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The Palantir Manifesto and the New Grammar of Hybrid Warfare

By Gerardo Spagnuolo

There is a room, somewhere in the world, where the future breathes before it is ever uttered. It lacks the solemn grandeur of the United Nations Security Council chambers; it is not shielded by the reinforced concrete of a subterranean Pentagon bunker, nor does it resemble the secret laboratories where atomic vectors are assembled. It is a place infinitely more silent, aseptic, almost spectral in its immobility: a cathedral of servers and liquid-crystal displays pulsing with the rhythmic regularity of a vital organ. In this room, time does not flow according to the linear progression of minutes and hours; it is calculated, decomposed into discrete streams of probability, digested and spat out in the form of probabilistic verdicts.

It is precisely within this metaphysical non-place that the twenty-one-point manifesto, published by Alex Karp and Nicholas W. Zamiska on behalf of Palantir Technologies, takes shape and substance. To reduce it to a mere industrial catalogue, a promotional pamphlet or a bold exercise in editorial public relations is to commit an error of perspective that modern strategic analysis cannot afford. This text does not

describe a share package or a software application; it constitutes the birth certificate of a radically disruptive geopolitical doctrine that we may define as **Absolute Technological Realism**.

If hybrid warfare is, by its very nature, the pathogen that dissolves the historical boundaries of modernity—the fault line between peace and conflict, the diaphragm between the civil sphere and the military apparatus, the fissure between informational manipulation and destructive kinetics—then Palantir’s manifesto configures itself as the source code of power in the age to come. Palantir does not sell computational tools; it formalizes the cognitive architecture of sovereignty in an era of fragmented reality. Below, this architecture is vivisected through four vectors of strategic penetration, expanding the doctrinal narrative to its furthest systemic consequences.

The Day Hard Power Evaporated into Code: The Privatization of Deterrence

Let us imagine a twentieth-century general. His world is composed of heavy matter, of geometric objects occupying space and possessing mass. Behind him loom topographic maps marked with thick grease pencils, bakelite telephones hitched to landlines, infantry divisions, and armoured columns whose potential is mathematically measurable: tons of steel, artillery calibres, kilometres of operational ranges, the range of ballistic vectors. Force, in the last century, was a matter of gravity and friction.

Now, let us erase this picture and replace it with the figure of a twenty-first-century commander. He has no paper maps before him. He has no telephone receivers to clutch. He has no linear front to defend, for the front is everywhere and nowhere. Before his eyes stretches a single, boundless graphical interface. It is a luminous window floating in the dark, a shifting mosaic of data that sees what no human eye could ever discern, anticipates correlations that no biological mind could process in time, and suggests and guides decisions before doubt can even crystallize in the soldier’s consciousness.



Source: US Strategic Command.

Deterrence (the ultimate pillar of the Westphalian international order, frozen in place during the Cold War) has undergone an ontological mutation. It is no longer the intercontinental ballistic missile nestled in the underground silos of North Dakota or Siberia, poised to usher in a nuclear winter through mutually assured destruction. Contemporary deterrence is a predictive algorithm. It is the capacity to observe the adversary in their digital entirety, to decode their intentions while they are still mere electrical impulses or embryonic logistical movements, imposing an unsustainable cost not in terms of physical destruction, but of total cognitive paralysis.

The Palantir manifesto puts this in black and white with a starkness that carries the seriousness of a verdict:

“In this century, hard power will be built on software”.

At this precise instant, power changes its physical state. It evaporates. It abandons the heaviness of iron and TNT to seek refuge in the intangibility of binary code. Yet, this dematerialization of force drags a destabilizing geopolitical consequence in its wake: if the infrastructure of defence and the effectiveness of the military instrument depend exclusively upon proprietary code (shielded by industrial secrecy and perpetually updated in real time), operational sovereignty undergoes an epochal displacement.

The Weberian monopoly on legitimate violence, the linchpin upon which the modern State has built its historical legitimacy over the last four centuries, slips from the grasp of ministries and parliamentary assemblies to settle instead within the boardrooms of defence Big Tech. We are no longer facing an evolution of the old military-industrial complex, the builders of hulls or fuselages executing state contracts. Palantir and its peers position themselves as the true demiurges of conflict perception. Whosoever possesses the algorithm is no longer a subordinate supplier assisting the political decision-maker; they are the epistemic subject determining what the decision-maker is biologically capable of seeing, and consequently, what they are permitted to resolve. The Leviathan no longer wears a crown upon its head; it wears a silicon harness.

