

Does Your University Have a Military Industrial (In)security Complex?

by Nick Theis

Placid as they seem, universities in the U. S. of A. are military appendages. Here at the University of Minnesota that relationship is not always obvious, but it is no exception.

At times it has even been a hidden and protected secret: for instance, CIA mind-control experiments here in the '50s and '60s, when Dr. Amedeo Marrazzi (a former Air Force scientist) gave large doses of LSD to unwilling subjects, including his own research assistant, whose experimental LSD trip resulted in 6 months of psychiatric therapy.¹

Outdated LSD experiments, as tragic, unethical, and sometimes absurd as they were, are just one chapter in an often invisible military-academic partnership that permeates Minnesota's oldest and biggest public university. Indeed, a "military-industrial-U of M complex" exists today and is probably more robust and overt than it ever has been.

I began to notice this on campus last November when the UMN chapter of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the local Veterans for Peace (VFP) group showed a film on campus about the notorious School of the Americas (SOA or WHINSEC).² SDS and VFP were coincidentally screening their film right next door to an Air Force ROTC recruiting session. How awfully ironic! In some states the ROTC actually offers summer trips for its students to attend WHINSEC training sessions at the School of the Americas.

Military recruiting is at the root of this university, and is the root of its relationship to the military. The same act that allowed the U of M to establish itself as a so-called "land-grant university," the 1862 Morrill Act, also laid the groundwork for what was to later become the Reserve Officer Training Corps (the ROTC).

Today, the Secretary of Defense can actually deny a university federal funding if that school chooses to ban military recruiting efforts or denies ROTC access on campus. This provision is afforded by the 1996 Solomon Amendment that President Clinton signed into law, which, in terms of funding at least, means important medical, agricultural, and engineering research at the U of M (and elsewhere) depends on military recruitment and access.

The Morrill Act of 1862 and its ramifications are an early link between the University of Minnesota (and other federally funded universities) and their military underwriters. Indeed, it was that same year Governor Alexander Ramsey infamously stated, "The Sioux Indians of Minnesota must be exterminated or driven forever beyond the border of the state," and recommended to President Lincoln the mass execution of 303 Dakota prisoners in Mankato (in the end 38 Dakota men were hung in what is still the largest mass execution in U.S. history).



Students and community members protested pro-war former National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice speaking at the University of Minnesota.

Photo: Sam Wagner

Governor Ramsey was also the first president of the University of Minnesota's Board of Regents (He was president in 1860,³ after the legislature reorganized the university structure and appointed him, nearly a decade after the U.S.-Dakota War). Interestingly, in 1879 Ramsey was appointed U.S. Secretary of War. If this anecdote means anything, it is that the mass execution and “ethnic cleansing” that occurred in the Saint Anthony Falls area about 150 years ago produced the necessary historical conditions for the establishment of a University of Minnesota, Alexander Ramsey being a leader in both undertakings.

The relationship between the U of M and the military is not, to be clear, some idiomatic detail of the late 19th century. Last spring, leaders at the university invited Condoleezza Rice, for a modest fee of \$150,000, plus the cost of a private jet, to come to Northrop Auditorium to lecture on civil rights. Of course the University of Minnesota didn't pay these expenses (its neocon benefactors did).

Rice's invitation was perplexing and inappropriate, and prompted wide outrage. In lying to the public about the existence of WMDs in Iraq, Dr. Rice's infamous quote, “We do not want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud,” while not as direct as Ramsey's, ultimately stated the same thing: “What we do want is war.” To be sure, this is the same person who, weeks before she appeared at the U of M, warned Americans not to become “war weary” regarding the situation in Ukraine.⁴

And while the appearance of celebrity war-criminal politicians on campus builds the University's résumé, it does so at the cost of legitimizing the insanity of war on a massive scale. Why give —let alone pay—Condoleezza Rice—or anyone else with such a criminal record—an opportunity to spread more lies? As John Lennon once said, “I'm sick and tired of hearing things from uptight, shortsighted, narrow-minded hypocrites!”

