

New York University: A center of militarism, mass surveillance and censorship: Part 1

NYU and the preparations of US imperialism for world war

The IYSSE at NYU
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This is the first in a three-part series.

As thousands of high school students tour the country looking at prospective colleges to attend in the fall semester, many remain unaware of the transformation of numerous academic institutions into centers for military research and training.

New York University (NYU), one of the most prestigious and expensive institutions in the United States, likes to present itself as liberal and “diverse,” and as an “institution without walls.” Many of the school’s departments, including history, sociology or anthropology, count leading representatives of postmodernism and identity politics among their faculty, and the promotion of race and gender as having primacy over class is, in many ways, the official school ideology.

However, behind this surface of “diversity” lie extensive ties to big business, the Democratic Party and the military. As this series will demonstrate, NYU is now closely integrated into the preparations for war against both Russia and China, and, along with that, in the efforts of both the state and the major corporations to conduct mass surveillance and censor free speech on the Internet.

Part 1: NYU and the preparations of US imperialism for world war

NYU was one of the earliest universities to embrace the deepening collaboration between higher education and the US state in the “war on terror.” In 2004, the university was one of the founding members of the Homeland Security-Homeland Defense Education Consortium (HSDECA), run by US Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), established under the Bush administration to provide military support to police within the United States.

In a question and answer session held in April 2004, the HSDECA deputy of education and training, Stan Supinski, explained that the role of the consortium was to promote programs related to homeland security and to tap into academia to help “level the playing field for homeland security and homeland defense the same way it leveled the field during the Cold War.”

NYU as a Cold War University

NYU’s ties to the state go back to the Cold War, in which it helped US

imperialism fight against the Soviet Union. The university played an exceptional role as an ideological base for liberal anti-communism.

During this period, NYU developed deep and lasting ties to the Ford Foundation. Established in 1936 through a donation from the founding family of the Ford Motor Company, the Ford Foundation has been known for decades for its close collaboration with the US state and military. Frances Stonor Saunders, a British historian of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), wrote in *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* that the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations were “conscious instruments of covert US policy, with directors and officers who were closely connected to, or even members of American intelligence.”

Both the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations were key instruments in establishing the so called “Cold War University,” in which academics, especially in the departments of physics, mathematics, politics and history, and the newly emerging field of international relations, placed their work at the disposal of the American state.

According to historian Udi Greenberg, “...the Cold War became an enduring presence on US campuses. Rather than demobilizing after World War II, professors, philanthropists, and state officials only tightened their cooperation. The US government forcefully encouraged this mission, pouring millions into new teaching programs, language training, and academic research agendas. Intellectuals and scholars who produced policy-relevant knowledge gained access to enormous funding, classified information, and open government positions. The global struggle with communism solidified universities’ new role as engines for domestic mobilization, government service, and assertive diplomacy.” (Udi Greenberg, *The Weimar Century: German Emigres and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War*, Princeton University Press 2014, p. 56)

NYU was no exception to this development.

In 1950, the Ford Foundation and the CIA jointly funded the establishment of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), which worked to cultivate anti-Marxist intellectuals through support for artistic festivals and publishing houses. The CCF’s US affiliate, the American Committee for Cultural Freedom (ACCF), was founded the same year inside NYU’s Faculty club.

Two former radical professors at NYU’s philosophy department played an active role in promoting the organization and recruiting researchers: Sidney Hook and James Burnham. Sidney Hook, a former member of the American Communist Party, headed NYU’s Philosophy Department from 1948 to 1969 and, in this capacity, was an important figure in the development of influencing neoconservative thought.

James Burnham, a former member of the Socialist Workers Party who broke with the Trotskyist Fourth International in 1939 to support the war effort of US imperialism, was an even more sinister figure. A professor of

philosophy at NYU since 1929, he took a “leave of absence” from NYU during World War II to work for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the forerunner of the CIA, where he headed the Political and Psychological Warfare division at the recommendation of George F. Kennan.

Burnham remained at NYU until 1953. He later continued to work with the CIA, where he was deeply involved in the covert warfare against the Soviet Union. In 1955, he co-founded the *National Review*.

