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Boeing University: How the California State University Became Complicit in Palestinian Genocide



OVER 1,000 CSULB STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF RALLIED FOR PALESTINE ON MAY 2, 2024. (PHOTO: BEN HUFF)

“Over the years, Boeing and its employees have played a vital role in the advancement of Cal State Long Beach.”

Jane Close Conoley, President, California State University, Long Beach

Pro-Palestinian student protests and encampments have bloomed this spring across U.S. universities. Unsurprisingly, campus administrators have responded with calls for civility and peace — that is, when not inviting militarized police forces onto campus to attack and arrest peaceful student demonstrators. At California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), while chiding students for a planned demonstration against Israel’s genocidal offensive in Gaza, the university President stressed that “we must hold to a vision of peace

and reject violence. We must embrace the immeasurable value of human life.” However, this “vision of peace” apparently does not extend to our university’s deep and numerous links to the U.S. military-industrial complex, the largest purveyor of weapons of mass destruction and death in the world, or to Palestinian people.

The “golden triangle” of military, industry, and university cooperation is nothing new, but in today’s neoliberal university — shaped by the politics of austerity and privatization policies and deliberately starved of public funding for over four decades — military and defense industry funding and collaborations have become foundational to the public university’s normal fiscal and research operations. These lucrative partnerships raise serious questions about the ways in which university priorities are inexorably bent and shaped to the will of corporate interests, imperial militarism, and war-profiteering.

As the second biggest campus in the nation’s largest four-year public university system, CSULB, as a site of analysis, is a prime example of this ongoing and growing complicity of higher education with the corporate machinery of war and imperialism. CSULB reveals the troubling ways that public universities have become entangled in the global geographies of racial capitalism and anti-Palestinian violence. In particular, the university’s longstanding partnership with Boeing showcases public higher education’s connections to US-Israeli militarism and genocide.

Boeing’s connection to Israel’s military violence

Since the founding of Israel in 1948, Boeing has played a key role in supporting Israel’s military and commercial interests. The Boeing Company is the world’s largest aerospace corporation and fourth-largest defense contractor, valued at over \$100 billion. Boeing’s weapons and technology have provided material support for Israel’s military campaigns of displacement, occupation, and brutal violence against Palestinians. While producing profit for the corporation, Boeing’s 75-year relationship with Israel is linked to tens of thousands of Palestinians killed by Boeing’s weaponry, the complete destruction of Gaza’s civil society and infrastructure, and the displacement of over 2 million Palestinian people.

Boeing’s financial partnership with Israel has provided key military assets, including (via its merger with McDonnell Douglas) F-15 fighter jets, “Apache” helicopters, hellfire missiles (produced in collaboration with Lockheed Martin), and the “tail kit” navigation system used on massive 2,000 pound MK84 bombs that have devastated Gaza in the latest round of genocidal attacks. Israel’s indiscriminate use of Boeing’s heavy bombs directly contributed to numerous “mass casualty events” and the soaring death toll in Gaza. Since October of 2023, Boeing and Israel have expanded their financial partnership with Israel’s recent purchase of

25 new sophisticated F-15 IA (Israel Advanced) fighter jets, in addition to Israel's high-tech Arrow-3 missile defense system, marketed for its "hit-to-kill" technology.

Boeing at 'The Beach': profit, privatization, and the erosion of the public university

Despite its complicity in occupation and genocide, Boeing has had a long and financially reciprocal relationship with CSULB, one going back decades with its latest iteration being touted as CSULB's "Boeing Partnership." CSULB is one of just 16 universities nationwide – and the sole university in California – to be selected by the Boeing Company for an exclusive university partnership. The Boeing Partnership is a university-corporate alliance that has further transformed CSULB into a public relations mouthpiece for the defense contractor. The CSULB-Boeing partnership illustrates not only how defense contractors such as Boeing, Raytheon, and Northrop Grumman profit from Israel's violence against Palestinians, but also how these massive corporations simultaneously undermine the mission of public universities by harming students domestically and facilitating genocide, militarism, and mass death abroad.

In alignment with the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement, the global student solidarity movement with Palestine has bravely demanded that their universities "disclose and divest" from stock holdings in corporations that profit off of Palestinian death and support Israel's settler-colonial war machine. This work has been crucial. Yet it is also critical to expose how the complicity of US universities in Israeli militarism and Palestinian genocide extends far beyond investments in stocks. Under constant threats of austerity measures and the steady erosion of state funding in the neoliberal context, large public university systems like the California State University (CSU) system have quietly become embedded with defense contractors saturating every facet of campus life. The university-corporate nexus has become all-encompassing, producing deleterious consequences for students, faculty, and staff while undermining the university's mission of promoting the "public good."

