On Weapons of Mass Surveillance

The 20th century was shaped by the Military-Industrial Complex: a self-perpetuating alliance of government agencies, private contractors, and technocrats. Massive sums were justified as necessary for existential survival; dissent was construed as weakness. That system isn't fading—it's morphing. Emerging from its shadow is the Intelligence Industrial Complex, the assemblage of firms, funding, and narratives oriented around surveillance, predictive control, and opaque AI decision-making.

The script is familiar. First, a threat is declared so sophisticated that only the "best and brightest"—often unelected tech firms—can address it. Second, the nation is warned it is falling behind. And third, only vast, urgent investment is proffered as the cure – and the only cure. The color and texture of the threat changes, but the frames remain.

Palantir Technologies exemplifies this. The U.S. Army has consolidated dozens of contracts into a single enterprise agreement that enables purchases of up to $10 billion in products and services over the next decade. Meanwhile, Palantir's Q2 2025 revenue forecast was raised as demand for its AI services—driven in part by government contracts—surged; U.S. government revenue jumped 53 %, and the Army deal looms large. The company sits at the center of data fusion and battlefield decision-making infrastructure.

Then there's Anduril Industries, the Silicon Valley-spawned defense upstart. In February 2025, it took over Microsoft's $22 billion IVAS (Integrated Visual Augmentation System) contract, overseeing hardware and software development of augmented-reality headsets for infantry. In March, Anduril won a $642 million anti-drone contract with the U.S. Marine Corps for base protection systems that include its Anvil drone and Pulsar electronic-warfare tools. Its autonomous systems extend underwater: Ghost Shark submarines and Copperhead loitering torpedo-drones are already being developed for the U.S. and allied navies.

Meanwhile, the Pentagon is buying not just hardware but AI workflows. Four commercial AI firms—OpenAI, xAI, Google, and Anthropic—each received up to $200 million contracts to develop "agentic AI workflows" applicable across warfighting, intelligence, logistics, and enterprise systems. OpenAI's pilot program alone promises unprecedented integration into national security workflows.

Defense-oriented startups also proliferate. Shield AI, founded by ex-Navy personnel, built its Nova reconnaissance drone under a Defense Innovation Unit contract and continues to expand with Air Force and international operations—most recently opening an office in Kyiv.

DARPA itself remains a laboratory for the future of autonomous control. Recent AI tests include an F-16 engaging in mock dogfights and a Black Hawk helicopter piloted by AI. DARPA's AI-Cyber Challenge produced autonomous bug-patching tools critical for cybersecurity infrastructure — backed by over $21 million in further funding.

These players—Palantir, Anduril, OpenAI, xAI, Anthropic, Shield AI—are interconnected by a single logic: intelligence is the new battlefield.

The rhetorical apparatus is already in place. The public hears that AI is evolving beyond comprehension, that it may prioritize its preservation, that competitors like China and various other ill-defined "adversaries" are on the verge of surpassing us. The solution, predictably, is immediate massive investment in tech solutions.

These systems of course generate their own justification. Palantir's integration ensures its tools become essential to defense pipelines. Anduril's systems weave surveillance into physical, digital, and even maritime environments. AI firms justify new contracts with pilot programs and statements of "institutional learning." Failures — bugs, leaks, abuses — are problems demanding additional R&D investment, not less. Critics and skeptics risk being branded naïve, anti-security, or worse if they persist.

The nature of warfare has shifted: It's now about modeling behavior, anticipating intent, controlling movement — both physical and

informational. The hardware may look different: Drones rather than bombs; AR goggles rather than shells; algorithms rather than artillery. But the architecture — state-sanctioned funding, private capture, existential framing — of funneling oceans of public money to giant private interests remains intact. What changes is the target. The Military-Industrial Complex killed other people's people. The Intelligence Industrial Complex controls ours: Our movements, actions, choices, captured invisibly in the architecture of surveillance.

And, as always, it's sold as an absolute necessity. Survival demands it, we are told. We are also told that only the best and brightest can build it and that if we don't invest, and swiftly, we will lose *everything*.