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Power Research for Palestine: How Campus Organizers Are Using Research to Oppose the War Machine



Graduate workers and student groups across the US are mapping university ties to militarism and Israel's war on Gaza.

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Author(s): **Derek Seidman**

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(Photo: Gaza Solidarity Encampment at Columbia University, April 2024)

The explosion of campus protest movements against Israel's siege of Gaza, especially during the April 2024 encampments, has been historic. These movements showed the whole world that swaths of young people across the U.S. stand in solidarity with Palestinians who are facing a genocidal assault. The encampments created crises for college administrators who purport to defend values of justice and human rights while also looking to appease their trustees and donor bases who back Israel's brutal war.

A generation has been galvanized and politicized, experiencing extreme repression for simply demanding their institutions cut ties with one of the great human catastrophes of modern times: Israel's indiscriminate destruction of Gaza, the killing of tens of thousands of people and injuring of many more, the use of [starvation](#) as a weapon of war, and the [annihilation](#) of Gaza's universities.

A lesser known thread stretching across this campus upsurge has been the critical role of power research in supporting movement organizing, labor struggle, political education, and protest strategy. Across universities and colleges, grad workers and undergrad students have done the nitty-gritty work of digging into their endowment's investments, researching the financial ties between the Pentagon and campus labs, and mapping out the connections between university trustees and the war machine.

Not all this research is new. It builds on years of work by the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement and other campus divestment campaigns. But there's no doubt that this moment, marked by a heightened awareness of the tight relationship between university power structures and the corporate-military-political bloc upholding occupation and

apartheid against Palestinians, has generated new urgency in the longtime craft of mapping corporate power.

These new research efforts that are unmasking university ties to militarism and war crimes are being carried out by union graduate workers from California to Michigan to Massachusetts who are organizing to stop the flow of their research — their labor — into military projects and military technology. They're being done by undergrad organizers from New York to Rhode Island who are campaigning for divestment and building out power maps to illustrate university ties to weapons' companies. These organizers are forming research committees and working collaboratively. They're sharing findings and skills through teach-ins and meetings. They're building national networks and communicating across geography through group chats and webinars.

These new research efforts are also drawing direct inspiration from past models of campus power research — anti-South African apartheid campaigns of the 1980s, but especially from the 1968 pamphlet, "[Who Rules Columbia?](#)," which mapped out the Columbia University power structure during that campus's historic uprising against war and racism over five decades ago. Indeed, some campus researchers today are communicating with and learning directly from the veteran researchers who quite literally wrote "Who Rules Columbia?"

Thus, grad workers and campus organizers for Palestine today are not merely doing research — they're upholding and expanding a proud movement tradition of power research that stretches back to the the civil rights movements and the [SNCC Research Department](#) and to the Vietnam antiwar movement and [National Action/Research on the Military-Industrial Complex](#) (NARMIC).

In charging forward with a new and broad effort to map out university power today, grad workers and campus organizers are also reviving an analysis of the militarized corporate university that was pioneered by activists in the 1960s and 1970s. This analysis understands the university not as a site of harmonious apprenticeship, but as an employer that relies on graduate labor to function everyday and to serve the imperatives of military production; not as an idyllic site of learning, but as a power structure governed by corporate elites, interlocked with influential blocs of capital stretching from finance to real estate to technology, with close ties to the war machine and with endowments that operate like hedge funds, ready to undermine its own purported values and students at the whims of wealthy donors and war industry partners.

“The Beginning of the Military Supply Chain”

As Israel’s siege of Gaza intensified in the fall of 2023, flattening and starving the enclave while killing tens of thousands of people, students across the U.S., from [Stanford](#) to [NYU](#), began protesting to demand a ceasefire in Gaza and that their institutions divest from and break ties with Israel.

Grad workers, as laborers within their universities, wondered how to respond.

“A lot of the research workers and grad students here were really struggling to metabolize our grief and figure out what sort of interventions on behalf of Palestine we were positioned to make,” said Isabel Kain, a fourth-year union graduate worker in the Astronomy and Astrophysics department at the University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC).

Specifically, Kain was thinking about the connections between her own workplace at UCSC and the war on Gaza. “The research that we do can go on to create the killing machines of

tomorrow,” she said. “We are the very beginning of the military supply chain.”

Universities are a critical part of the U.S. war machine. Billions of dollars from the Department of Defense flow annually into labs whose research findings advance weapons’ systems. University endowments invest in military-tied corporations and many university trustees are [interlocked](#) with war profiteers.

“The U.S. military-industrial complex “could not function without American universities,” wrote Harry Zehner in the [Nation](#). “It needs college-educated engineers and scientists. It relies on thousands of research projects, funded by the Pentagon and carried out by academics around the country.” Moreover, it relies on thousands of graduate workers and postdoctoral fellows to carry out the research labor and lab work behind those research projects.

Heeding [the call](#) of Palestinian trade unions in late 2023 to “end all forms of complicity with Israel’s crimes,” including “halting the arms trade with Israel” and “all funding and military research,” UCSC grad workers started looking toward their own workplace to take action.

They weren’t the only ones. At Columbia University, some grad workers were also thinking along the same lines.

“We were looking at our science and saying, ‘This is pretty messed up,’” said Kelsey Harrison, a third-year Chemistry PhD student. “Our government is sending weapons that are being used by Israel, and our science is contributing to advancing those weapons.”

Building a National Network

Toward the end of 2023, these grad workers were increasingly connecting with each other across campuses to discuss what they could do, as university workers, about Israel's war on Palestine. This connecting was made easier because many of these grad workers were already plugged into a preexisting network of cross-campus union solidarity.

