

The Military-Intelligentsia Complex: How Higher Education Enables US Militarism

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From developing new weapons and hiring war criminals to denying dissidents the right to teach, universities have a history of serving US imperial interests. Last October, a cabal of staff at the Pentagon-funded Plymouth University canceled me.

Throughout history, most academics have been the witting or unwitting servants of power. Socrates was accused of failing to honor the gods of Athens and corrupting the youth with his ideas. He was canceled in the ultimate way: sentenced to die. Aristotle, by contrast, tutored the young Alexander the Great, future King of Macedonia, which at the time was occupying Athens. During the rebellion, Aristotle fled to save his skin.

Today, some academics refusing to toe the line are also threatened with death. Chicago University's John Mearsheimer was placed on the US-funded Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation's blacklist, where he and others, [including myself](#), were accused of committing "informational terrorism" by expressing fact-based opinions about the war with Russia. At the same time that Ukrainian fascists were placing me on their list, a cabal of liberal staff at my military-funded institution, the University of Plymouth (UK), terminated my position without warning or right of reply.

If we look at the US imperial apparatus, we see that higher education plays a major role.

From the Beginning

The American university has been significantly influenced by the military since at least 1862, with the passing of the Morrill Land-Grant College Act. The Civil War-era legislation awarded government grants to create agricultural and engineering colleges.

Britain has the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House), [funded](#) by big oil, weapons companies, and banks. The US has its Chatham House offshoot, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), founded in 1921 and funded by the usual suspects: banks, big oil,

etc. A history of the CFR and its close ties to academics, who continue to help shape the ideologies that justify and influence capitalist imperialism, has been authored by Laurence H. Shoup and William Minter: the classic, [Imperial Brain Trust](#).

By the Second World War, the university's "very importance for the achievement of public priorities, most conspicuously for national defense," [writes](#) historian Richard M. Abrams, "led the university to accept inducements and constraints that pulled it notably away from its briefly assumed mission as a protected refuge for the dispassionate and critical study of science and society." Those "constraints" came in the form of military funding.

Historian Robin Winks wrote [Cloak and Gown](#): a major history of the CIA's forerunner, the Office of Strategic Services, and its successful efforts to recruit academics to work for US intelligence during the Second World War. The majority of scholars were teaching at Yale. In 1943 alone, there were 42 recruits. Most the recruits were bookworms who would aid analyses and assist in foreign languages. Other operations included using universities as covers to buy hundreds of books that were intended for OSS-CIA station chiefs.

[The Wise Men](#), written by Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, traces the history of six members of the post-War foreign policy establishment who shaped the Marshall Plan, NATO, and other instruments of US imperialism. The men were graduates of Harvard, Princeton, and Yale.

Institutions like NATO would have still been created without intellectuals, but academics acted as ideological shepherds, rounding policy staff into pens of groupthink that enabled intellectual justifications for the insanity on which they were encouraging politicians to embark.

From WWII to the Cold War

During the War, campuses of the University of Washington (Seattle) were commandeered by the government as the University [pioneered military medicine](#). Political enemies were not welcome. Professors at the University of Washington - Joseph Butter, Ralph Gundlach, and Herbert Phillips - were [fired](#), postwar, for being commies, never to teach again. Their surviving colleagues were forced to sign loyalty pledges. At the time, the men were driven out by [political right-wingers](#).

Today, the tables have turned. So-called liberals are leading cancel culture, as we shall see from my experience.

Citing Johns Hopkins as an exception, historian Lionel S. Lewis [writes](#) that, during the Cold War (1945-91), universities and colleges "typically sacrificed faculty in the face of political pressure ... When faculty committees at the University of Michigan, Rutgers University, and the University of Washington concluded there was no reason to punish faculty whose politics were too far to the Left," writes Lewis, "the campus presidents precipitously overturned the recommendations and fired them." (I endured the same treatment by higher-ups using their executive powers at the Pentagon-funded Plymouth University.)

In 1962, Larry Gara, another alleged dirty commie (actually a Quaker) teaching at Grove City College (Pennsylvania), was fired. Grove City College donor, J. Howard Pew of Sun Oil, took a dislike to Gara and worked in secret to have him fired. Likewise, forces working in secret pushed out me of Plymouth University. Gara had previously been incarcerated for

refusing the draft and, while in prison, had protested racial segregation. When historian Steven Taafee [reviewed the records](#) and discovered Pew's involvement, Grove issued Gara an apology: 53 years later.

More Weapons, More Ideology

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, meanwhile, was enjoying an annual [\\$100 million](#) Pentagon subsidy - nearly \$1 billion in today's money - to develop all manner of weapons. Daniel J. Glenn [described](#) the scene: "Encased in the stairwell of Building 8 are a cluster-bomb wingshaft, a guided missile control fin, and other weapon parts."

