

Intelligent Defenseware

About Palantir's Gotham AI and the history of intel agencies

#IT #Ukraine

Historically, intelligence had an early but powerful adversary long before the concept of gathering information to anticipate the future became the dominant form of advice: religious prophecy. For a long time, divine advice was the only way for military leaders to get a glimpse of whether a particular military tactic or strategy would succeed. In ancient Rome, leaders regularly sent their augurs - a highly respected class of special priests - to the battlefield. These priests would omen the behaviour of chickens, for example, to predict the prospect of military actions. Some centuries earlier, the Chinese General Sun Tzu elaborated in his famous book *The Art of War* on how spies and their enemy information gatherings should be an essential part of a military strategy.

Augurs were among the highest members of the political class during the Roman Republic until 27 BC. They were respected representatives of the state,



US Senate logo with Fasces

second only to the '**consulship**', politicians with tremendous judicial powers. During their reign, consuls - not augurs - carried what is known as '**fasces**', a strange bundle of wooden sticks with a double sword attached. The word was adopted a few thousand years later by Mussolini by the way, who was the first to name his political party 'National Fascists' in 1921.

Palantir, a software company based in Denver, Colorado, with a strong base in Silicon Valley, seems to have managed to combine the two historic intelligence methods into one. Founded in 2003, the company harnesses the power of artificial intelligence algorithms and has received early support from the CIA. Palantir's software creates predictive outcomes for various industries after analysing and calculating massive amounts of data and information through neural software networks.

We founded the company to build software for defense and intelligence agencies whose budgets were

larger than the economies of some countries. They had the personnel and the funding but not the software they needed to do their jobs. The incumbents that dominated the industry had tens of thousands of employees and essentially unlimited resources. We had about five people and an idea for a product.

Palantir CEO and Co-Founder Alexander Karp in [Annual Letter 2022](#)

As of 2013, Palantir's clients include at least twelve groups within the US government, including the CIA, FBI, DHS, NSA, CDC, Marine Corps, Air Force, Special Operations Command, United States Military Academy, and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Palantir, whose name refers to a term invented by J.R.R. Tolkien for seven mysterious vision stones in his famous book 'The Lord of the Rings', offers various software systems, one of which is codenamed Gotham. This, of course, is referred to the corruption-ridden metropolis of the famous Batman comics and later films.

There must have been something shining about Palantir already some years ago when newly elected US president Donald Trump [had a meeting with](#) America's top Tech Executives about a month before being inaugurated in January 2017. Among the Apple, Google, Facebook and more Directors was Alexander Karp, CEO of Palantir - probably by the consultancy of Trump's tech strategy advisor and famous early IT investor Peter Thiel.

Palantir itself displays an interesting video regarding how it had contributed to transforming military itself. The Batman Gotham seemed to have been turned upside down by Palantir when seeing it in action in various military operations, also in the Ukraine-Russia war:

Palantir's system allows for a different kind of military behaviour. While in the past, military operations and strategies depended entirely on generals, soldiers and military equipment, a new player has entered the military arena, capable of suggesting entire operations and even strategies to humans: artificial intelligence.

The Russians are using their artillery like it's the First World War. What the Ukrainians are doing is completely different. A digital army is fighting an analogue army. What you are seeing is that the digital army, despite being a fraction of the size, is able to massively outperform its analogue adversary.

A defense source about Palantir's Gotham according to [The Times from December 24, 2022](#)

For Palantir's algorithms to be effective, it needs billions and billions of historical digital data points that lead to a certain outcome in the past. The more, the better the algorithm is able to predict new scenarios and outcomes with high quality. Palantir ingests data from up to 300 commercial and government satellites, as well as drones. [In Ukraine](#), the system also relies on ground intelligence; the Kiev government has set up a web platform where citizens can upload the positions of Russian forces on the ground. In February 2022, the government in Kiev was [quick to allow](#) its important and partly

confidential data to be transported entirely onto Amazon's cloud infrastructure starting the day of the Russian invasion.

With all this massive input data, Gotham is able to predict hidden tanks, camouflaged battalions, carefully shielded rocket launchers and more. It suggests entire strategic moves and tactics sometimes not even considered by long-time military experts. And the longer a war is sustained, the more Palantir's neuronal software is able to learn and provide better algorithms. The undisputed winner of the Ukraine war may one day be none other than the software maker from Denver, Colorado and the US National Security apparatus Palantir serves. Thanks in part to Palantir, traditional wars have become information wars. The decisive factor in winning is no longer the number of soldiers and weapons on the battlefield, but increasingly the quality of an army's artificial intelligence neuronal network. Power is shifting to software architects, whose skills can already significantly determine the outcome of a war. Even more so in the future, when two or more opposing AI systems will compete indirectly on the battlefield.

Sort of like augurs and consuls competing over the most valued political position in the Roman Republic.

<https://www.sun24.news/en/intelligent-defenseware-about-palantirs-gotham-ai-and-the-history-of-intel-agencies.html>