The past few years have seen a [historic wave](#) of bottom-up grad worker organizing. Thousands of grad workers have unionized and gone on strike. This new campus labor militancy has been driven by militant, democratic unionism, often affiliated with left-led unions like the United Auto Workers (UAW) and United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE).

This organizing infrastructure, connecting grad workers from the University of California to Columbia, Michigan to MIT, laid the basis for easier communication, strategizing, and skill-sharing around Palestinian solidarity and anti-militarism work on campus.

"None of this is by coincidence," said Harrison.

Dozens of grad workers were already communicating through Zoom calls and group chats. There was growing interest in digging into university ties to militarism and the war on Gaza. With consciousness heightened by years of organizing, there was a sense that grad workers, given their critical role at universities and science labs, could have a big impact as *workers* in the Palestine solidarity movement, especially by withholding their labor.

"When we saw this call to end complicity and stop arming Israel, we realized that it was graduate workers who were positioned to intervene at the very beginning of the supply chain," said Kain. "It was graduate workers who were positioned to cut the flow of labor and expertise and work going into the

military industrial complex that will flow on to harm Palestinians.”

“Palestine is absolutely a workplace issue,” she said.

With interest growing, some suggested that grad workers meet more concertedly to dig into their university’s connections to the catastrophe in Gaza and to U.S. militarism. As workers embedded in the military supply chain, they could use the research into these ties to help identify points of leverage to disrupt the war machine.

A new network, Researchers Against War (RAW), was born out of this moment. Going into 2024, RAW held zoom meetings that brought together grad workers across the U.S. Mike Locker, a co-author of the original 1968 pamphlet “[Who Rules Columbia?](#),” offered guidance on the ties between universities and militarism and how power research could support their organizing.

Out of all this, grad workers were feeling galvanized to look deeper into their employers — their universities and labs — to support Palestine and challenge the larger military-industrial complex.

“Researching Like Mad”

Emboldened and connected, grad workers were starting to map out their institutions’ ties to the war machine, supporting each other by sharing research tips and organizing advice.

At UCSC, around ten grad workers began “researching like mad for a couple of months,” said Kain, mapping the flows of money from the Department of Defense to UCSC and University of California system. They dug into public records of federal grants, mined sites like [USASpending.gov](#), followed grant numbers tied

to specific labs, and looked at the school's Office of Sponsored Projects.

Kain said that in 2023 the University of California system received [\\$333 million](#) of Department of Defense basic research funding that flowed into a range of labs across campuses. At UCSC specifically, they found 18 labs with active Department of Defense contracts and 10 labs with recently expired DoD contracts. They identified areas of potential "research misuse," as Kain put it, meaning "clearly weaponizable stuff."

UCSC grad workers used these findings to organize within their departments. "It was really this funding research that unlocked the possibility of talking to our coworkers," said Kain.

In January 2024, nearly three dozen UCSC astronomers penned a [collective letter](#) that stated their commitments to "demilitarizing" their research, with specific demands like "withholding academic labor benefiting militarism" and "refusing research collaboration with federal military institutions as well as private arms and defense companies."

In exchange for millions of Pentagon funding, said the letter, "the products of our research lubricate the churning gears of the war machine." The letter made direct connections between labor performed at UCSC and the genocide in Palestine and called "on all academic workers everywhere – graduate students, postdocs, lecturers, faculty – to divest their labor from apartheid, genocide, and militarism."

The UCSC astrophysics letter was an inspiring model to a core of Columbia grad workers who had also started to explore their school's ties to weapons' companies.

They discovered that a "huge amount" of Defense Department funding went into basic research at research institutions. In

2021, Columbia received over \$49 million in research and development funding from the Defense Department, the 28th most in the nation.

Faculty	Funding Sources	Collaborations	Other notes
[REDACTED]	<p>-AFSOR [REDACTED]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approximately \$200 million is anticipated to be available for support of actions awarded under this announcement, subject to availability of funds. Research proposals funded between \$100,000 and \$300,000 per year are encouraged. Most of our awards are three (3) years in duration. Awards may be proposed for not more than five (5) years <p>-DOE [REDACTED]</p> <p>-ARO [REDACTED]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> USAF [REDACTED] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$1,000,000 (2021-2026) Correlated electronic structure methods for point defects, grain boundaries, and interfaces <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Computer simulations can accurately predict the properties of a hypothetical, perfect, and pure substance. However, real materials are imperfect—they contain trace amounts of the wrong types of atoms, atoms in the wrong location, dislocations, and other types of defects. Predicting the impact of these imperfections is a challenge for computer simulation. Moreover, the exotic properties of these defects can be exploited for technological applications. For example, some localized point defects in solids behave as 'qubits' and thus represent a promising platform for quantum computers. As another example, some rough surfaces with atomic imperfections are efficient catalysts, which speed up chemical reactions occurring near the surface. This proposal will develop new computer simulation tools that can accurately and affordably predict the properties of these defects, boundaries, and interfaces. The methods are designed to focus the computational effort on the interesting regions without completely ignoring the rest of the atoms in the material. The developed tools will be implemented in open-source scientific software and made freely available to community. 	<p>-DOE funded profs</p> <p>-Flatiron</p>	<p>-DOE early career award</p> <p>-AFOSR young investigator</p>

A snapshot from Columbia grad workers' research into Pentagon lab funding at Columbia.

