

Pentagon's fascist revamping of military training program

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On February 27, US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth released a memorandum, “Aligning Senior Service College Opportunities with American Values,” announcing the revamping of the US military’s Professional Military Education (PME) program “to ensure alignment with the warrior ethos, National Defense Strategy, and American values.”

The memo marks a major step in the Trump administration’s drive to mold the US military into a US version of Hitler’s Wehrmacht, based on an ultra-nationalist and fascist ideology.

According to the summary statement released by the Department of War (DoW), “the Department is discontinuing all graduate-level PME fellowships and certificate programs with Harvard University” starting in the 2026-2027 academic year. The statement goes on to say that the DoW will end its “legacy Senior Service College Fellowships (SSCFs) at Ivy League and other universities that similarly diminish critical thinking, have significant adversary involvement, or fail to deliver rigorous education grounded in realism.”

SSCFs are granted to officers set to take up senior positions in the US military and intelligence apparatus. According to the US Army War College, SSCF fellows “are relatively senior, often post-Colonel command and senior service college graduates, and are placed in positions of influence on behalf of the senior Army leadership.” SSCF programs have a 10-month curriculum that involves educational and leadership training seminars split between the US Army War College and partnered PME institutions.

According to Hegseth’s memo, the elimination of these partnerships will wipe the current slate of PME institutions clean and repopulate it with a new selection of universities and colleges from across the country, including the University of Michigan (U-M).

The *Michigan Daily* quoted U-M spokesperson Kay Jarvis as acknowledging the DoW’s selection of the university as a new PME partner. In a letter to the *Michigan Daily*, Jarvis wrote:

The university recognizes the substantial responsibilities active-duty personnel carry, and Michigan welcomes the opportunity to remove unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles as active-duty military leaders pursue an education.

Jarvis added that U-M is “establishing an expedited review process for military applicants to U-M who have been admitted to Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government.” She continued: “This pathway allows elite service members to have their credentials considered without the burden of a redundant application, and it ensures applicants receive timely decisions.”

Hegseth spelled out the reason for the PME revamping in the second paragraph of his February 27 memo:

PME is a bedrock upon which we build lethal warfighters grounded in the founding principles that underpin American exceptionalism. To that end, our PME institutions must return to the fundamental mission of focusing our military leaders on core national security strategy issues. We must develop strategic thinkers through education grounded in the founding principles and documents of the republic, embracing peace through strength and American ideals, and focused on our national strategies and grounded in realism. We will no longer invest in institutions that fail to sharpen our leaders’ warfighting capabilities or that undermine the very values they are sworn to defend.

In both his memorandum and an accompanying video published on Twitter/X, Hegseth’s language—education “grounded in the founding principles,” “peace through strength,” and instruction that better “affords ... contribution to the lethality of the Force”—makes clear that the goal is

ideological conformity. He goes on to say that the prior PME institutions were “sacrificing free expression for the suffocating confines of Leftist ideology.”

Hegseth claims the PME system has been “poisoned from within by a class of ‘elite’ universities who have abused their privilege and access to this department and utterly betrayed their purpose.” Hegseth declares that Ivy League institutions have “gorged themselves on a trust fund of taxpayer dollars” for decades, “only to become factories of anti-American resentment and military disdain.”

Broadly identifying liberal and left politics as anti-American, Hegseth rails:

This is not education, it’s indoctrination. ... We’re done paying for enemies’ wicked ideologies to be taught to our future leaders. No longer will we sit back and treat these woke breeding grounds of toxic indoctrination as valid centers of so-called intellectual curiosity.

In an earlier memo released on February 6, titled “Rebuilding the Warrior Ethos in Professional Military Education,” Hegseth outlined another component of the PME restructuring. Beyond the ideological aim of conforming the US military to fascist nationalism, the earlier memo highlighted the DoW’s intent to review the Ivy League universities’ ability to “deliver cost-effective, strategic education for future senior leaders when compared to public universities and military master’s programs.”

Hegseth first announced the DoW’s discontinuation of its PME relationship with Harvard University in his February 6 memo, citing Harvard’s “troubling partnerships with foreign adversaries” and noting letters sent by Trump officials stating that “Harvard has in recent years failed to live up to both the intellectual and civil rights conditions that justify federal investment.”

The decision to sever PME links with Harvard flows directly from the Trump administration’s broader political and financial campaign to subordinate higher education to the state and punish institutions that resist its ideological line. Harvard, Columbia and other former-PME institutions, despite their suppression of opposition among students, faculty and staff to the genocide in Gaza during the Biden administration, found themselves at odds with Trump’s demands to escalate the on-campus crackdown on democratic rights.

Harvard’s legal challenge to the administration’s move to freeze \$2.2 billion in federal grants and the public dispute over campus protests provided a pretext for escalation.

Trump threatened an additional \$1 billion in funding cuts and the elimination of the university’s tax-exempt status.

The discontinuation of Harvard’s PME status and other DoW-linked programs is part of the Trump administration’s punishment of Harvard and other universities that failed to comply with sufficient speed with its fascist demands.

The new list of institutions selected to host PME programs is composed largely of small private colleges and state universities. Some of these, like the University of Florida, were already aligned with the Trump regime’s ideological program, while others, like U-M, took drastic steps to accommodate Trump’s demands.

Under the Biden administration, U-M spearheaded the crackdown on anti-genocide, pro-Palestinian protests, employing police violence, legal action and a broad range of campus policy amendments to suppress the democratic rights of staff, faculty and students. In December 2024, following Trump’s election, U-M began dismantling its multi-billion-dollar Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs to comply with the incoming administration’s demands.

The remolding of the PME system is part of the Trump administration’s reorientation of the US military and intelligence apparatus on an overly fascist basis so as to carry out US imperialism’s wars of extermination, as in Iran, and the violent suppression of workers and youth at home. In this, the Democratic Party, which dominates the U-M Board of Regents and most elite private universities, is complicit.



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