> One study in the journal of Military Psychology comparing before and after effects for US soldiers in Afghanistan showed that "...despite the training, both resilient thinking and morale were observed to decline across the deployment period."<sup>77</sup>

Other psychological approaches such as humanistic and existential treatments, preceded positive psychology in rejection of determinist assumptions but, in contrast to positive psychology, have concentrated upon the deeper search for meaning in the face of disempowering circumstances. Some approaches were designed to address trauma buried from current memory but likely to break through in destructive ways. These other approaches aim at qualities of healing and resilience that are complex but do not shy away from experiencing and dealing openly with sorrow, fear, grief, shame and repentance and with attention to cultural context.<sup>78</sup> Still other therapies work interactively between victims and perpetrators for longer term restoration and some approaches help those who have been victimized by powerful institutions, like the military, to join with others like themselves to preclude such harm in the future.<sup>79</sup>

In the face of such options it is fair to ask why the military so quickly awarded a \$31 million, no-bid contract to the CSF project.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps prior engagements with the principle investigator re prisoner interrogations suggested that the project would be compatible with military goals.<sup>81</sup> A belief that the potential harm from using positive psychology to build resilience is small in contrast to the benefits, suggests a rosier picture than the evidence supports and an unwarranted dedication to the dominant narrative. CSF, in fact positive psychology as a whole, provides a framework for helping some soldiers feel uplifted without addressing the range of conditions that a psychologically healthy person would work to change. Whatever its advantages, positive psychology is neither attentive to the functional aspects of anguish, nor to issues of confronting authority.<sup>82</sup> Positive psychology has been widely criticized for its selective preference of the more easily measured aspects of experience and its contribution to a culture of denial.<sup>83</sup> The restrictive view of reality fits well with military purposes.

Important attempts to help persons who have lived through traumatic events have been well summarized by researchers such as van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth.<sup>84</sup> The military made use of the principles of “proximity, immediacy, and expectancy” in designing interventions that have shown some effectiveness in reducing immediate distress and returning soldiers to service.<sup>85</sup> However, these principles have not been effective in preventing PTSD.

According to Army Lt. Col. Kathy Platoni, a clinical psychologist and a reservist who spent 11 months in Iraq living with the troops and leading combat stress programs, “Nobody comes back unaffected”.<sup>86</sup> She believes it to be miraculous that only 15 to 30 percent of returning Iraq war veterans are reported to deal with posttraumatic stress disorder or some related mental health problems when “[t]his war has no front line, the enemy is impossible to identify, the dangers are everywhere. There is no safe place.” These are characteristics that any unwelcome invading or occupying army will face. It is time that the PTSD of combat be recognized and dealt with for what it is, an inevitable consequence of war.

Assessing soldiers for their potential to withstand such horrors and building resilience through teaching appreciation skills present a difficult task. The repetition of cognitive messages guided by a trained “Master Military Resilience specialist” is not a healthy alternative to the involvement of military personnel in affirming and asserting their right to question and to dissent. The enormous toll that asymmetrical warfare exacts on soldiers, veterans and their families and communities, ought to give our leaders pause. It is another reason to send young men and women to war only as an absolute last resort—and to get them home as quickly as possible, not to send them back repeatedly.<sup>87</sup> It should also cause concern for psychologists whose efforts contribute to sending soldiers back into combat rather than counseling them about their options for non-participation in needless wars. Long notes that the professional training of military health professionals has typically included some variant of the central ethic of the Hippocratic Oath’s ‘First Do No Harm’.<sup>88</sup> But in the U.S. military health professionals are placed within non-medical chains of command and expected to honor a different ethic: ‘Service before Self’.<sup>89</sup>

Professional work may inflict harm on others in many ways—some indirect and concealed even from the people engaged. However, the harm still occurs, “whether as part of the work itself, opportunities it provides for unethical behavior, or through its connections to social injustice, violence and tangential systems in which a given profession has become embedded”.<sup>90</sup> The U.S. detains hundreds of Afghans in Bagram, without charges, legal defense, or being properly informed of their rights. And, Guantanamo remains open. Psychologists, to the shame of the profession, have contributed to the mistreatment of prisoners in these facilities. That they do so in uniform, or as civilian contractors, does not excuse them of moral responsibility. If we consider the judgments handed down at Nuremburg after WWII, neither does it insulate them from potential legal consequences.