The End of Technological Innocence: The Integrated Military-Civilian Complex

For nearly three decades, Silicon Valley sold the world a distinctly messianic narrative. It donned the garb of an ingenuous, neutral maiden, convinced that connecting people was inherently an act of democratic emancipation, that technology was a fundamentally progressive medium, and that engineers were simply building the tools for a global agora. “We build platforms, we do not choose conflicts”, was the mantra whispered behind the glass desks of California.

The manifesto of Karp and Zamiska tears away this veil of performative hypocrisy with the violence of a surgeon lancing an abscess. Technological neutrality has never existed: it is a commercial fiction useful for penetrating global markets, an intellectual luxury for times of apparent peace. In the grammar of

hybrid warfare, digital space is not a neutral terrain for cooperative exchange, but a pervasive, militarized theatre of operations. The manifesto launches a frontal assault against the “tyranny of apps” and invokes the “moral debt” of technology creators, demanding the definitive liquidation of the concept of dual use. Pope Leo XIV Magnifica Humanitas understood immediately the sham of neutrality and invokes clearly an “AI disarmament”, time will tell with what results.

Historically, dual use was the ethical and economic expedient through which technologies born for the civilian market were loaned to national security. Palantir inverts this vector: technology must be born with an explicit geopolitical posture. It must choose its side before the first line of code is ever typed. This total integration produces the definitive welding of domestic security to external geopolitical projection.

The fluidity of hybrid warfare erases geographical frontiers, replacing them with the capillarity of the network. Point 17 of the manifesto, which invokes the application of predictive technologies against violent crime in American metropolises, reveals the holistic and ruthless nature of this doctrine. The classical distinction of public law between external threats (the enemy submarine, the armoured division across the border) and internal threats (social unrest, urban deviance) definitively collapses.

The algorithmic platform makes no ontological distinctions among its targets: the software designed to map, track, and neutralize a network of drug dealers or rioters in Baltimore is structurally identical to that which maps Russian supply lines and artillery emplacements in the Donbas basin. The internal stability of the nation and the psychological fortitude of its urban fabric are no longer matters of mere public order; they become the front line of the global geopolitical chessboard. Civilian technology awakens as a soldier, and society as a whole find itself transformed into an immense, invisible theatre of confrontation.

Anti-Relativism as the Shield of the West: Cognitive Warfare

The most insidious, profound, and lethal dimension of hybrid warfare is fought neither on servers nor in the skies, but within the minds of men. This is so-called cognitive warfare: the ability to bend and ultimately break the willpower of a national community without needing to destroy its cities, but by radically altering its value systems, its vectors of meaning, its very perception of good and evil. It is the semantic attrition of the adversary.

In this quadrant, Palantir’s manifesto abandons the jargon of computer engineering to become ruthlessly philosophical. The assault it mounts against the cultural relativism of Western elites is an act of epistemic warfare. When the text states unequivocally that “certain cultures remain dysfunctional and regressive”, it is not offering an anthropological judgment for academic salons; it is providing the ideological and muscular justification necessary for global great-power competition.

Within the doctrine of Absolute Technological Realism, the internal fragmentation of the West (fuelled by the hyper-psychologization of public debate, cancel culture, and the exacerbated polarization of social networks) is not read as an innocent exercise in democratic pluralism. It is, on the contrary, a systemic vulnerability of military grade. It is the fissure in the armour that the psychological operations (PsyOps) apparatuses of Beijing and Moscow exploit daily to inoculate democratic public opinion with doubt, guilt and decisional paralysis.

Palantir proposes a brutal anchoring of identity: to fight and win a protracted hybrid conflict, the West must cease apologizing for its history and its existence. The retrieval of an assertive stance, the revaluation of the strategic posture of the *Pax Americana*, the abandonment of performative moralism, and even the appeal to spiritual or religious roots are not presented as ethical options or conservative political preferences. They are described as requirements for the biological survival of the State. They are the indispensable cognitive antibodies needed to neutralize the infection of doubt induced by the enemy's informational asymmetry. Self-certainty becomes the primary weapon of defence: to the avail of the State or of powerful private interests remains a fundamental question that the manifesto skips.