With this research, they started putting together a chart that tied Pentagon funding to specific research projects at Columbia. Like UCSC, Columbia grad workers used their research to support organizing within their departments, holding one-on-one conversations with fellow grad workers.

The research was a “great way to bring people in,” said Harrison. “A lot of people cared about Palestine but didn’t know what to do about it. This is a very concrete way that they can start to look into their own position and role and how they’re contributing to the military.”

Teach-Ins and Research Committees

Meanwhile, RAW was working to expand the national effort among grad workers to challenge, as higher ed laborers, the flow of their labor into military production and campus ties to militarism.

On February 12, RAW [hosted](#) a national teach-in and organizing discussion over Zoom, titled “Demilitarizing Research from Vietnam to Palestine,” where dozens of attendees heard from grad workers and post-docs who had started to map and organize around their schools’ Pentagon ties.

Teach-in attendees also heard from veterans of the 1960s and 1970s like [Mike Locker](#), who recalled how the Vietnam antiwar movement used power research to protest against campus ties to the war machine.

Along the way, grad workers at individual campuses continued to push the movement locally. [Columbia RAW](#) members spoke at the Columbia encampment on April 19, where they also passed out a [RAW brochure](#).

RESEARCHERS AGAINST WAR

The Militarism of STEM Research

What is the DOD?

- The United States Department of Defense (DOD) is an executive branch of the federal government of the US charged with coordinating and supervising all agencies and functions directly related to national security and the United States Armed Forces

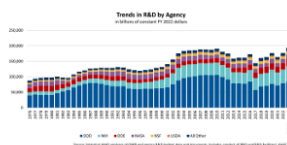


What is the state of scientific research in the U.S.? What is its relation to militarism and corporate power?

- Military R&D funding and influence dominates American science [1]
- Private defense contractors steer billions of dollars of scientific resources towards weapons research
- Technology is developed and used not when it is useful, but when it is profitable

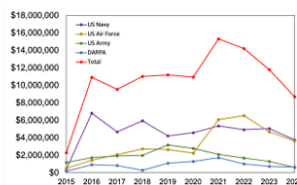
US R&D Spending

- Nearly 50% of total US R&D spending supports DOD objectives [2]

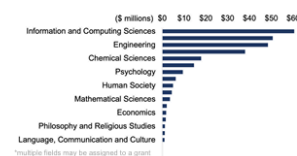


DOD Funding at Columbia

By DOD Agency 2015-2024 [3]



By Field of Research 2015-2024 [3]



What areas of research is the DOD interested in? What are their goals?

- Each agency (Air Force, Army, Navy, DARPA) outlines their fields of interest and objectives in a public **Broad Agency Announcement**
- Examples of research and their objectives include [4] ...

Dynamic Materials and Interactions

for
“revolutionary advancements in future Air Force weapons” and
“the scientific foundation for game-changing advancements in munitions development and propulsion.”

&

Plasma and Electro-Energetic Physics

for
“directed energy weapons, sensors and radar, electronic warfare”

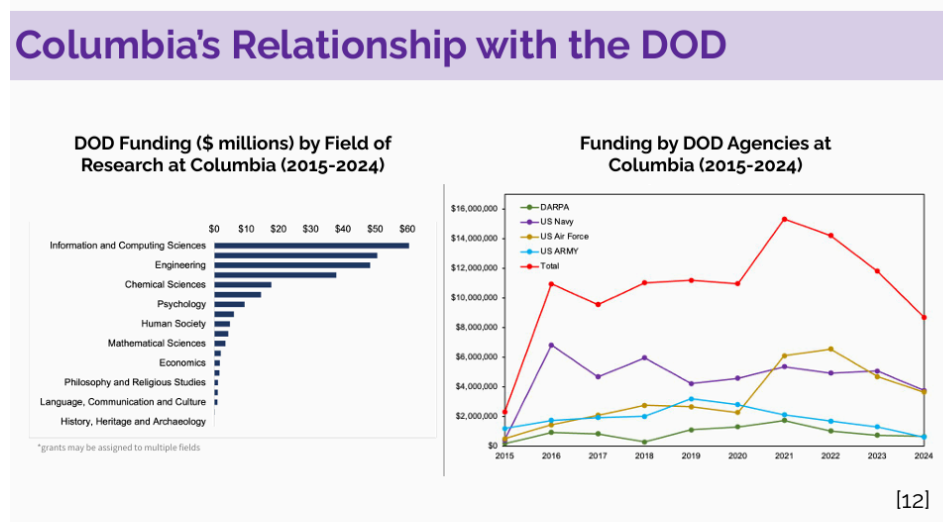
Is academic research really used by the military?

YES

- Ghost Robotics, the company supplying the robot dogs, was founded by two PhD students from UPenn whose research was funded by the Army Research Laboratory [5]
- These military dogs are being tested by the IDF in Gaza [5]



A few days later, on April 22, Columbia RAW and [Science for the People](#), a group dedicated to demilitarizing science research, held a joint campus teach-in at Columbia on the movement for antiwar STEM research. Columbia RAW gave a presentation, “Towards Anti-War STEM Research,” that laid out in painstaking detail the ties between the Defense Department and university research labs.



A slide from Columbia RAW's teach-in presentation, "Towards Anti-War STEM Research."

Other campuses were also plugging into the national research network. At the University of Michigan, grad workers with the [Graduate Employees' Organization](#) (GEO) were among the several campus efforts to hold a “watch party” for RAW’s February 12 teach-in.