Many of us were shocked to learn about Rice's invitation, but what was far more shocking than Rice's involvement with the universities was our university's leaders' involvement with global politics and the military. Not until we began to investigate the situation did we realize that the dean of the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, Eric Schwartz, who approved Rice's invitation and ultimately had the power to cancel it, served as the second highest ranking official at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in Geneva, during the invasion of Iraq! 5 If anyone at this university understands the laws of war, or the illegality of what Rice did, it ought to be Schwartz.

But Schwartz is not unique: many of our highest-level university administrators are working either simultaneously for the university and in Washington, or have been riding the “revolving door” for decades.

Take the highest administrative position: our university's president, Eric Kaler, who has had a seat at the Department of Homeland Security's Academic Advisory Council (HSAAC) since 2012, when Janet Napolitano (former Secretary of DHS and current president of the University of California) appointed him.⁶

Dual senior leadership positions like President Kaler's may help explain why the U of M participates in programs like BORDERS, based at the University of Arizona, and run by the National Center for Border Security and Immigration (part of DHS), which has a direct partnership with three think tanks and 13 other universities. And then there is Homeland Security's National Center for Food Protection and Defense led by—guess who? The University of Minnesota.

I do not mean to suggest that the U of M is engineering a U.S.-Canada border wall for the DHS, or that there is NSA spyware in our corn (although they are developing civilized farmer drones), but rather that the military is establishing a much greater influence over the universities than ever before, and through them many industries (such as agriculture) that were once free from military interference, for the most part, are today becoming overtly militarized.

The usual military-academic enterprises, like DARPA—the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency—still funds a wide array of projects in the hard science at the U, ranging from software development to drones research (yes, there is drones research here). But more recently, military funding has entered the social sciences: in 2008 the Department of Defense began the MINERVA Research Initiative, which pumps millions of dollars annually into universities to study the causes of mass civil unrest (to put this in perspective: the CIA creates unrest, the DoD studies it—excellent use of taxpayer money, eh?).⁷

As the relationship between the military and our universities deepens, so does military might, and the dependence of our universities on it; as the relationship is intensified, it is also normalized. One of the stated goals of Homeland Security's

Office of University Programs is to “foster a homeland security culture within the academic community through research and education programs.”

This goal seem to be materializing, at least at the U of M: in a warning to students about violating the University's Student Conduct Code, President Kaler wrote recently: “In this era of social media, no one is anonymous.” He was, of course, warning the student body about participating in Dinkytown hockey riots, but this mentality has been extended to even peaceful protest at the U.S.

As a result of the ever-expanding DHS-DoD-CIA-ROTC imperialist agenda, academic freedom at universities across the country is diminishing. Research is directed down narrower and narrower avenues. Student activism is squelched. Surveillance culture is expanded. To some, this relationship may seem unimportant or conspiratorial; they might argue “it has always been this way.” Indeed, it always has—but it does not always have to be.

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ENDNOTES:

1 C. Ross. 2006. The CIA Doctors: Human Rights Violations by American Psychiatrists. See Chapter 17: Mary Ray.

2 The School of the Americas is a military school located at Fort Benning, Georgia, and was renamed the “Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation” (WHINSEC or WHISC) in 2001 to confuse the public. At the SOA the U.S. military trains Latin American troops, both military and paramilitary. SOA graduates have been tied to some of the most heinous crimes and coups in the region's history. For more info see www.soaw.org.

3 C. W. Hall. 1896. The University of Minnesota: An Historical Sketch. Page 5.

4 “Condoleezza Rice: U.S. can't afford to be war weary,” Blake, Aaron. Post Politics, Washington Post.

5 According to the Humphrey School of Public Affairs [website](#): Schwartz held this position in 2003 and 2004.

6 www.discover.umn.edu/news

7 For the full story, see: “The University & Security State: DHS Joins Pentagon and CIA on Campus,” Gasser, Michael, Solidarity, May 13, 2014 www.solidarity-us.org

8 See, for instance: “Protesters at U ribbon-cutting could face discipline,” Lerner, Maura. May 1, 2014. Star Tribune.