Every effort to support military operations is justified as support for our troops. This is true whether it is the use of drones that can kill from a continent away or tapping into, and inducing a soldier's capacity to kill without a serious hangover. But the decisions to use military force are not made with the well-being of soldiers foremost in mind, nor are they made by soldiers or even influenced by their needs and desires. Army sergeants trained as master resilience trainers will not be urging soldiers to report violations of the rules of engagement among their superiors. They will not be encouraged to empathize with the humanity of the adults and

children whom they may have killed as collateral damage, nor encouraged to use forms of restorative justice for apology and reconciliation that have a potential for deeper healing. And they will not be building supportive ties with defectors critical of the war they are fighting.

## Conclusion

Unrestrained enthusiasm for the use of Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF) programs and the Global Assessment Tool (GAT) in the January 2011 *American Psychologist* issue is expressed without concern over their implications for democracy and individual rights. One article suggests that it "would be useful to other large groups and organizations such as schools, businesses, police and fire departments, hospitals, community mental health centers, and the like - any and all settings where doing well is recognized, celebrated, and encouraged".<sup>91</sup> In the army, participation in the "fitness" program, conceived by psychologists under large contracts from the military, is not optional. The government can ask what it wishes in order to assess any individuals and assign them to fitness programs without asking their consent and without offering them viable alternatives. Is this to benefit the soldier who has been psychologically and physically damaged? Or is it to benefit the sponsor that seeks to recruit and to redeploy soldiers? Psychotherapist and *Harpers* mental health consultant Gary Greenberg observes that Seligman harkens to a positive image of classical Florence nurturing the optimism of life.<sup>92</sup> He concludes that "Florence had its Machiavelli; our therapeutic state will have its Seligman, whispering reassurance to our generals about the inexhaustible optimism of their troops".<sup>93</sup>

We see a basic failure to differentiate the velvet glove of authoritarian planning, however well intended, from protected freedoms of individuals to make their own choices. In Huxley's *Brave New World*, citizens were made happy by the best scientific methods available. But Orwell's 1984 showed that authority for the vital decisions in such controlled societies was left to Big Brother. Sophisticated public relations, already developed by the Department of Defense could be used to sell the value of a universal application of testing and intervention based upon positive psychology. Those who question this may be depicted as ignorant detractors of science or scorned and labeled as enemies. But that would only make the image more Orwellian.

We are left with a paradox that should be foremost in the minds of professional psychologists. Helping people who have already been harmed by trauma is essential. But should we be involved in helping an institution that prepares to place more people in harms way without our questioning the cause? Whatever the benefits of team building, loyalty, camaraderie and a positive outlook, the institutions created to fight wars are not the place for ethical and fulfilling values to be created, practiced or mandated. Militaries are authoritarian institutions that kill, maim, deceive and reduce the sense of individual agency. Their prevailing narrative demands deception. We would be wise to heed the words of Thomas Jefferson: "Governments constantly choose between telling lies and fighting wars, with the end result always being the same. One will always lead to the other".<sup>94</sup>

The issue of what such programs as building toughness for soldiers mean for the psychology profession has been raised. "Is the discipline of psychology inadvertently strengthening the institution of war through the belief that 'master resilience trainers' can somehow train people to be resilient to the incomprehensible atrocities and brutalities of war? If we someday find the "gene" which corresponds to resilience will we then selectively breed those resilient people to be the defenders of our "national interests"? What are the consequences of a new generation

of psychologists making a living by facilitating Post Traumatic Growth and ameliorating PTSD in war vets? Has the APA wholeheartedly embraced the institution of war as a de facto reality of the human species?<sup>95</sup> We do have a word for people who are able to kill victims without experiencing the anguish common to other perpetrators. Without regard to how they acquired their resilience, we refer to them as psychopaths.

As peace psychologists, we believe that respectful dialogue is always to be preferred over demonizing those with whom we differ, whether they are terrorists, exploiters, warriors, or professional organizations with whom we disagree. The Coalition for an Ethical Psychology was unfortunately rebuffed in its efforts at dialogue with APA regarding culpability of psychologists who collaborated with the military in coercive interrogation and its professional responsibility in service to the military Coalition, 2013.<sup>96</sup> But, recent revelations in the *New York Times* and elsewhere have indicated a long period of APA collaboration with coercive military interrogations and a record of deceptive cover-up sufficient to call for resignation of APA officials<sup>97</sup>

We close with two implications for the psychology profession. The extent of US engagement in wars that were unneeded is extensive and compelling. It is not professionally responsible for the field of psychology to ignore these facts. The APA seriously faltered, lost members, and shamed itself on the issue of ethical responsibility for those who aided coercive interrogations and torture. Its ties with the military were a factor. The term 'professional' requires a source of judgment independent from the whims of the sponsor or the myths of popular culture. Those extensive ties will need greater transparency if APA is to be a professional organization rather than a follower of where the money is.

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