At CSULB, the administration has invited the Boeing Company to become the university's omnipresent corporate partner. Boeing and CSULB's insidious alliance can be found in classrooms and research labs, job fairs, Boeing internships, the Aerospace Corporation Leadership Academy, Boeing guest speakers at the Student Leadership Institute, Boeing-sponsored student orientation events, Boeing research competitions, and Boeing-sponsored scholarships for students in Business and Psychology. Students are inundated with Boeing's footprint on campus. The College of Engineering and College of Business has quite literally transformed into Boeing's labor-supply mill. CSULB was the second institution to receive

Boeing's "Supplier of the Year" award. It's no surprise, then, that Boeing employs the largest number of CSULB graduates. In recent years, the College of Engineering introduced the Boeing Endowed Chair in Manufacturing. Meanwhile, the College of Business has also aligned closely with Boeing as one of its key "corporate partners" providing "internships for students, support the different centers, programs, and student organizations at the College."

The revolving door of defense contractor executives serving as advisors to university administrators at CSULB has become a taken-for-granted reality. Previously, the Vice President of Boeing's Defense unit served on the Board of Directors for CSULB's 49er Foundation – the primary body in charge of the university's endowment and investment holdings. CSULB's Alumni Association also honored two former Boeing Vice Presidents of Boeing's Defense, Space, and Security unit with the Distinguished Alumni Award, CSULB's highest alumni honor.

Beyond Boeing, the university has also formed strategic corporate partnerships with other weapons and defense contractors complicit in Israeli violence, such as Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and Northrop Grumman. The Dean's Advisory Council for the College of Engineering currently has three members from Boeing, two members from Raytheon, and two members from Northrop Grumman. Like Boeing, Northrop Grumman is similarly embedded in CSULB faculty and student research, student organizations, along with so-called labor "talent" pipelines. The Dean for Research and Graduate Programs has also sought to build a closer relationship between the university and the US Army. While the university's purported mission is to promote "global understanding" through "respect and appreciation for different cultures," collaborations such as these do nothing of the sort. Instead, they facilitate capital accumulation for defense contractors at the expense and destruction of racialized peoples across the globe.

Reclaiming the people's university from the U.S.-Israeli war machine

As Palestinian life continues to be annihilated by a settler-colonial state aided by its primary ally, the United States, hope has also emerged from university campuses where student movements are demanding transparency about university investments and divestment from corporations that thrive from war profiteering. These organizing efforts stand in stark contrast to the neoliberal university's collaboration with corporations that profit from war and violence.

Across the CSU, student activists are rising up and demanding transparency and accountability at numerous CSU campuses and they are winning. Cal State Sacramento became the first public university in California to promise divestment from

companies doing business with Israel. At San Francisco State, students are redefining democracy at their university by engaging in open bargaining with their campus president over its investments. These movements remind us of the collective responsibility to defend, at all costs, the right to life and human dignity. Students are also mobilizing against public university partnerships with defense contractors such as Boeing. Students at Portland State University demanded the university cut all financial ties with Boeing. The pressure from Portland State's student activists led to an announcement from the university President: "PSU will pause seeking or accepting any further gifts or grants from the Boeing Company until we have had a chance to engage in this debate and come to conclusions about a reasonable course of action."

Meanwhile, the CSU Office of the Chancellor has countered that they do "not intend to alter existing investment policies related to Israel or the Israel-Hamas conflict," choosing to prioritize corporate profit-making and the neoliberal machinery of mass death rather than the purported values and responsibilities of public institutions. Drawing on the politics of scarcity without calling into question the violent logic of austerity, the CSU sanctimoniously continues to justify its support of the US war machine that actively aids genocide in Gaza. CSU leaders claim that "CSU investments provide a stable revenue stream that benefits our students and faculty, and supports our critical campus facilities, scholarships, and other key elements of our educational mission." The fact that this "stable revenue stream" comes soaked in the innocent blood of Palestinians doesn't give them pause, since clearly to them the right to life of Palestinians is less important than the CSU system hoarding its \$8 billion reserve fund.

Boeing's takeover of CSULB illustrates the immense ethical challenge facing public higher education. As educators and students, we must actively resist the normalization of university partnerships with corporations that facilitate dehumanization and indignity while imagining new ways to ensure public universities can thrive without becoming complicit in the mounting crimes against humanity perpetrated by the US-Israeli military-industrial complex. The uncritical acceptance of military defense corporations' enmeshment in all levels of the university demonstrates how a public university's mission is being eroded before our eyes. We must ask, what role can and should public higher education play in articulating different life worlds where a generative vision of peace, justice, and transformative possibilities can flourish? The answers to these pressing ethical dilemmas are already being generated by student activists, *not* university administrators; this means, we need to listen to our students.

The authors are all members of [CSULB Faculty for Justice in Palestine](#), an academic worker collective of over 50 tenure-track and lecturer faculty at California State University, Long Beach.

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