Other NYU affiliates such as Kalman H. Silvert, a former political science professor, and Henry Townley Heald, NYU president from 1952 to 1956, went on to lead the Ford Foundation’s program on Latin America, the scene of some of US imperialism’s worst crimes, and head the foundation, respectively. In 1962, the university appointed James McNaughton Hester, son of a US Navy chaplain, who had served in the Marine Corps in Japan before entering into academia. According to one of his biographies in 1962, he believed the ultimate weapon was “not the hydrogen bomb, but education.”

Due to its ties to the American war machine and intelligence state, NYU was affected by the student protests against the Vietnam War that swept American campuses in the late 1960s. There were regular demonstrations in opposition to the US government’s imperialist actions and NYU’s connections, including demonstrations by hundreds of students against the university allowing recruiters from the Dow Chemical Company, which was the principal manufacturer of napalm, to work on campus.

The mass opposition to the Vietnam War forced NYU—like many universities—to downplay or hide ties with the US military and intelligence agencies for decades. Today, however, they are more extensive than ever.

In his 1961 farewell address, President Dwight Eisenhower famously warned of the explosion of the “military-industrial complex” and its “total influence” over social and economic life in America. In that same speech, he also warned of “the prospect of domination of the nation’s scholars by Federal employment, project allocations, and the power of money.”

Today, as the military-industrial complex has reached proportions unimaginable even in the Cold War, this “domination” of academia by the state and big business has likewise reached monstrous proportions. NYU is a stark example of this process, and was ranked as the 91st most militarized US university by *Vice magazine* in 2015.

Planning for wars: NYU’s relations with CSIS

Through its Board of Trustees and various departments, NYU maintains significant relations with the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), one of the most important think tanks in Washington, D.C. While this organization is little known to the average student or worker, CSIS has played an instrumental role in the planning of military aggression by US imperialism, especially against China.

In 2015, the CSIS was commissioned by the Department of Defense to draft a paper on potential military conflicts with China. The resulting 275-page study provided a detailed and comprehensive analysis of what is required to speed up the US military build-up in Asia, to ensure maximum military support from regional allies and strategic partners, and to research and build new weapons systems to neutralize Chinese defense capacities.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote at the time, “the report is nothing less than a master plan for an accelerating arms race in Asia in preparation for a conflict that would inevitably draw in the entire region and the world.” In an earlier report from 2012, the CSIS had already offered a concrete blueprint for the Obama administration’s military buildup against China within the framework of the so-called “Pivot to Asia.” In 2013, a CSIS report proposed to prepare for nuclear war in the Asia

Pacific Region.

Historically, the board of CSIS has included a parade of war criminals and strategists of US imperialism.

For a long time, CSIS was headed by the late Zbigniew Brzezinski, who served as National Security Advisor during the Carter administration and was a key figure in determining US foreign policy over the past half century. Other trustees of CSIS have included Henry Kissinger, who served as National Security Advisor during the Nixon administration; Leon Panetta, the Director of the CIA under the Obama administration; and Rex Tillerson, Donald Trump’s recently sacked Secretary of State, to name but a few.

It is, therefore, highly significant that nearly one-tenth of NYU’s Board of Trustees (6 out of 66) are also on the board of CSIS. According to the NYU website, the trustees are considered to be the university’s “overall fiduciaries” who are “responsible for ... creating policy, setting mission and purpose, strategic planning, [and] reviewing programs.”

Among them is the multi-billionaire Kenneth Langone, a lifelong Republican and one of the founders of The Home Depot, who is a major donor and trustee of CSIS. He is on both the Board of Overseers of NYU’s Stern School of Business and NYU’s Board of Trustees.

Langone, early on, played a key role in developing NYU’s cooperation with think tanks and the state. By 2004, he had established extensive ties to the US government as a founding member of Choice Point Inc., which has since changed its name to LexisNexis Risk Solutions. LexisNexis is an information company that worked as a private intelligence service for the US government. In a sign of the university administration’s gratitude to Langone, the university named its medical center after him in 2008.

Other NYU trustees who also serve on the board of CSIS include Mark T. Fung, a former researcher for Brzezinski and current CSIS advisory for Chinese trade and politics; Donald B. Marron Sr., a life trustee for NYU, who had previously served as a member of the board for Fannie Mae, the public trading company that was partially responsible for the 2007-2008 mortgage crisis; Stanley F. Druckenmiller, the founder of the hedge fund Duquesne Capital Management, and his wife Fiona, who have contributed millions of dollars to CSIS; and Maurice R. Greenberg, the former chairman of the giant insurance company American International Group (AIG).

