

November 1, 2011

To the President and Council of the American Political Science Association:

We, the undersigned members of the American Political Science Association, were shocked and profoundly dismayed to learn that John Yoo was invited to speak at the 2011 APSA conference in Seattle. Mr. Yoo was a leading architect of the torture policy adopted by the George W. Bush administration. In drafting memos to his superiors that served to authorize acts of torture, Mr. Yoo, according to the Office of Professional Responsibility of the Department of Justice, "knowingly failed to provide a thorough, candid, and objective interpretation of the law." The Senate Armed Services Committee concluded that the Office of Legal Counsel "torture memos" to which Mr. Yoo contributed "distorted the meaning and intent of anti-torture laws" and "rationalized the abuse of detainees in U.S. custody." In 2009, Mr. Yoo was placed under criminal investigation by Spanish authorities for torture and other war crimes.

Academic conferences should encourage healthy debates and a free exchange of ideas, and we do not support measures that constrain or censure scholarly discourse. But there can be no justification for giving a platform to someone who participated in the actual authorization of torture, a shameful and morally unacceptable practice and a crime under both domestic and international law. The record establishes that Mr. Yoo bears major responsibility for implementing a policy of torture, that he did so based on the purposeful manipulation of law, and that he proceeded on this course in violation of international treaties prohibiting torture and other war crimes. As political scientists and as Association members, we declare our support for open and free debate and discussion, we affirm our opposition to torture, and we protest the decision to invite John Yoo to speak at the APSA conference as an affront to the standards of our profession and of humanity.

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