

New York University and the military-university complex

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Last fall, the New York University Student Activities Board (SAB) rejected the application submitted by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) for club status. In its initial application, the IYSSE had stressed its goal of giving voice to the broad anti-war sentiments of students on campus. In the course of appealing the SAB's decision, reached despite the fact that the IYSSE had collected the signatures of over 200 students supporting its application and met all other requirements for club status, the IYSSE was told by the SAB that it rejects nearly 90 percent of all groups that apply.

This arbitrary and undemocratic process is in large part aimed at vetting and restricting the political opinions to which students on campus have access. To launch its drive to obtain club status this year, the IYSSE is holding a meeting on Thursday, February 2 at 7 pm at Judson Memorial Church Assembly Hall. The address is 55 Washington Square South. The title of the meeting is "The way forward in the fight against the Trump administration."

NYU's close connection to the US war machine sheds light on why the university administration would want to prevent students from hearing a socialist anti-war perspective. The ties between American colleges and universities and the national security apparatus—financial, political and professional—are manifold and widespread. NYU exemplifies the US military-university complex in a particularly concentrated manner.

According to a 2015 report from *VICE News*, NYU is one of the most militarized universities in the country, receiving \$16,282,000 in Department of Defense Research and Development funding in 2013, the last year for which data was available at the time of publication. The Defense Department gives funds in order to "achieve agency and national goals," according to the Defense Department web site, and focuses on the development of new technologies for surveillance and weaponry.

For a significant portion of the NYU faculty, there is a revolving door between the university and the State Department, the Pentagon, the CIA, the FBI and various surveillance agencies. The university employs numerous current and former officials from these agencies, who play a major role in shaping academic programs and determining what students study.

One recent NYU jobs listing on a defense-related blog gives a sense of the university's cozy relationship to the war machine of American imperialism.

The listing seeks a new employee for the NYU School of Law's Center on Law and Security, whose purpose, the notice explains, is

"to make our national security policies more effective, legitimate, and sustainable through its publications, student programs, and events."

The notice points out that "in the past several months, the Center's activities have included hosting US elected officials, the Deputy Director of the CIA, and a meeting of a Presidential commission." It touts its close connections to "former government attorneys, including General Counsels of member agencies of the US Intelligence Community and senior federal prosecutors focused on cybersecurity and counterterrorism issues."

The listing suggests to applicants: "Background in US foreign policy, national security, and/or intelligence strongly preferred."

As this listing indicates, NYU has to a significant extent been transformed into a think tank for US imperialism. Its various "national security" programs are aimed at legitimizing state spying, drone assassination programs and the military-intelligence complex that carries out such activities and is responsible for the deaths of millions of people in the Middle East and Central Asia in the last 15 years alone.

The university is also a founding member of the Homeland Security-Homeland Defense Education Consortium (HSDECA), run by US Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), the military command whose purview includes the United States itself. The purpose of the consortium is to involve academics in the plans of USNORTHCOM and develop and promote security programs on campus.

In 2015, the NYU Center for Global Affairs launched the Initiative for the Study of Emerging Threats program with a talk with the then-president of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves. The former president is known for his rabidly anti-Russian politics. In 2014, he called for a massive NATO military buildup on Russia's border, risking military conflict between nuclear powers and a new world war.

The NYU program claims to focus on "non-traditional and new security threats," and lists "information war and subversion" and "cybercrime, cyberwar, and cyberterrorism," among other threats.

NYU has developed a specialized expertise in the legal and technical training involved in mass cyber surveillance. In 2014, the National Security Agency (NSA), which the Snowden revelations exposed for conducting mass spying on the US and global population, designated the NYU Polytechnic School of Engineering, since renamed the Tandon School of Engineering, a Center of Academic Excellence (CAE).

The school is one of only 16 institutions with the CAE designation in cyber operations. CAE designation provides the school with an expert who works as a liaison between it and the NSA. CAE-designated schools can apply for grants from the National Science Foundation (NSF), which helps fund scholarship service programs such as the ASPIRE scholarship (Scholarship For Service Partnership For Interdisciplinary Research and Education), which is awarded to “students in the general area of information assurance and cybersecurity.” NYU has five separate programs at different colleges that are approved for the ASPIRE scholarship, which covers tuition and provides a stipend of \$20,000 a year for undergraduate students.

Students who receive the scholarship must spend two years in government service. According to a 2015 article by the *Guardian*, roughly 29 percent of the students who receive the scholarship are placed in the NSA. Most of the rest are slotted into other intelligence, spying, police or military agencies.

The listing cited above was placed by the board of advisers of the NYU law school’s Center on Law and Security, which is comprised of legal experts for US intelligence agencies and their corporate partners. The members of the board include Gus Coldebella, the former general counsel for the Department of Homeland Security; Rajesh De, former general counsel for the NSA; Gavin Hood, founder and CEO of the CIA-backed startup Palantir Technologies; and Elizabeth Rindskopf-Parker, who between 1984 and 1995 worked for the CIA, the NSA and the State Department.

In 2014, the law school hired Harold Koh, a former legal advisor to the State Department, to teach. Law students and alumni drew up a petition calling Koh’s “presence at NYU Law and, in particular, as a professor of International Human Rights Law...unacceptable,” due to his involvement with the Obama administration’s drone warfare program. The petition received over 400 signatures.

In response, the online journal *Just Security*, which is based at New York University Law School’s Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHRGJ), organized a counter-petition in support of Koh. The CHRGJ faculty director and co-chair, Ryan Goodman, is a member of the State Department’s Advisory Committee on International Law. The journal published the petition, which was co-authored Sarah Cleveland, former counselor on international law to the legal adviser at the State Department, and Michael Posner, former assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor at the State Department and current professor at NYU’s business school.

The petition read, “Professor Koh has been a leading scholar of, and advocate for, human rights for decades... he is widely known for his unquestionable personal commitment to human rights and his eminent professional qualifications to teach and write on the subject.”

This petition absurdly praising an architect of the drone assassination program was signed by 14 members of the NYU law school faculty, as well as several from the business school.

Posner worked for the State Department from 2009 to 2013, during which time he was a leading proponent of the human rights rhetoric that has become a central argument for US foreign

intervention and justification for the military atrocities committed by the US and its allies. In 2011, Posner stated that a no-fly zone in Libya is “not a solution, but it’s a piece of it.” At the time, the US was carrying out a bombing campaign and supporting jihadist militias as part of its bloody war for regime-change against Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

In 2013, Posner and Sarah Labowitz, another former State Department employee, co-founded the Stern Center for Business and Human Rights as part of NYU’s business school. The center’s stated mission is to “challenge and empower companies and future business leaders to make practical progress on human rights.” Labowitz also signed the letter praising Koh.

For all its professed concern for “human rights,” NYU used super-exploited labor in completing the construction of its Abu Dhabi campus. Cheryl Mills, former chief of staff to Hillary Clinton, negotiated the establishment of the Abu Dhabi campus in 2009 while she was employed by both the State Department and NYU.

The *New York Times* later exposed the fact that the campus was being constructed with the use of roughly 6,000 migrant workers who were forced to work under brutal conditions. According to documents released by WikiLeaks, NYU also maintained contact with Mills after she left the school in order to update her about the establishment of NYU’s Shanghai campus.

The IYSSE is re-applying for club status this semester to educate and mobilize students at NYU as part of the building of an international movement against war, based on the working class and a revolutionary socialist and internationalist program. This will prove all the more essential under the Trump administration, which will give the military and intelligence agencies free rein to expand the attacks on democratic rights and never-ending wars of the Obama years.



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