GEO had started a Palestine solidarity working group as part of the union’s Solidarity and Political Action Committee. The working group had different arms, including a research team. Grad researchers started to “map labs around campus,” said Nathan Kim, a PhD student at the University of Michigan School of Information, and “basically try to determine what different sources of funding they were getting.”

With those research findings, they'd use an "organizing approach," Kim said — for example, talking to students about [Project Nimbus](#) when they discovered funding from Google. They hoped to "politicize what it means to do research," said Kim, and organize grad workers to refuse Pentagon funding.

This "lab tracker research" was one wing of their larger research efforts; endowment research and research into the University of Michigan's affiliations with pro-Israel institutions such as the [Michigan-Israel Partnership](#) were others.

WHAT IS THE ENDOWMENT?
Through its \$18B endowment, the University of Michigan is supporting the genocide in Gaza and the war and military machinery colonizing Palestine.
The U-M endowment is a collection of over 12,500 funds managed by the University's investment office, under the supervision of the Board of Regents. These funds are packages of donors designated toward specific uses, but they're all managed in a single account known as the University Endowment Fund.
U-M holds \$18 billion in its endowment — making it the third largest endowment among public universities and the ninth largest university endowment overall.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

TROUBLING CONNECTIONS
SKYDIO is a Silicon Valley-based drone company that in the three weeks since October 7 has "sent more than 100 drones to the Israeli Defense Forces, with more to come," according to an executive.
ATTENTI is an Israeli prisons surveillance company that, through an \$18 million contract, is the sole provider of ankle monitors to the Michigan Department of Corrections.
MOTOROLA SOLUTIONS produces surveillance products that are used for Cop City Atlanta and Atlanta's Operation Shield, in US prisons, at the US-Mexico border, and in checkpoints and illegal settlements in the West Bank.

DIVERSITY IS OUR IMPERATIVE TOWARDS PALESTINE
Divesting from Israel is a powerful way to hold it accountable and stop sponsoring genocide. The settler colonial state of Israel is acutely unstable both politically and economically, as its existence rests on the erasure of Palestinians. With the support of America, Israel has continually sought to eliminate this instability through the segregation, ethnic cleansing, and genocide of Palestinians. In addition to financial and military aid from the West, Israel must also maintain investors' confidence to sustain its economy, and complete the occupation of Palestine. Therefore, while Israel's task is to project stability and keep investors calm, our job is to uncover the cracks in the Israeli economy and force a major investor (U-M) to withdraw.

U-M FUNDS ISRAELI APARTHEID, THE GENOCIDE AND THE US WAR MACHINE

...AND MORE IN THE ENDOWMENT GUIDE

Part of the zine on the UMichigan endowment that researchers and comms organizers put together.

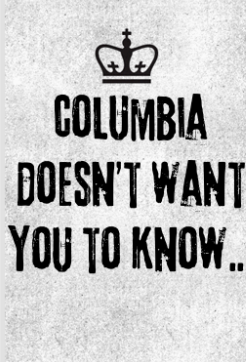
After the [TAHRIR Coalition](#) formed at the University of Michigan in November 2023, GEO grad workers continued to do research as different efforts across the campus gravitated together, and GEO and its research team soon became part of the broader campus-wide TAHRIR project.

Power Research and the Columbia Encampment

As in 1968, students at Columbia University in 2024 made a breakthrough for the wider campus movement when their April 2024 encampment — and the repression against it — galvanized the nation. Power research played a role in informing the encampment's demands and messaging.

In October 2023, Columbia students reactivated Columbia University Apartheid Divest (CUAD), which [formed](#) in 2016 but had since become inactive, and formed different CUAD subcommittees, including a research committee. In late 2023 the coalition submitted a lengthy [divestment proposal](#) to Columbia's Advisory Committee on Socially Responsible Investing (it was [rejected](#)).

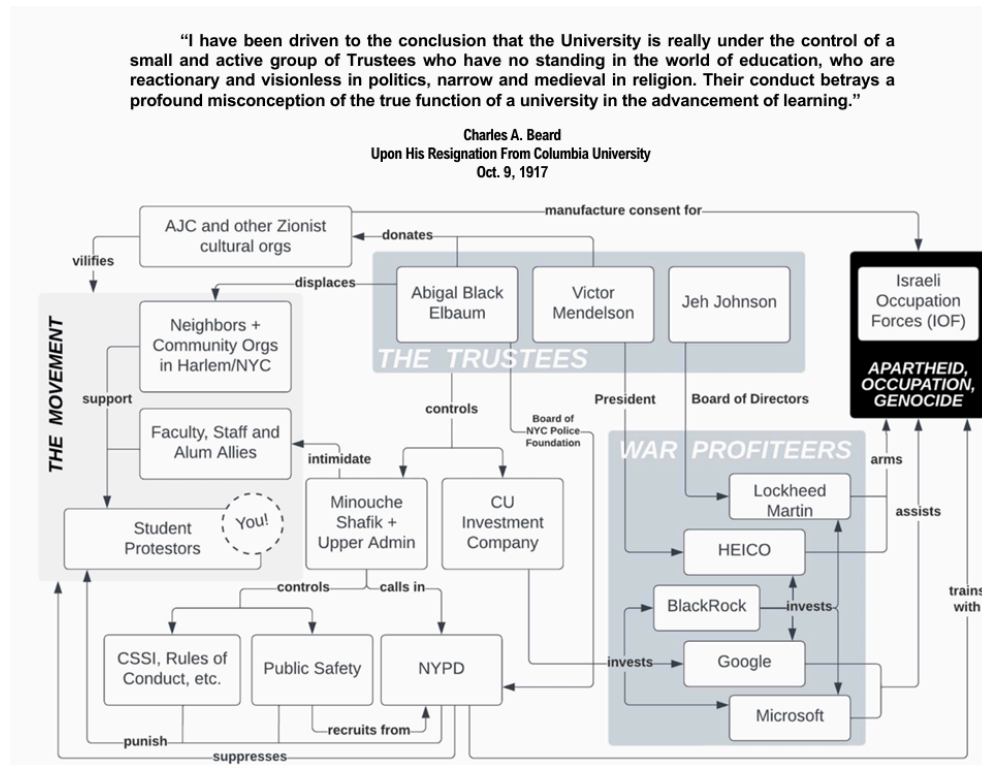
With the April 2024 encampment taking off, the research committee put together a tabling pamphlet that contained a power map of university ties to Israeli occupation, apartheid and genocide. It showed how university trustees were tied to war profiteering.

