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AAA Commission Delivers Report on Engagement with U.S. Security and Intelligence Agencies

The American Anthropological Association's (AAA) Executive Board received the final report of the Ad Hoc Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with U.S. Security and Intelligence Communities on November 28th at the AAA's 106th Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. The report, which is the culmination of over a year of investigation of the subject, explores the kinds of work anthropologists involved with the military, defense, and intelligence sectors perform, and evaluates the ethical ramifications of such work.

Recent military action in the Middle East has proven to be highly controversial; anthropologists have strong opinions about the conflict because of the military's "human terrain systems (HTS)" program, which includes anthropologists assisting the military in a number of functions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The newly-released report extends beyond the particulars of the HTS debate, however, with the intent of offering guidance to individuals who might consider work with military, intelligence, or defense organizations. The report neither endorses nor opposes such engagement, but it offers suggestions for action by the AAA Executive Board, and encourages continued dialogue on this subject.

The eight members of the Commission are James Peacock, Chair, Robert Albro, Carloyn Fluehr-Lobban, Kerry Fosher, Laura McNamara, Monica Heller, George Marcus, David Price, and Alan Goodman, ex officio.

The conclusions of their report are as follows:

- 1) Recognize both opportunities and risks to those anthropologists choosing to engage with the work of security and intelligence.
- 2) We do not recommend non-engagement a priori but emphasize differences in kind of work and accompanying ethical considerations.
- 3) Key ethical considerations are do no harm to those one studies (or with whom one works, in an applied setting) and be honest and transparent about what one is doing; see AAA Code of Ethics.

Key recommendations for the Executive Board of AAA include:

- 1) Make our report available for the AAA membership.
- 2) Revise or supplement the AAA Code of Ethics to sharpen guidelines for informed consent, transparency, and application of "Do no harm" in security/intelligence contexts.
- 3) Devise a system for informing members about funding and employment opportunities related to security/intelligence work while also monitoring such announcements and cautioning members about risk
- 4) Append to the Code of Ethics or otherwise guide members in assessing ethical aspects of such activities as direct engagement with the military, teaching cultural understanding to the military, doing studies of military organizations, forensic studies of victims of the military, and guiding military in cultural preservation.

To read full text of the report, [click here](#).



Founded in 1902, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) is the world's largest professional organization of scholars and practitioners in the field of anthropology. With over 10,000 members, the Arlington, Virginia-based association includes archaeologists, cultural anthropologists, biological (or physical) anthropologists, linguists and applied anthropologists in universities and colleges, research institutions, government agencies, museums, corporations and non-profits throughout the world. AAA publishes 19 peer-reviewed scholarly journals and conducts the largest annual meeting of anthropologists in the world. For more information on the American Anthropological Association, please visit <http://www.aaanet.org>.

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