In the 1970s, Harvard's Samuel P. Huntington co-authored an [infamous book](#) on behalf of a CFR-type entity, the Trilateral Commission, which argued that there was too much democracy in the US and that media should do more to indoctrinate the youth away from participatory politics. Meanwhile, the so-called "realist" school of political philosophy saw the likes of Zbigniew Brzezinski teaching at Harvard and Columbia on the evils of communism. Brzezinski was a member of the [Bilderberg Group, CFR, and Trilateral Commission](#). As President Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor, he later helped to create the *mujahideen* to "draw the Soviets into the Afghan trap," [as he put it](#). The *mujahideen* were later [rebranded](#) "al-Qaeda" by US intelligence.

During this period, CIA on-campus recruitment increased markedly. The Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) was founded as the forerunner of the CIA's clandestine services unit. According to the [Harvard Crimson](#), "the OPC cultivated faculty members who had been with the wartime Office of Strategic Services and used these contacts to find agents among the burgeoning numbers of foreign students." In 1955, there were 34,323 student recruits. In 1975, there were a quarter of a million.

At the time, neoconservatism, which was neither new nor conservative, was gaining academic credibility in its denunciation of the Soviet Union. One of its leading scholars, Francis Fukuyama, studied at Harvard under Huntington and went on to join the Pentagon-funded military think-tank, the RAND Corporation. Fukuyama [served](#) in Reagan's State Department, specializing in Middle East affairs, and went on to author the ludicrous "end of history" hypothesis: that the triumph of neoliberal capitalism (which is neither new nor liberal) would make life peaceful and rather boring. Fukuyama now [advises](#) the British intelligence cutout, Bellingcat.

Increased Funding

Military funding for universities is not just about war. The US economy, now bought out by asset managers, is a hi-tech economy. The biggest corporations are algorithmic, computing, data, and e-commerce firms. Each of them came out of the military sector, which gave us computers, the internet, and much more.

Under Reagan, the Pentagon increased its funding for universities, hoping for innovation under the cover of the Strategic Defense Initiative: Reagan's plan to weaponize space with a missile system. By the mid-1980s, Department of Defense funding for higher education was double what it was at the start of the decade. One article from the period [reported](#): "Researchers at universities are paid by the Pentagon to study such things as the impact of nuclear explosions on satellite communications, new biological weapons, and ways to generate electricity in outer space."

By the close of the decade, reliance on university skill for weapons and future consumer innovation was of such importance that the outgoing Reagan and incoming Bush administrations created the [Multidisciplinary University Research Initiative](#) to streamline military funding to universities.

The “War on Terror”

After the Soviet Union collapsed and before 9/11, US intellectuals sought new pretexts for war. They concocted the notion of “humanitarian intervention,” latter rebranded “responsibility to protect.” The doctrines were tested in Somalia in 1992 and Serbia in 1999. Scholars who provided [intellectual justification](#) included Sir Adam Roberts of the aforementioned Chatham House.

But “humanitarian intervention” was a damp ideological squib that lost out to the “war on terror.” In the 1990s, the aforementioned Professor Huntington wrote a widely ridiculed article for the CFR, followed by a book, on the [“clash of civilizations.”](#) I think that people who mock the book misread it: Huntington seemed to be saying that the coming post-Cold War conflicts for oil in the Middle East should be *couched* as a “clash of civilizations” for propaganda purposes, as a way of denying imperial motivations, not that they were *actually* a clash of civilizations.

The US blamed “al-Qaeda,” the group it created, for the events of 9/11. Relentless invasions of and proxy wars within the oil-rich Middle East and strategically significant Central Asia followed, as did appointments to prestigious universities of George W. Bush-era war criminals:

Robert Kagan was a member of the now-defunct Project for the New American Century, which in 2000 openly called for a [“catastrophic and catalyzing event”](#) that would enable the US to: back out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (1972) in order to weaponize space; invade Iraq; encircle China; and much more. Kagan is [Adjunct Professor of History](#) at Georgetown University, which is a few minutes’ drive from the Pentagon and White House. Kagan’s wife is Victoria Nuland, chief architect of the Ukraine 2013-14 coup and current US-led proxy war. Nuland is [Distinguished Practitioner in Grand Strategy](#) at Yale (yes, that title really exists!).

Deputy Assistant Attorney General, John Yoo, was the chief ideological architect of Bush’s torture program. Yoo is [credited](#) with giving the administration the fake legal justification for so-called enhanced integration techniques by drafting the “torture memos.” Yoo is currently a law professor at California-Berkeley. In 2007, former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld faced [student protests](#) after Stanford’s Hoover Institution made him a Distinguished Visiting Fellow. After her stint as National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice returned to teach at Stanford, later [directing](#) part of the Hoover Institution.