	<p>ABOUT CUAD</p> <p>Columbia University Apartheid Divest is a coalition of student organizations working toward achieving a liberated Palestine and the end of Israeli apartheid by urging Columbia to divest all economic and academic stakes in Israel. We seek an end to all interlocking systems of oppression through collective action and solidarity with oppressed people worldwide.</p>	<p><u>YOUR</u> VOTE COUNTS!</p> <p>If you're a student with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Columbia College • Barnard • School of General Studies • Columbia Law School • Columbia School of Social Work <p>CUAD has initiated a referendum or resolution process at your school.</p> <p>Vote to divest Columbia from Israeli Apartheid!</p>	<p>GET INVOLVED</p>  <p>LEARN MORE ABOUT CUAD</p>
<p>WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR?</p>	<p>FINANCIAL DIVESTMENT</p> <p>Divest all of Columbia's finances, including the endowment, from companies and institutions that profit from Israeli apartheid, genocide and occupation in Palestine. Ensure accountability by increasing transparency around financial investments.</p> <p>NO POLICING ON CAMPUS</p> <p>End the targeted repression of Palestinian students and their allies on and off campus, including through university disciplinary processes. Defund Public Safety and disclose and sever all ties with the NYPD.</p>	<p>ACADEMIC BOYCOTT</p> <p>Sever academic ties with Israeli universities, including the Global Center in Tel Aviv, the Dual Degree Program with Tel Aviv University, and all study-abroad programs, fellowships, and research collaborations with Israeli academic institutions.</p> <p>END THE SILENCE</p> <p>Release a public statement calling for an immediate, permanent ceasefire in Gaza, denouncing the ongoing genocidal campaign against the Palestinian people, and call on government officials to do so too.</p>	<p>STOP THE DISPLACEMENT</p> <p>No land grabs, whether in Harlem, Lenapehoking, or Palestine. Cease expansion, provide reparations, and support housing for low-income Harlem residents. No development by Columbia without real community control.</p>

From the tabling pamphlet compiled by the CUAD research committee at Columbia

Trustee Jeh Johnson, for example, is a [board director](#) of Lockheed Martin, a major weapons supplier to Israel. It also showed how the Columbia University Investment Company, which oversees CU's endowment, invests in companies like Google and Microsoft, and in the funds of asset management giant

BlackRock, who all bolster Israel's ongoing oppression of Palestinians.



From the tabling pamphlet compiled by the CUAD research committee at Columbia

A Columbia undergraduate and CUAD member who was involved in making the power map, and who asked that their name be withheld, said the map's creation was very much a “communal process.” It started with a scribbled rough draft on paper. The draft was based on researchers' findings. Out of this, someone used a computer program to create the finished map that was used in the pamphlet.

The power map and the brochure were created for specific organizing purposes. Organizers wanted to make accessible for students the material connections between Columbia and Palestine.

“It's not necessarily clear to an ordinary college student how they have a direct and personal connection to the genocide,” said the Columbia undergraduate. “The brochure was the best way to lay out our understanding of that connection in a direct way,”

conveying “how we felt and what we learned from our research inside CUAD,” they said.

The pamphlet made transparent and concrete what the encampment was demanding. “It showed that students were fighting for divestment from these primary companies, and why,” said the Columbia undergraduate.

The research into the Columbia University power structure also informed protest strategy. This included choosing specific trustees to [protest](#). “Our research allows us to pick the best possible target and have the most direct justification for our action,” they said.

Organizing and Research Across Other Campuses

Research and power mapping played important roles within a range of other university protests as well. University of California organizers [mapped out](#) the UC Board of Regents and named certain investments tied to Israel. Organizers at the University of Massachusetts [laid out](#) their ties to weapons producer Raytheon. At Emory University, organizers [focused](#) on the role of Motorola’s surveillance technology from Atlanta to Palestine.

Researchers at the University of Michigan compiled a thorough [report](#) on their endowment, handed out divestment [flyers](#), and used power research to agitate on social media around the [Board of Regents](#) and [endowment](#).

Brown University did not have an umbrella coalition like CUAD at Columbia or TAHRIR at Michigan, but different groups came together to engage in direct actions, a [hunger strike](#), and an [encampment](#). Palestine solidarity work at Brown has drawn on inspiring precedents of campus divestment campaigns against [South African apartheid](#) in the 1980s. The current upsurge has

also built on organizing and research from the past few years. In 2020, a student divestment vote created the Advisory Committee on Corporate Responsibility in Investment Policies (ACCRIP), which issued a [report](#), compiled by a group of faculty, grad students, and undergrads, arguing that Brown's own ESG standards Brown should divest from companies that "facilitate the Israeli occupation of Palestinian Territory."

