

George Mason University forges close ties with the US military as it clamps down on opposition to genocide and war

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In December, following public outrage in response to the Gestapo-like police raid on the home of student protesters and their unjust suspension for being involved in opposition to the United States-backed Israeli genocide of the Palestinian people, Gregory Washington, George Mason University's president, responded by warning:

"George Mason University... maintains close ties with local, state, and federal law enforcement to enhance early detection, prevention, and when necessary, law enforcement actions... These capabilities, plus more measures that by design remain invisible, form a protective web around the university campus that our proximity to the nation's capital demands, with capabilities not always available to universities elsewhere."

The listed "capabilities" of the university located in Fairfax County, Virginia, just outside Washington D.C., include:

- "The first fully equipped university SWAT team in Virginia."

- "A campus police department having "close ties with local, state, and federal law enforcement."

- "Police officers that are "routinely present at student gatherings."

- "[C]onstant university vigilance," including "a cross-functional team of university officials" meeting "regularly and as needed to provide on-demand emergency operations."

Previously, members of the student group Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) had been suspected of an act of graffiti that highlighted GMU's affiliations with military contractors. Without evidence to prove the school's suspicions, the university has cracked down on freedom of speech, banning the campus chapter of the SJP.

President Washington's remarks are revealing. What is being described at GMU is the essential framework of a police state. Its task is not to provide the student population and broader community with "safety," but to monitor them on behalf of its close ties to the United States military and intelligence apparatus.

The question must be asked, what are GMU's ties to the state, and the military specifically?

George Mason University is a public research university based in the Northern Virginia suburbs of the US capital. This places it directly at the center of a military-corporate-academic nexus, serving the combined interests of big business and the military-intelligence community.

A 2018 Department of Defense document calls for "a ... diverse

network of private sector companies, R&D organizations, academic institutions, and government-owned facilities to develop and produce the technologies enabling U.S. military dominance and ensuring national security." Already in 2015, the publication *Vice* noted that GMU was among the top ten most militarized colleges in the United States when measured by "relationships with the national security state, and [its] profit... from American war-waging."

In the last few years this process has accelerated. GMU has forged increasing ties with the US military through research and training partnerships. The university's website boasts that, "For the past 5 years, the single largest federal sponsor of research at George Mason has been the US Department of Defense."

In December 2024, the university became a member of the Systems Engineering Research Center (SERC) and the Acquisition Innovation Research Center (AIRC), both of which are sponsored by the Department of Defense (DoD). The AIRC assists the American military in acquiring and deploying advanced weapons systems, among other things. SERC, a college consortium serving the needs of the Pentagon, works directly to develop and assess the capabilities of the military's systems.

According to the US Army's research laboratory, these University Affiliated Research Centers (UARC)s were established to develop "essential engineering and technology capabilities of particular importance to the DoD." In 2021, the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics reports that "funding from federal sources for UARC)s totaled \$1.5 billion."

Art Pyster, associate dean for research at GMU's College of Engineering and Computing, explained on the university's website that, "We now have a full seat at the table, participating in meetings with DoD sponsors and helping to set the SERC/AIRC agenda."

As part of these collaborations, the university website explains that GMU will have a "long-term strategic relationship with the DoD in a specific research area."

Mike Bunting, assistant dean at the College of Engineering and Computing, said the university will now have an "easy button" to perform research for the DoD. He added, "It's about having a set of resources that the government can rely upon from a trusted agent... George Mason has hundreds of faculty, staff, and students who conduct research in areas of interest to the DoD."

George Mason's Baroni Center for Government Contracting was a key research partner in 2023 and 2024 for the US Senate's Commission on Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution Reform of the Department of Defense.

The purpose of the commission, for which GMU received a \$645,000 DoD research contract, was to "drive resource allocation in a more rigorous, joint and analytically informed way" and to "respond as quickly and effectively as needed to support today's warfighter."

As part of this work, GMU researchers were tasked with improving the development of AI-piloted combat drones by helping to "align priorities and make resource decisions in a timely manner." The Senate-sponsored commission cited the GMU research numerous times in its March 2024 report.

"Our work played a large role in informing the Commission's findings and reinforcing their policy recommendations," Baroni Center Executive Director Jerry McGinn told the university's website. "These inputs are today being considered as Congress debates 2025 appropriations and DoD concurrently develops and vets the budget for 2026 and 2027."

Soon after the release of the Commission's report, GMU hosted a "rollout event" for the Commission's chair, vice-chair and executive director and further joint events were planned for the summer.

In July 2023, through the engineering school and GMU's institute for digital innovation, the university partnered with the Air Force for joint research, rapid capability development and warfighter training and education. The university will help refine the Air Force's digital education program and assist in making air bases "more efficient and effective." It will collaborate on projects related to cyber security and resiliency, sensor fusion and anomaly detection, predictive analytics, systems engineering, 5G and data analytic capabilities in battle, as well as advances in robotics, autonomous vehicles, smart cities and drones.

Most recently, on January 29, the university announced another collaboration with the Department of Defense. The university received a \$1.6 million grant sponsored by the Army's Ground Vehicle Systems Center to research "novel approaches and development of new vehicles" for the military. According to the university website, the purpose of the project is "to develop a comprehensive digital engineering methodology for new vehicle concepts."

The university is also host to three separate "Centers of Excellence" pertaining to the military, state and intelligence community. These research hubs focus on "innovation" in a particular field. For the US military, GMU hosts the Center of Excellence in Command, Control, Communications, Computing, Intelligence, and Cyber (C5I Center). Other sections of the military-intelligence and state apparatus represented include the Department of Homeland Security and the National Security Agency.

It is no coincidence that the close and ever-growing relationship between George Mason and the military to improve the capabilities of the United States to wage war comes as the university, along with universities around the country and internationally, is clamping down on free speech in an attempt to

stamp out all opposition to genocide and war. Indeed, the minor spray painting incident from last summer leading to the intervention of the FBI occurred at the location of a job fair sponsored by military contractors, including Lockheed Martin.

The growing connections between the US military and George Mason University are just one example of the tight relationship between the American state and academia. In the wake of the shut-down of the University of California academic worker strike last June—a strike explicitly waged in opposition to the genocide in Gaza—the *World Socialist Web Site* explained, "Campuses are being converted from centers of scholarship and debate into propaganda centers controlled by the military-intelligence apparatus and Wall Street..."

According to a 2019 report from the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, 49 American colleges and universities are involved in the research and design of nuclear weapons. Additionally, 15 universities are linked directly with the US military through UARCs.

Over the past year, large protests have taken place on campuses throughout the world calling for their university to divest from Israeli institutions and military and to pressure the US government to stop supporting Israel in its genocide against the Palestinians.

However, these protests have failed to change the course of American policy, which is aimed at domination of the world, regardless of whether the Democrats or Republicans are in control. The threat of a global war only continues to increase, as the United States attempts to offset its economic decline by destroying its strategic rivals, foremost China and Russia.

The universities themselves play a specific role in this mission. The appeals to campus administrations have been met with repression for the same reason that attempts to pressure the American state have resulted in efforts to curb freedom of speech.

Students, armed with an understanding that the growing threat of a world war is the product of the breakdown of capitalism, must turn their appeals to workers at workplaces and factories. In its role as the producer of society's wealth, the international working class is the only social force capable of ending war. If organized and armed with a socialist political perspective, the working class can put a stop to capitalist descent into barbarism and revive universities once more as centers of knowledge and learning instead of centers for state spying and war research.



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