

Georgia National Guard to use location data to target students for recruitment

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As the United States recklessly accelerates the drive to nuclear world war through its escalation of the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and preparations for war against China, the US military is desperate to offset its recruitment difficulties. One method to reach wider layers of vulnerable young people is to target their cellphones with recruitment advertisements and military propaganda.

The Georgia Army National Guard plans to use cell phone location data to target high school students, as well as their “centers of influence,” such as teachers and parents, with recruitment advertisements. First reported by *The Intercept*, which obtained a copy of the federal contracts materials detailing these plans, the National Guard will create virtual perimeters (“geofences”) around 67 high schools throughout the state and target phones that enter within a one-mile radius of these locations.

The contract material states that the ad campaign should deliver a minimum of 3.5 million impressions and 7,000 clicks, using data such as IP addresses and mobile device IDs to target students on a variety of platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram, and music and television streaming services. Its “primary objective is to reach the core targets of various segments of 17–24 year-olds in Georgia high schools and colleges, with the intent of generating qualified leads of potential applicants for enlistment.”

In other words, the National Guard will invade the privacy of both children and the adults around them, track their location data without their knowledge or consent, and use it to coerce them into joining the military.

The plans underscore the hypocritical, war-mongering nature of the US government’s propaganda campaign against China, which it claims uses the social

media platform TikTok as “a weapon of the Chinese Communist Party to spy on you, manipulate what you see, and exploit your future generation.” As part of the anti-China witch hunt, the Department of Defense bans the use of TikTok for official purposes, including advertising.

Potential vendors must have the ability to determine which media types are most popular within a specific geographic area and to run ten different campaigns simultaneously. Gizmodo reported that the Georgia Army National Guard did not confirm whether any vendor had secured the contract yet.

Through a marketing technique called retargeting, advertisements will also follow students home and off campus, even if they are no longer within the boundary of the geofence. Once a student interacts with an ad, their phone data is saved, and they will be even more aggressively targeted.

Although the National Guard claims the campaign is specific to 17–24 year olds, children much younger will be hit with military advertisements. Speaking to *The Intercept*, ACLU of Georgia attorney Benjamin Lynde noted that, “There are middle schools within a mile of those high schools... There’s no way there can be a specific delineation of who they’re targeting in that geofence.”

This new campaign is the latest in the evolving but ever predatory recruitment practices of the US military, which is in the midst of a crisis. Last year, every branch of the military struggled or failed to meet recruitment goals, with the Army falling short by 15,000. Three decades of unending war has had a profound impact on America’s youth who are increasingly leery of, if not outright hostile to, military enlistment.

Recruitment officers are known for trying to ingratiate themselves with young people, traditionally

in school settings, in practices that public health professionals have described as “disturbingly similar to predatory grooming.” The strategy is to weasel themselves into students’ lives and lure them into the military, usually by exploiting the financial difficulties facing working class youth as they consider college.

Contemporaneous with the launch of US imperialism’s “War on Terror,” the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 made it mandatory for public schools to provide military recruiters with students’ contact information or risk losing federal funding. With many schools misunderstanding this requirement, “schools allow military recruiters to coach sports, serve as substitute teachers, chaperone school dances, and engage in other activities. In some cases, recruiters are such a regular presence in high schools that students and staff regard them as school employees,” noted *EdWeek*.

The military has also tried to adapt its tactics to match the interests of Gen Z, including through exploiting the wide popularity of video games, which is the largest market within the entertainment industry. The Army’s esports team, launched in 2018, competes in and hosts tournaments, tours the country visiting colleges and high schools, and spends hours chatting with online viewers through livestream videos. In 2020, the team faced backlash for banning users on its Twitch page, a popular livestreaming gaming platform, who raised criticisms about US war crimes. The team was also caught hosting fake prize giveaways which directed clicks to the Army’s recruitment website.

Other recruitment practices are outright illegal, as in the widespread scheme whereby thousands of high school students have been forced into the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps without their consent.

Ensuring an ample supply of troops is imperative to the American ruling class, not only for carrying out its war plans abroad but also for suppressing the growing class struggle at home. The National Guard is a state-based military reserve force for the US Army and the Air Force, but also functions as an occupying force against the American population itself that has been routinely used to suppress strikes and protests, including the 1970 murder of four students protesting the Vietnam War at Kent State University.

In 2020, amid the largest mass protests in US history following the police murder of George Floyd, the

National Guard was activated in at least 26 states, including Georgia, to assist police in violently suppressing protesters with rubber bullets, pepper balls, tasers, batons, and other so-called “non-lethal” munitions.

Earlier this year, Georgia Republican Governor Brian Kemp again deployed 1,000 National Guard troops to Atlanta to work closely with police under Democratic Mayor Andre Dickens to crack down against opposition following the police murder of environmental activist Manuel Esteban Paez Terán, who was killed for protesting the planned \$90 million “Cop City” military-style police training center. Both history and current experience teach that the revolutionary movement of the working class, driven by the intractable crisis of world capitalism, will be met with the full repressive force of the capitalist state. However, the international working class is a far more powerful force.

The upcoming online May Day rally sponsored by the *World Socialist Web Site*, the International Committee of the Fourth International, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees will put forward a socialist perspective and program to unite the developing international movement of the working class with opposition to war and on this basis put an end to militarism and exploitation on a world scale.



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