Because of all this, said Brown senior Kian Braulik, there was already "a broad base of support for divestment" that "was really democratic" when students started organizing to oppose Israel's siege of Gaza. Braulik said a group of researchers from different campus groups collaboratively revised that report, extending it from the original 16 pages to [over 50 pages](#), adding new graphic designing to make it look catchier. During the encampment, they handed out copies of the report to show people why they were protesting and what their demands were around divestment.



Cover of the longer updated [2024 edition](#) of recommending Brown divest from Israeli occupation

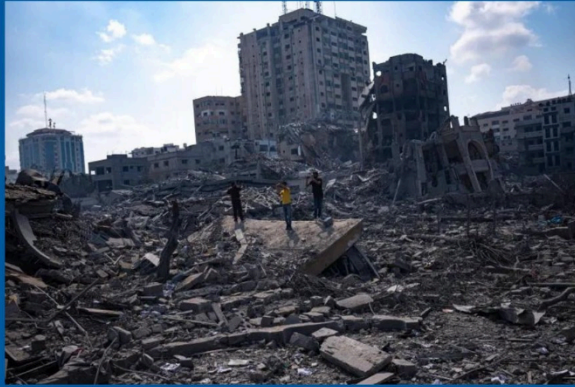
Campus organizers also made [flyers](#) of ten companies they want Brown to divest from, including Safariland, Boeing, General Dynamics, RTX (formerly Raytheon) and others, with explanations why.

All this research and mapping informed the demands at Brown, said Braulik, including their decision to protest [Maria Zuber](#), a Brown trustee who also sits on the board of [Textron](#), a military contractor headquartered in Providence that [provides Israel](#) with weapons.

TEXTRON

WHAT IS TEXTRON?

A military contractor with headquarters here in Providence, Textron provides military and surveillance equipment like armored vehicles aircrafts to armies across the world. Israel primarily receives supplies from Textron under subsidiaries such as Beechcraft, Bell Helicopters, Cessna, and Hawker.



VIOLATIONS - CRITERION A:

- Textron provides the Israeli Air Force 100 Squadron with Beechcraft King Air, Queen Air, RC12-D Guardrail, & Bonanza A-36.
- Textron's aircraft is used to target residential buildings, schools, water treatment facilities, & other civilian targets.
- Textron provides the IOF with 40 Bell Helicopter Super Cobra attack helicopters (model AH 1G/1S).

Textron, headquartered in Providence, was one company that the Brown University movement highlighted.

Organizers at Yale University also made use of power research. Taran Samarth, a second-year PhD student in political science, notes that power research has “deep roots” in New Haven and Yale. Grad workers affiliated with [Local 33 Unite Here](#) have used [power research](#) to support their organizing, while Fossil Free Yale imparted critical help for campus Palestine organizers. Samarth said the organizers who had done fossil finance research were “really helpful” in supporting Yale’s Palestinian solidarity movement and that “those same skills” were deployed to “thinking about Palestine and about the genocide.”

Samarth said there hadn’t previously been much focus among Palestinian solidarity activists on Yale’s investments. “If people said divestment, it was sort of a gesture,” they said. “We didn’t really know what the connections were because no one had really done the work to investigate them.”

Yale organizers stepped up that research in October 2023, as campus actions started taking off. In November, an anonymous zine was distributed that named specific connections between Yale and Israel's war on Palestine through Yale's investments, while the Yale Endowment Justice Coalition [campaigned around Yale's investments in weapons' companies through ETF funds.](#)

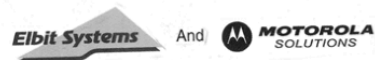


Yale's Retirement Fund Invests in Genocide

TIAA-CREF, the retirement fund for Yale faculty and staff, invests millions of dollars into various companies arming and supporting the current genocide in Gaza, and the Israeli apartheid system as a whole.

In 2013, students at Yale launched a campaign to pressure TIAA-CREF to divest their funds from companies that directly profit from the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, following a successful campaign by NYU faculty which resulted in TIAA-CREF divesting from Caterpillar. However, the school still relies on TIAA-CREF, funneling the savings of its faculty and staff into the Israeli war machine and apartheid system.

Here are some of the examples of the companies that TIAA-CREF still invests in:



TIAA-CREF has invested 1.7 million dollars into Elbit Systems, the largest Israeli arms manufacturer and the material backbone of the Israeli Defense Forces. In 2021, nearly 20% of Elbit's revenue came from procurement contracts with the Israeli military.

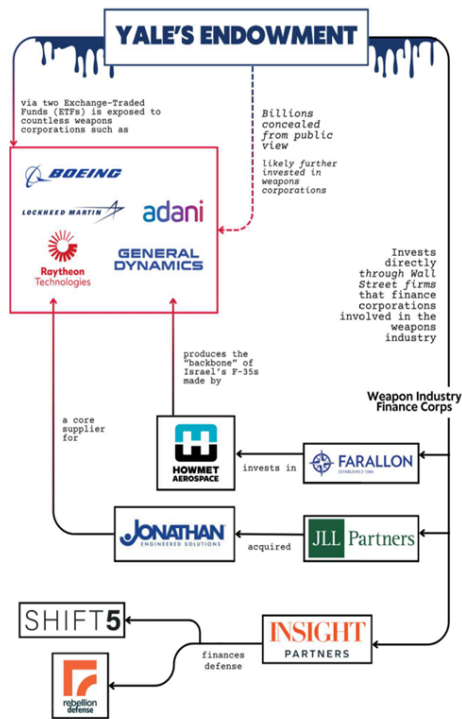
Elbit Systems supplies the IDF with two of the three drones in its fleet: the Hermes 450 and Hermes 900. Armed Elbit drones are being used in the cruel aerial bombardment on Gaza, attacks in Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank and have previously been used by the IDF in bombing campaigns in Syria and Lebanon. The Israeli Government also contracted Elbit Systems to build and operate the Apartheid walls in the West Bank and Gaza and provide associated military surveillance systems.

