

From the archives: UCSD and the Military Industrial Complex

A Note on Settler Colonialism

UCSD as with all of so-called San Diego and extending into so-called Tijuana is built on stolen Kumeyaay land. The Chancellor's mansion is built in particular on a Kumeyaay burial ground that Kumeyaay have been trying to have returned to them. The university has actively side-stepped this fact through "experts" in anthropology claiming the area is somehow "ambiguous" meaning there is enough doubt for them that it is not Kumeyaay land (read: bullshit).

The settler colonial context is essential to understand as a foundational and recurring violence. This violence continues to create so-called San Diego through a process of colonization that began with military forces, starting with the Spanish and now maintained by the so-called U.S. Early settlements can be better understood as forts or military outposts. The missions came later to expand the "civility" of the colonizers through various forms of genocide and incarceration.

These early foundations of the State helped to establish the precincts we currently live in, where we are not only surrounded by domestic police but also international police who are ready and willing to escalate whenever they feel necessary. In so-called San Diego, this is quite clear with the

presence of Camp Pendleton to the north, the navy in the center of the city, the Marine Corps Air Station Miramar right next to La Jolla, and the border patrol to the south of the city.

The presence of the military is if not outright celebrated then accepted as normal. So much so that the army has run "realistic military training" through the city, which includes helicopters running low to the ground as the sound of explosions fills the sky. They train to both enforce the might of the US abroad and within the national border while everyone sits and watches. This is an invitation to think specifically about how UCSD functions within the realm of the military industrial complex, and to find ways to do more than just sit and watch.

What's wrong with the MIC?

If you're not totally aware of what's wrong with the military industrial complex and need some talking points, here are a few:

- As mentioned above the MIC is the foundation of (settler) colonialism
- The US is a military nightmare across the globe with over 750 military bases in 80 countries
- The US military is the top polluter in the world
- The military creates ecological crises around the world, including 130 bases now considered superfund sites (basically unlivable), including the Red Hill crisis in Hawai'i

The military industrial complex in the US is the foundation of the State's power, and there has been very little in the form of an on-going anti-military movement since Vietnam. There has of course been on-going organizing since then, but it has been more momentary waves of general support followed by core groups struggling to get any movement. While the mass movements have fallen to the wayside, smaller affinity groups have disrupted military logistics where they can. More recent student groups like Dissenters have also shown the ability to disrupt the MIC, and are probably worth connecting with, again, understanding that no specific organization will save us.



(UCSD Organizing Party in the 70s)

There are multiple possibilities beyond engaging with a large mass organization, including a small formal organization focused on political education and/or mutual aid that is “above ground” as well as affinity groups that emphasize the shared recognition that these oppressive institutions must be attacked. An affinity group will not focus on spectacular forms of organizing, but will instead try to attack institutions in ways that are unmediated and repeatable. Either way, these small organizations can share a more radical horizon than is allowed in mass organizations. Obviously, security culture will be extremely important as oppressive institutions and the State attempt to infiltrate groups. Secure but not paranoid, keeping in mind that misogynists make the best informants.

Either/both a small formal organization or an affinity group will be essential to long term capability. These are people you can study and plan with who want to seriously contend with questions like: how can we dismantle the MIC? What kind of actions have been effective in the past? Which are applicable to our situation? And at the same time, this group can reaffirm the importance of dealing with these questions at the root while the tediousness of mass organizations leads to boredom and burnout.

- Military grade weapons are given to local police forces to manage revolt

- The military, which works through the State, is complimented through the Capital of private companies
- These companies explicitly profit off of and incentivize war through the selling of weapons

A Beginning

UCSD was a relative late comer to the UC system and was not built until the 1960s. Before this time, the federal lands from the Morrill Act were used by the U.S. Military.

On the site that is today UCSD’s main campus were three military bases. From 1917 to 1964, Camp Matthews—which occupied most of what is today’s central campus—served as a Marine rifle training camp for more than one million Marines. The Army base, Camp Callan, was located to the West on the Torrey Pines Mesa. It served as an anti-aircraft artillery replacement training center during WWII (1941-1945). From 1940 to 1946, Marines training for WWII trained at Camp Elliot, near what is today Geisel Library. The Navy took this site over after the war and used the base for military training until 1961. All of these bases were decommissioned in the 1960s and handed over for the construction of the UC San Diego campus.

The construction of the UCSD campus was bankrolled by a one-million-dollar grant from the General Dynamics corporation, which was interested in having a graduate program to produce scientists and engineers for its growing

industry. The company’s investment was represented in the creation of the Jacobs School of Engineering, which was established in 1964. By design, graduates from Jacob’s were recruited by the defense industry to work on

organizer saw this as a serious issue to consider. However, because the rest of the union organizers didn’t see any problem with this, they continued on perhaps with a slight variation to their original plan (they wouldn’t explicitly say “this is our land”). This could have been an opportunity for the union to engage with Kumeyaay peoples and orgs, but instead only certain individuals were turned off by this issue and had no space to work through the contradiction. Eventually leading to one person resigning from their position within the union.