Obama’s “Conspiracy Theorists”

Under Obama, the US [increased its efforts to recruit spies](#). Typically, the National Security Agency helps to build profiles of academic targets. The CIA then recruits those targets, foreign and domestic, to act as spies at conferences through its National Resources Division. Agents also pose as businessmen offering grants to prospective assets. Regarding academic conferences, ex-Officer Ishmael Jones (alias) [says](#): “We tend to flood events like these.” Through cutouts like Centra Technology Inc., some conferences are even run by US

intelligence agencies. As part of its proxy war against Iran, the CIA reportedly ran a program literally called Operation Brain Drain: an attempt to lure Iranian scientists – the ones they and Mossad didn't [murder](#) – to the West.

Samantha Power was Professor of [Practice in Human Rights](#) at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. She authored *A Problem from Hell* (2002), a book calling for more US invasions of sovereign nations under the pretense that foreign policy planners' hearts bleed for oppressed peoples. The timing of the book was unfortunate for Power, as the US had shifted away from "humanitarian intervention" to the "war on terror." Nevertheless, Power was picked by Obama to be Ambassador to the United Nations and then by Biden as head of the US Agency for International Development – America's imperial privatization arm.

Power married Cass Sunstein, Obama's Administrator of the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs. Sunstein is currently [Robert Walmsley University Professor](#) at Harvard, where he espouses discredited behavioral sciences as a means of social control, or "nudge," as he and others call it. Sunstein [co-authored](#) a paper arguing that "conspiracy theorists" were becoming a dangerous new class of people. (As we shall see, "conspiracy theorist" was a lazy and vague smear used against me by Plymouth University staff in their efforts to cancel me.)

The culture is shifting from thinking of "conspiracy theorists" – an undefined and meaningless designation – as harmless eccentrics to threats to "national security," meaning the stability of political elites. To give a couple of examples: After questioning who might really be responsible for 9/11, Kevin Barrett of Wisconsin-Madison was ["witch-hunted out"](#) of the institution, in his words. In Canada, Lethbridge University's Professor Anthony Hall was forced into early retirement after being [accused](#) of being an anti-Semite and a conspiracy theorist.

Britain

The story is much the same in the UK. Just as Georgetown University is a few minutes' drive from the Pentagon and the White House, the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in London is close to the Ministry of Defence and Houses of Parliament. In addition to the RUSI, Chatham House continues to invite scholars to speak and publish. The top universities, Oxford and Cambridge, have long been recognized as [recruiting grounds for spies](#).

Left-wing professors like A.J.P. Taylor and Christopher Hill were [under surveillance](#) during the Cold War by the internal spy agency, MI5. More recently, the so-called Integrity Initiative (II) developed what it called "clusters" of sympathetic journalists and scholars to promote a narrative: that Russia is an existential threat to Britain and Europe and to discredit anyone who disagrees. Professor Piers Robinson, then at Sheffield University, and Professor Tim Hayward of Edinburgh University, were both smeared by [II-linked journalists](#) in *The Times*, who [splashed](#) the front page with the headline: "Apologists for Assad working at British universities."

Professor Robinson says that he chose to step down from his position, while Professor Hayward continues to fight smears and complaints, including those [coming from students](#). Similar student-based tactics have been used in the US against [Mark Crispin Miller](#) and in the UK by [David Miller](#). In my case, I was not a salaried employee, so, as wannabe bullies are wont to do, the cabal of staff at Plymouth University seized upon this weakness to try to cancel me.

Plymouth University

The City of Plymouth UK houses the Ministry of Defence (MoD)'s [Naval Base Devonport](#) from which the UK's amphibious ships, surveillance vessels, and frigates sail. The Base also services Britain's [nuclear-armed](#) and nuclear-powered submarines, as well as [storing](#) decommissioned submarines. Inevitably, the City's University has a close relationship with the Mod

As part of its 2014 Covenant with the Mod, Plymouth University [agrees](#) that "we are an armed-forces friendly organization." Perhaps that's why the small University Press has [10 titles](#) on Britannia Naval Histories of World War II and initially accepted and then rejected without explanation my book, later titled *Britain's Secret Wars?*

The University's Centre for Seapower and Strategy [seeks to counter](#) "global pandemics; climate change; mass migration; transnational organized crime; transnational terrorism; the 'hybrid warfare' of state actors; and cyber attacks." In addition, the University has signed up to the [Human and Social Science Research Capability](#) framework: "University of Plymouth is part of a framework agreement supplying the Ministry of Defence (MOD) through BAE Systems" – the notorious weapons manufacturer.