TIAA-CREF has 37,857 shares in Motorola Solutions, Inc., valued at \$10,850,951. In 2014, Motorola received a contract from the Israeli Ministry of Defense to be the sole provider of the 4G network for the Israeli Military, and has supplied military smartphone devices to the IDF since 2016. Motorola also provides communications services to the Israeli Police, Ministry of National Security, the Israeli Prison Service, and to illegal Jewish-only settlements in the West Bank. Motorola also helps to maintain systems of surveillance in Israeli checkpoints throughout the West Bank, and is the supplier of communications radios for the Supervision Unit of the Civil Administration, which is "in charge of enforcement and security legislation of Israeli military law in the occupied West Bank."

Page from anonymous zine on Yale's endowment's ties, "Yale is Complicit."

"Power research was a really key part of demand-making and orienting the campus movement early on," said Samarth. The following months saw direct action protests, teach-ins, and the encampment, all which focused on divestment demands that research helped to clarify.

Samarth also says that that power research helped students develop a deeper understanding of the corporate university. "There's this whole broader problem of the university and its relationships with New Haven and the world," they said."



DIVESTMENT ISN'T A NEW TACTIC—IT'S OUR TRADITION.

In 1986,
Yale students occupied Beinecke Plaza to oppose Yale's investments in apartheid South Africa.

In 2005,
Students forced Yale to divest from corporations aiding the genocide in Sudan.

In 2017,
Graduate workers occupied this plaza to, in part, call out Yale's destructive investments in payday lenders and student loan corporations.

In 2019,
Students stormed the field at the Harvard-Yale game to demand divestment from fossil fuels.



From the "Yale Corp, Divest from War" pamphlet, distributed at the Beinecke Plaza occupation and encampment at Yale in the Spring of 2024.

And while these campus movements played out locally, they were also stitched together through national networks and coalitions.

For example, Kim at University of Michigan, Braulik and Brown, and Samarth at Yale were among the researchers who connected to form the Endowment Justice Research Network (EJRN). "We were just trying to get people working on similar things together to talk to each other and develop methods together," said Kim.

Kim went to conferences like Labor Notes and the People's Conference for Palestine in Detroit and passed out half sheets with QR codes to grow the network or recruited by word of mouth. This past summer, EJRN co-hosted a [webinar](#) with LittleSis on endowment research.

JOIN THE ENDOWMENT JUSTICE RESEARCH NETWORK

We are the **Endowment Justice Research Network (EJRN)**, a group of student divestment organizers from across the nation from schools including the University of Michigan, the University of Virginia, Yale, Johns Hopkins, Cornell, Brown, Harvard, Georgia Tech, and others. We're interested in performing research on endowments and how they are invested.

This summer, we're working on:

1. developing teach-in programming and other educational content
2. creating data tools to work through publicly available data from groups like the SEC and IRS
3. writing about our work to be published as essays or op-eds

If you'd like to join our effort to pull back the curtain on how endowments are invested, and empower existing organizing efforts through cross-university collabs, please join us with the QR code below!

**QUESTIONS? DM
@NATHANCKIM18.49
OF UMICH TAHRIR ON
SIGNAL**



“One goal of the EJRN is to identify some shared connections across universities,” said Kim. “Finding points where we can mobilize a shared campaign would be awesome, and that’s one goal for the future that we have.”

1968’s “Who Rules Columbia?” Inspires a New Generation

When grad workers and campus organizers started researching and power mapping their universities’ ties to militarism, they

didn't do this in a historical vacuum. This new organizing wave drew inspiration from campus divestment movements against South African apartheid from the 1980s, and, especially, from power research efforts five decades earlier in the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1968, Columbia students waged a historic protest on campus against the university's connections to racism and the war in Vietnam. Out of this, a small group of researchers produced a powerful pamphlet, "[Who Rules Columbia?](#)" that [mapped out and analyzed](#) the university's power structure and its deep ties to the war machine and corporate interests.

"Who Rules Columbia?" showed that universities were deeply interlocked with society's larger corporate power structure and ruling elite. The same forces and interests dominating national politics and economic decision-making — real estate, Wall Street, the military industrial complex — also occupied the governing heights of university power.