The International Sanctions & Financial Crimes Compliance Program, which was established as a joint collaboration between NYU’s Law School and the strategic advisory firm Financial Integrity Network (FIN), also drew on CSIS advisor Juan C. Zarate. Zarate, a co-founder of FIN and former deputy assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor for Combating Terrorism under George W. Bush, was part of the national security apparatus that unleashed the invasion of Iraq and the systematic use of torture.

Zarate’s specialty is “financial warfare,” and he has worked to develop a program at NYU to train business executives to understand and plan for economic sanctions against foreign countries. He explained that the program was part of training executives to “manage compliance risks surrounding financial crimes,” or rather how to comply with sanctions implemented against countries targeted for US economic and military bullying.

CSIS has also provided speakers and program advisors to train NYU students. CSIS current and former employees work as adjuncts and full-time faculty at NYU’s Law School, Stern School of Business, and School of Professional Studies (SPS). In many departments, including the East Asian department, the CSIS—like the Council on Foreign Relations—is recommended to students for internships.

Many NYU alumni have become CSIS researchers or participated in their Young Leaders program that gives members the “opportunity to build networks, observe the foreign-policy making process, and voice their generation’s viewpoints within elite circles of policy specialists” and

“gain a deeper understanding of serious conflicts and issues in the Asia-Pacific region.”

Training for the US army and secret services

The university has also collaborated directly with government agencies on accredited programs and worked to incentivize students to join these agencies through a variety of scholarships and funding programs.

This includes the establishment of the Transnational Security Concentration, which is hosted through NYU’s Center for Global Affairs at the School for Professional Studies (SPS). According to the program’s director, Mary Beth Altier, the role of the program is to “not only understand the threats that confront states, organizations, and individuals, but to better prepare students to be able to detect, anticipate, and thwart emerging threats whether they work in government or the private sector.”

Before coming to NYU, Altier conducted her post-doctoral research at Pennsylvania State University, one of the most militarized in the country, working on a US Department of Homeland Security and UK government-funded project on “terrorist disengagement, re-engagement, and recidivism,” as she writes on her website.

The program encourages students to do “Global Field Intensives,” in which a student will be accredited for work experience either in New York City or abroad by participating in internships or associated organizations. Among the areas included are China and Russia.

Notably, Altier’s message to prospective students states that the program, “covers conventional interstate threats such as the crisis in the South China Sea,” which has become a buzzword among foreign policy strategists as part of the justification for US military encirclement of China.

Military and political leaders have for years considered Russia an obstacle to US global hegemony, a phenomenon that has only increased after the allegation of Russian interference in the 2016 election. NYU has done its part to whip up the campaign against Russia.

In 2015, the Center for Global Affairs hosted a talk with the then-president of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves. Ilves is known for his rabidly anti-Russian politics and had previously called for a massive NATO military buildup on Russia’s border, which could risk military conflict between nuclear powers. Multiple events that encouraged the anti-Russia campaign, with figures such as journalist Julia Ioffe, have also taken place at NYU’s Jordan Center for the Advanced Study of Russia.

The Global Center’s website specifies that enrolled students and alumni of the Master of Science degree program hold positions in a variety of businesses, NGOs, think tanks and government agencies, including the United States Army and Department of Homeland Security.

Several other programs have trained operatives for major military and intelligence contractors. According to campustechnology.com, in 2013 private security contractors Booz Allen Hamilton and ManTech International joined the “enterprise learning arm” of the Polytechnic Institute of New York University—since renamed NYU Tandon School of Engineering—in order for their employees to have access to online courses in cybersecurity and other technical and computer engineering fields.

Booz Allen Hamilton is the former employer of whistleblower Edward Snowden, who exposed the extensive surveillance by the National Security Agency (NSA). The company has also helped the United Arab Emirates establish its own spy agency.

Moreover, NYU offers a variety of symposiums, talks, and scholarships to help recruit students into the military, intelligence agencies, or companies that work for these agencies. In 2014, for instance, NYU hosted a “CIA information session,” during which students could meet the

CIA’s Directorate of Science and Technology to “discover what it’s really like to work for the CIA.” The event was hosted inside NYU’s Bern Dibner Library in Brooklyn, New York and advertised on the Tandon School’s event page.

To be continued in Part 2: NYU’s role in “cybersecurity” and mass surveillance



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