Undergrads, while mostly not unionized, face a similar issue as they engage with student government or the non-profit industrial complex that makes up the organizing landscape of UCSD. While it can be useful to at times engage in these spaces to project a more radical horizon, these types of organizations should not dictate what is considered possible. They can be helpful to find people you share affinity with, to expand the horizon for those open to it, and also in collecting information – so, they’re not totally useless, but they can’t take up the majority of your energy.

Organizing Against the MIC

You don’t have to do as we layout here, but these are

suggestions based on our experience. In the matter of organization, creativity is always necessary. Institutions of oppression, such as the university, are constantly finding ways to recuperate the struggles of movements by making superficial changes and also leveraging large mass organizations so they have little room to maneuver (or worse, even feel they are being “heard” by the university). The type of organization or disorganization you need will depend completely on your creativity as you deal with your unique situation.

In that case, both formal and informal organizations will be necessary in a long term strategy against the MIC. Informal, tight-knit affinity groups will be necessary for direct action while formal organizations stall out. Affinity groups can also help to sustain people willing to take action who might otherwise burnout struggling within a larger mass organization.

Large mass organizations often place individuals with an internal tension of perhaps feeling something is off, but unable to change the direction of the action and thus leading to burnout and fatalism. For instance, UAW 2865 has previously planned to hold actions at the chancellor’s mansion while saying “this is our land.” When it was pointed out that this is actually Kumeyaay land, at least one government contracts. contracts.

At GD, engineering projects included the development of jet fighters, strategic bombers, surface-to-air missiles, and

rockets used for the space program and for Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles. The alignment between the UC program and the defense industry had a massive impact in orienting greater San Diego’s economy towards the U.S. war machine.



(A map of US military bases around the world)

Other defense-industry corporations soon followed with their own heavy investments into UCSD’s development, including Northrop Grumman, General Atomics, SPAWAR (the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command), the Air Force Office of Scientific Research, the U.S. Army Research Laboratory, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency, the Los Alamos National Laboratory (which developed nuclear weapons technology), the Office of Naval Research, and Lockheed Martin. Most of

which continues to this day, you can just check the “list of partners” on the jacobs school’s website.

Such investments spawned additional science and engineering programs on the campus, each with military-industrial ties and strong recruiting programs. More recently, UCSD has been a major contributor to the U.S. military’s drone program. Chancellor Kholsa himself worked as an engineer for military drones before his current position. Altogether, UCSD has had a stand-out role in sustaining US military power. As such it has had a direct impact on U.S. imperialism.

The Minerva Research Initiative

Launched by the Secretary of Defense in 2008, the Minerva Research Initiative is a Department of Defense sponsored, university-based social science research initiative that focuses on areas of strategic importance to the U.S.. With grants totaling \$18 million in 2009 with roughly \$75 million promised over the next five years.

The initiative is essentially a think tank for the DOD and serves as a link between the Pentagon and the academic community. In this relationship, expertise housed within universities is harnessed to national security projects in a revolving door of personnel.

At UCSD, funding for this project has been channeled into programs such as the Center for Peace and Security Studies

and the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation. The academic analysis produced is used for U.S. intelligence in Latin America, Africa, and other regions where the U.S. has a strategic interest. Thus, the Minerva Initiative has essentially militarized anthropology, social science, and political science.

In addition to the Minerva Initiative, in 2018, 10 faculty researchers from UCSD received funds from the DOD’s Defense University Research Instrumentation Program (DURIP), which seeks research related to instrumentation that helps with weather and wave prediction, for example. In 2020, UCSD researchers received an additional 7 DURIP awards – tops in the UC and one of the most prominent throughout the entire country.

Occasionally, someone writes about these funds in the Guardian, there’s been no sustained movement to bring attention to this in decades.

Global Policy and Strategy, or the Managers of Empire

It’s also important to keep in mind that the official military is just one aspect of empire. Currently, empire is also managed through financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, which create levels of “development” colonized countries have to meet, or they will face the consequences of sanctions (with military force and the US’s empires of bases lurking always). And wouldn’t you know it,

but GPS happens to have recently hired the former director of World Bank, Caroline Freund, as their director. Freund is just an individual in this system, but the entire purpose of GPS is to create the next generation of empire's managers.

Some Suggested Reading:

10 Steps for Setting Up a Blockade



At Daggers Drawn



An Activist's Guide to Basic First Aid



Field Guide to Wheepasting



Insurrectionary Anarchy and Revolutionary Organization