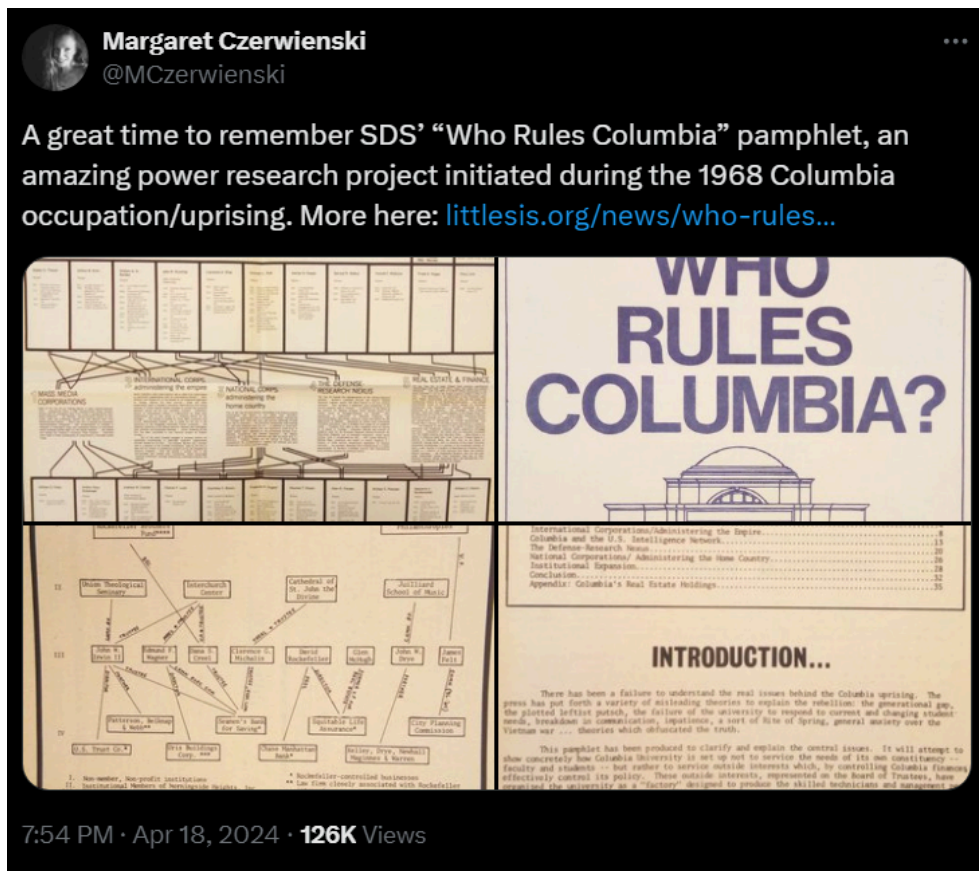
For grad workers at Columbia organizing around Palestine, "Who Rules Colombia?" was an inspiration. "Reading it showed me what is possible," said Harrison.

Nor were they just abstractly inspired by "Who Rules Columbia?" They were mentored by and worked closely with Mike Locker, a seasoned power researcher who was one of the original authors of the original pamphlet in 1968.

Locker joined Researchers Against War meetings and Columbia grads soon connected with him directly. They started having regular breakfasts with him where they would absorb lessons from Locker's years of experience doing power research.

We would "just sit down and talk and ask each other questions and check in," said one Columbia grad worker in chemistry, who

asked that their name be withheld. “He’s able to apply his strategies from the 1960s to current times. It’s just been incredible, not only for information and resources, but also for inspiration.”



“Who Rules Columbia?” [tweeted out](#) by one grad worker during the April 2024 encampment wave

Kim said the research group at University of Michigan read *Who Rules Columbia?* and that the pamphlet “changed our campaign” by focusing attention on the university as a larger power structure, such as “the people controlling the endowment” and “the backgrounds of the regents.”

“[‘Who Rules Columbia?’](#) made us realize that what’s most important and useful to us is not just understanding what the endowment is invested in,” said Kim, “but the networks of power around the university that control things at large.” Because of this, University of Michigan organizers started new research projects, including a dossier on the Board of Regents.

Kim also took inspiration from Locker — a University of Michigan alum — when the power research veteran joined the debut Researchers Against War teach-in that included grad workers from across universities. “He talked about his own experiences, both at Columbia and the University of Michigan,” said Kim. “That was super helpful for us.”

It wasn't just the mentoring and support from Locker that inspired the Columbia grad workers who met with him. It was also his personal example as someone who has dedicated his life to the movement. “To see people who had been committed in 1968, in their youth, and who are still committed,” was deeply inspiring for the Columbia grad worker who asked that their name be withheld. “It really grounds you in the fact that this is a lifelong commitment and that it's possible to lead a life that is guided by your values.”

* * *

The current campus movements for Palestine illustrate the usefulness of power research for supporting organizing efforts. The deeper ties between universities and militarism are not necessarily apparent, but research and mapping can help uncover and illustrate these connections. Doing so helps educate movements, offering a clearer sense of what they're up against, and making more transparent how universities are *both* power structures within themselves *as well as* crucial components of the wider corporate and militarist power structure.

Understanding these interlocks and connections opens up new strategic and tactical possibilities for organizers. Moreover, the very *process* of doing the research can be an organizing tool: a collective endeavor that builds cohesion, consciousness and solidarity.

Critically, it's important to remember that power research is not an end in itself, but rather a tool that serves organizing efforts and, often, can strengthen them — whether that be for grad workers making clearer sense of their relationship to the military supply chain and how to disrupt it, or campus groups seeking to better understand and communicate their institution's ties to the war machine and identify focuses for protest actions.

University power — elite-managed, corporate-tied, military-aligned, ultimately repressive — has been unmasked for a new generation of students. RAW is still meeting regularly and drawing from grad workers in the sciences, engineering and humanities. Campus groups are retooling their efforts to challenge university ties to militarism. As a new semester takes off; as Israel's monstrous war against Palestinians continues, fully backed by the U.S. and its military industry; and as the corporate university shows no signs of abating, we may be seeing just the beginning of a new wave of power research and mapping of campus power structures — and beyond.



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