Democracy as an Immunodeficient Organism: In Praise of Imperfect Leaders

Contemporary liberal democracies, the manifesto suggests, are afflicted by a severe form of pathological immunodeficiency. That very characteristic which historically represented their greatest boast and chief source of legitimacy (radical transparency, the meticulous scrutiny of power, the public exposure of the ruling class) has inverted into its exact opposite: an autoimmune weakness that risks leading them to strategic subjugation.

Media puritanism and the obsessive hunt for the private or venial errors of governors have generated a political class that is structurally weak, blackmailable, and terrified of the emotional impact of a single tweet or a coordinated disinformation campaign. When the private lives of leaders are constantly X-rayed and fed to the permanent tribunal of social media, the result is the evaporation of foresight. It produces a “hollow and ineffective” leadership, incapable of assuming strategic risks, condemned to govern with eyes fixed on tomorrow’s polls rather than the destinies of the decade to come. This pneumatic vacuum renders democracies a perfect target for foreign operations of *kompromat* (compromising material) and psychological infiltration. It is interesting to see that the authors do not contemplate that, through the same means, this leadership remains manipulable also by any external private interest.

Faced with this ruthless diagnosis, the manifesto proposes a shock therapy that savours of classical political realism. On one hand, it demands a return to “imperfect” leadership – that is, a ruling class that reclaims the right to tactical error and strategic complexity, immune to the blackmail of total transparency and capable of deciding within the fog of war without heed to the puritanism of public opinion.

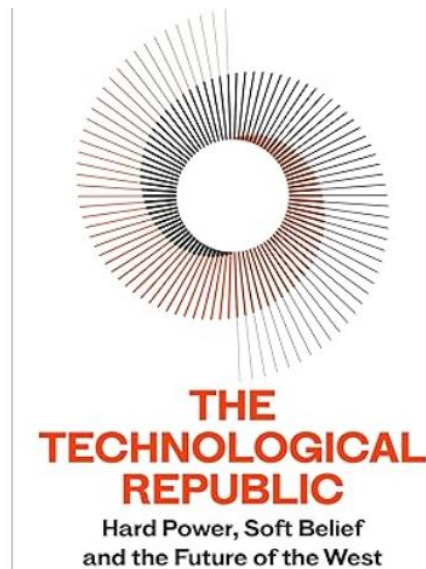
On the other hand, the manifesto launches the disruptive proposal of universal, mandatory national service. In a hybrid war where safe rearguards no longer exist and where the entire social fabric is perpetually under attack (through the sabotage of critical infrastructure, energy blackmail, or psychological bombardment) the total delegation of defence to a narrow circle of professionals creates a lethal fracture between citizens and the State.

Mandatory service is not a nostalgic or disciplinary demand; it is a project of systemic resilience engineering. A population that does not participate in the defence of its own geopolitical architecture is a fragile population, destined to collapse at the first harsh impact of real conflict. A nation's strength is no longer measured solely by the number of its technological patents, but by the capacity of the individual citizen to absorb the trauma of crisis without becoming a vehicle for panic or capitulation. One cannot avoid the irony of see that the authors advocating universal conscription have not the faintest idea or experience about universal conscription: they have an idealised version that was not measured not even against historical experience.

Epilogue: The Sovereign Algorithm

Palantir's manifesto does not anticipate the future: it institutes it, encloses it and fixes its coordinates of legitimacy. The epochal transition that we trace within this doctrine is summarized in a formidable insight: hybrid warfare is no longer fought *with* technology; it is fought *inside* technology. Software has ceased to be the instrument of conflict to become its exclusive environment, its breathable atmosphere, its very gravity.

When hard power dematerializes into lines of code and the efficacy of the State depends upon the computational precision of a private platform, the ancient line of demarcation separating the capitalist enterprise from the intelligence agency evaporates like mist before the sun. The century of digital innocence has ended, and with it, the illusion that the network was a virgin space destined for entertainment or individual emancipation. Those who persist in looking at Silicon Valley through the conceptual categories of the twentieth century are historical subjects already defeated, fossils inhabiting a time that is no more.



Source: Amazon.au

The Technological Republic prefigured by Alex Karp distributes no consolations and promises no pacific utopias. It offers a silicon harness to a weary, distracted West that has forgotten the ruthless hardness of iron and the tragedy of history. Yet, behind the lustre of this algorithmic protection remains suspended the most exquisitely political and radical question of our time: will Western democracies know how to wear and act in this armour while preserving the status of sovereign citizens, or will they accept transforming themselves into the obedient subjects of its predictive gaze? The answer is stored in no server; it awaits to be written by the surviving will of man.