In 2018, the Pentagon's innovation arm, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), launched its [PREventing EMerging Pathogenic Threats](#) (PREEMPT): a project in which virologists were funded to use gain-of-function research to assess the possibility of animal pathogens jumping to humans and to develop preventative measures. But this so-called dual-use technology can also be weaponized.

Plymouth University benefits from DARPA. It helped to set up a private, for-profit biotech corporation headed by a [former Pfizer scientist](#), Dr. Jeremy Salt. Called The Vaccine Group (TVG), the organization is listed as a private company on the UK government's [directory of businesses](#). It follows the model pioneered by Oxford University: use public money to create a private vaccine company. TVG was [recently championed](#) in the business press for completing a project on lassa fever. The lassa fever project was also [funded](#) by US taxpayers via DARPA.

Terminating My Contract

I was a postdoctoral researcher at Plymouth University's Cognition Institute working on a device, funded by an external source (the Thomas Pocklington Trust), to help blind people. The University acted as a host institution for the third-party funding, so I was not a salaried member of staff. My research had nothing to do with politics. Politics is something about which I write for a number of journals in my spare time.

In September 2022, an anonymous snitch sought out my old PhD examiner, Assistant Professor Jane Grant (how did they know or think to do that?), to complain about [things I'd been writing](#) for *Nexus*, the internationally-distributed Australian magazine. The University continues to protect the identity of the tattler, citing data protection. This is Orwellian: people in the UK are permitted to make baseless accusations about others, yet their targets are not allowed to know who they are. Both Grant and the anonymous squealer violated the University's Dignity and Respect Policy (DRP), which [states](#): "academic staff have the right to explore unpopular or controversial subjects and opinions."

Grant wrote to the Doctoral College, cc'ing one Cornel Sandvoss: "I've had an email regarding one of our ex PhD students [sic] who, I've been informed is writing some pretty odd stuff for a journal called Nexus." The "odd stuff" is not specified and, to whatever it might pertain, is protected, in theory, by the DRP. "Can you check if he is still registered with us please? If so, it may be time to terminate his contract."

So, the [allegedly pro-trade union](#) Grant decided to "terminate" my position without specific allegation or evidence. The neologism *fauxialist* comes to mind. What should have happened is that an investigation should have been launched into my conduct at which I should have been given the right to defend myself and see the evidence against me.

At this point, the situation turned Kafkaesque: Grant admitted to the Doctoral College that I had done nothing wrong: "the content of what he [Coles] is now writing is not good for the University to be associated with, just general but outlandish conspiracy theories etc. and him as a research fellow. Be good to have him not on our books so to speak." "General but outlandish conspiracy theories"? Apparently this constitutes grounds for ruining someone's reputation and career.

I knew nothing of any of this until one October morning when I sat at my home desk to login to my University email account and found that it had been suspended. No one at IT Support would tell me what was going on. My email account sponsor (who is a friend whom I met in peace activism circles) belatedly informed me about Grant et al. The above emails were never intended for me to read or even know about.

Having ignored my emails requesting an investigation, Dr. Cristina Rivas of the Doctoral College denied having any responsibility. Grant did not have the courage or decency to reply to my request for assistance: to undo the wrong she had done. The mysterious Dr. Sandvoss did not answer when I asked via email if he was the original complainant.

I then wrote to the Vice-chancellor, Judith Petts, who appointed an investigator who agreed that the cabal should not have terminated my account in the way it did, but the investigator ignored all of my complaints of bullying, constructive dismissal, and threats. The threat came from one Katie Angliss, head of the Business School, the employer of my original email sponsor. Angliss asked me to stop contacting staff in my efforts to get my account unlocked - who does she think she is? - and then wrote in bold and underlined text, as if shouting:

"if you are able to identify a named member of university staff **that you are currently working with**, and that can confirm your research association, then it is them that will need to sign off your discretionary membership."

Conclusion

Universities have never been the spaces for freedom of thought and expression that some wish them to be. Their fundamental purpose is to train new generations of designers, economists, engineers, philosophers, and politicians to perpetuate the privileges of the ruling classes. This article has focused on militarism, but it could have just as easily focused on elite economists, like the so-called [Chicago Boys](#), who were brought in to reap the rewards of Chile's post-coup economy in the 1970s on behalf of US business interests.

Despite this, the potential for free inquiry exists as an unintended consequence - or "externality" as economists would say - of universities. As the Pentagon enters its final and

most dangerous phase of what it calls “full spectrum dominance,” taking on nuclear-armed Russia and China, the grip on freedom of thought and expression tightens.

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