

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY IS COMPLICIT IN THE WAR ON YEMEN

by Jamie Gagliano and Anthony Walker

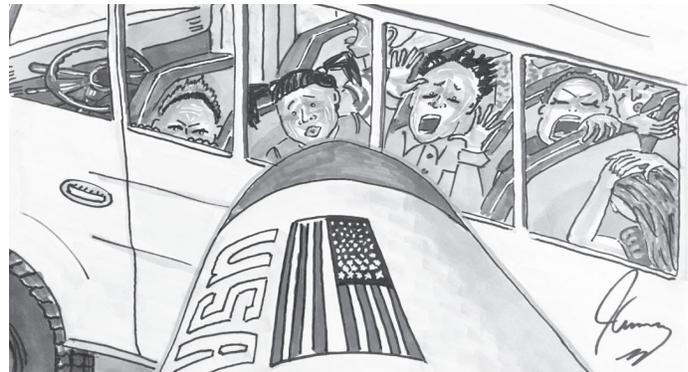
In August, a bomb was deployed against a school bus killing 40 children in Yemen. On a surface level, this may not appear to have any connection with our community here in Syracuse. However, as CNN reported, the “weapon that left dozens of children dead on August 9 was a 500-pound laser-guided MK 82 bomb made by Lockheed Martin,” a US arms manufacturer that has a plant in Syracuse’s neighboring suburb Salina. Yet Lockheed Martin continues to evade widespread scrutiny in part because of its relationship with Syracuse University, another major Syracuse employer.

Lockheed Martin has played a significant role in the nearly four year conflict in Yemen perpetuated by a US-backed Saudi-led coalition of Gulf states. This conflict has generated a grave humanitarian crisis. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights estimates that Saudi-led coalition air strikes and shelling have caused nearly two-thirds of civilian deaths in Yemen. The coalition is exacerbating famine conditions by securing blockades of Yemen’s seaports. Much of the weaponry supplied to the coalition comes from US defense contractors, including recent \$481 million deals for Lockheed Martin. Lockheed has been awarded multiple contracts that include missile defense systems, long-lead materials, and Saudi naval expansion.

The brutal murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and the August school bus bombing galvanized the US Senate to vote to withdraw US military support of Saudi Arabia’s conflict in Yemen. However, this may remain a largely symbolic act. While a ceasefire was negotiated in early December for the central port city of Hodeida, it is incredibly fragile. Even if it holds, the conflict is far from over; the Saudi coalition continues bombing the capital, Sanaa. The tenuous ceasefire and the Senate’s weak symbolism highlight the need for action that targets the profit motives fueling international conflict—actions which should include rupturing the long-standing connection between Lockheed Martin and Syracuse University.

Lockheed Martin has developed a clear relationship with Syracuse University (SU) through the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVFM). In 2013, Lockheed Martin donated \$500,000 to IVFM programs that assist veterans and families transition into post-service life; in 2016, they donated \$1,000,000 to a program that encourages business ownership amongst veterans. The IVFM’s advisory board includes representatives from JP Morgan Chase & Co., Verizon Entertainment—and Lockheed Martin. Financial ties also extend beyond the IVFM. In 2006, Lockheed Martin gave \$250,000 to Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science to attract “the highest caliber of engineering students.”

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Graphic: twitter.com/JimCarrey. He wrote, “40 innocent children killed on a bus in Yemen. Our ally. Our missile. Our crime.”

SU’s relationship to Lockheed Martin is particularly troubling since one of the six themes of its Academic Strategic Plan is “Commitment to Veterans” with the goal to “distinguish Syracuse as the premier university for veterans, military-connected students, and families.” While this is an admirable goal and the above programs may deserve to be financed, it is contradictory that such an ambitious effort at veteran support is funded in part by a defense contractor that profits from putting these people in the context of war to begin with. Rather than representing a spirit of generosity, these donations are an active investment on the part of the company. They may, for example, secure influence over IVFM programming, including programs that connect veterans directly to Lockheed Martin. More insidiously, donations generate for Lockheed Martin a benevolent image of good-will while they profit at the expense of the lives of veterans, military families, and Yemenis. If SU truly wants to distinguish itself as a supportive environment for veterans and military families, its programs should be solely accountable to those directly impacted by the traumas of war.

More importantly, SU cannot in good conscience maintain relationships with Lockheed Martin as Lockheed continues to profit off indiscriminate killing. The Syracuse community should draw inspiration from protests against Saudi connections to Harvard, Yale, and MIT, and remember its legacy of anti-war activism, including shutting down the campus in the spring of 1970 to protest the US war in Vietnam and invasion of Cambodia. While the Yemen war continues today, we cannot remain silent. As dissident Saudi academic Madawi Al Rasheed recently urged on Democracy Now: “Americans should ask themselves this question: Is America just an arms dealer, a manufacturer of heavy armament to be sold to dictatorships around the world, or is there something else that America stands for?” 🇺🇸

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