

South Australian university partners with US defense contractor Lockheed Martin

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The University of Adelaide announced in October that military technology giant Lockheed Martin had become the first partner of the university's new Australian Institute for Machine Learning (AIML). The institute will be based at the "innovation precinct" known as Lot Fourteen on the seven-hectare redevelopment site of the old Royal Adelaide Hospital in the north-east of the South Australian state capital.

The decision of the University of Adelaide, behind the backs of students and staff, marks a further integration of Australian universities into the US-led war drive against China and Russia under successive Liberal-National coalition and Labor Party governments.

Lockheed Martin Australia will move a team of researchers from the \$13-million Science, Technology, Engineering Leadership and Research Laboratory (STELaR Lab) at the University of Melbourne to be co-located with AIML researchers, with honours, doctoral and post-doctoral R&D programs.

STELaR Lab is Lockheed Martin's first multi-disciplinary R&D (research and development) facility outside the United States. STELaR Lab's launch in August 2016 was attended by then Liberal-National Coalition Defence Industry Minister Christopher Pyne, as well as Stephen Conroy, then Labor's shadow minister for defence, and Victorian Labor Premier Daniel Andrews, in a display of the bipartisan support for the militarisation of universities.

Other major defence research centres and think tanks at universities around the country include the University of Melbourne's Defence Science Institute, opened in 2010 with the stated aim of building "defence science research networks," as well as a "memorandum of understanding" between the university and BAE Systems—a major British arms manufacturer—in February for the establishment of a manufacturing and innovation centre.

A \$12 million dollar cyber-security facility is to be

established at the Australian National University in the national capital Canberra with the Australian Signals Directorate.

The new centre in Adelaide has already received over \$1 million out of \$13.8 million in grants awarded to researchers at the University of Adelaide by the Australian Research Council this year. According to a university press release, the South Australian government has made a \$7.1 million investment in the AIML, including \$1.5 million of that prioritised for defence capability research.

The AIML's research into artificial intelligence will be focused on the following areas, all of which can have military applications:

- Machine learning—the ability for computers and machines to learn how to do complex tasks without being explicitly programmed by humans.
- Trusted autonomous systems—this includes research into surveillance and tracking systems. The AIML notes on its website: "In defence, the on-going surveillance of potential threats can be automated using a variety of computer vision-enabled platforms."
- Robotic vision—the ability to map an unknown environment to create technology to allow field robots, drones and autonomous vehicles to navigate independently.
- Visual question answering—machines answer questions about the content of visual images.

These technologies are part of the shift in military research in the last decade toward drone warfare, driverless vehicles, and other such autonomous systems including robots that can be used in combat.

Lockheed Martin, the world's largest military contractor, has the closest ties to the Pentagon. The company has developed some of the most highly-coveted American military technologies, including next-generation fighter jets and drones that have been used to

bomb Yemen, Iraq, Syria and other targets of US aggression.

The University's Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor Mike Brooks, said: "Such innovation is expected to be catalysed by the Federal Government's once-in-a-lifetime investment in defence and related industries here in South Australia."

South Australia is quickly becoming a centre for Australian military industry with the federal government announcing in 2016 a \$50 billion contract to build 12 advanced submarines at a shipyard at Osborne, near Adelaide, to replace the Australian Navy's fleet.

South Australian researchers also secured nearly \$695,000 in funding from the Defence Innovation Partnership (DIP) last month. The DIP is a collaboration between defence companies, the University of Adelaide, Flinders University, the University of South Australia, the South Australian defence department Defence SA, and the federal Department of Defence, the Defence Science and Technology Group (DST Group).

Among the five projects being supported by the DIP, are research into identification of combat and combat-related stigma in deployed Australian military personnel, AI-enabling of Australia's Future Submarine, and Miniaturised Orbital Electronic Warfare Sensor Systems (MOESS).

South Australian Premier Steven Marshall said that defence research is "a key priority for South Australia's broader defence strategy and is critical to ensure that we maximise the full extent of the Commonwealth government's \$90 billion naval shipbuilding commitment."

Under both Coalition and Labor federal governments, there has been an unprecedented increase in military spending. The Greens-backed Labor government of Julia Gillard in 2011 integrated Australia into the US military build-up against China, expanding basing arrangements and defence collaboration, with Australian universities playing a key role. In 2016, the Coalition government boosted military spending by 81 percent, or \$495 billion, for the subsequent decade.

In their quest for military funding, universities are seeking to block anti-war sentiment among students. In 2015, the University of Sydney prevented the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) from holding a meeting opposed to the glorification of militarism surrounding the centenary of World War I. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth wing of the SEP, has faced repeated attempts to prevent it from forming

affiliated student clubs by student union and university administrations at a number of campuses, including at the University of Melbourne.

At three South Australian universities, 2,500 students and staff have signed petitions over the last semester opposing the integration of universities with the military. However, groups such as Disarm Unis and Books Not Bombs, tied to pseudo-left organisations, the National Union of Students (NUS), and the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), have sought to channel growing anti-war sentiment on the campuses back behind the political establishment and the pro-capitalist trade unions.

South Australian NTEU President Peter Cardwell told Australian Broadcasting Commission radio in October that the union had passed a motion calling for "institutional autonomy" from "defence and military funding and influence." Cardwell made a meaningless appeal for university managements to make "ethical decisions" about which military research would be "in the public good and contribute to social wellbeing."

Cardwell was a keynote speaker with state Greens party leader Mark Parnell at a gathering of the "Disarm" campaign in November. The pseudo-left organisations are promoting such figures, who are part of, or aligned with, the very parties responsible for Australia's alignment with the US preparations for war against China.

The only way to oppose militarism is through the abolition of the capitalist profit system that objectively leads to war. This can only be done through an international mobilisation of workers, students and youth along socialist revolutionary lines. Young people wanting to fight against the drive to war should join the IYSSE and help form new IYSSE clubs across the country.



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