Palantir

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Buried in the news this morning, and provoking far less attention than Sydney Sweeney’s jeans ad, is a report from Axios that the Trump administration’s Defense Department, led by the pride of Forest Lake, Minnesota Pete Hegseth, is combining 75 high-tech military/intelligence contracts into one. And that one contract, worth a tidy $10 billion will be invested entirely with Palantir, the rapidly mushrooming data/surveillance company in which prominent Trump supporter Peter Thiel is a major investor.

In case you’ve forgotten, German-born Peter Thiel was essentially the one-man Super PAC that put J.D. Vance first in the Senate and now in the Vice-President’s mansion. His multi-billion dollar fortune comes via early investments in PayPal and Facebook, with the genius move being pumping $5 billion-plus of his Facebook-derived equity into a Roth IRA and thereby avoiding billions in tax liabilities.

Thiel represents what I think of as The Real Deep State in modern American life.

Not the nitwit MAGA cult theory Deep State of Hillary Clinton and George Soros toasting each other with baby blood mimosas in the basements of pizza joints … without basements. No. Instead, with Trump’s consent, and the protections afforded by Project 2025, Thiel and his close pal Elon Musk and other tech masters of the universe have burrowed deep into the loam of American life, sucking up unknown but likely vast amounts of previously highly-secured private data worth billions-to-trillions if fed into the artificial intelligence systems they are rapidly building.

In other words, guys like Thiel are where the real action is in 2025 USA. They – not Trump or MAGA – are intensely focused on “what’s next”, which as I say, has nothing to do with Sydney Sweeney’s jeans, blue eyes or voter registration. And, most importantly, they have both the finances and political cover to steer us into their preferred version of the immediate future and profit from it in nearly unimaginable ways.

Not that very many of us are paying all that much attention to them today. I mean, come on! It’s summer and pretty soon we’re going to have the NFL back.

Two things recently got my dystopia-addicted brain churning anew.

One was an interview Thiel recently gave to Ross Douthat, The New York Times’ libertarian opinion columnist. Thiel rarely says much of interest in public, and after listening to the podcast and then reading the transcript it’s easy to understand why. He regards himself as a once-in-a-lifetime visionary, but with every fourth paragraph he comes off like the guy you look around in hopes of seeing an EMT crew rushing in with a straight jacket.

The second was the still-building response to a paper called “AI 2027” released last April.

Written by a handful of young-ish guys with AI pedigrees from the likes of Open AI and other places, the paper grabbed some attention in the spring among the usual AI-watchers and fanboys, but has since steadily accumulated both notoriety and respect among a much wider audience of people concerned about the looming arrival of artificial general intelligence (AGI) – i.e. the great quantum leap in computing when machine intelligence equals and exceeds our own.

As you might have guessed from the title, the authors of “AI 2027” see the arrival coming within roughly 18 months. But it's what they see happening in the following three to five years after that that has a buzz still building in both the tech and anthropology crowds.

There’s a very good BBC documentary on YouTube laying out their vision of “what’s next.” Spoiler alert: it isn't pretty. Especially after AGI programs running on tens of millions of computers all over the world begin “autocorrecting” for errors and impediments to their assigned tasks. (Go ahead, say, “Skynet.”)

You don’t need me to rant on at my usual length with apocalyptic scenarios of what Thomas Friedman calls, “the creation of a new species”, could mean for our lives here on this planet. But Peter Thiel’s interview with Douthat – who asks crisp, cogent questions (of a guy dripping with megalomaniacal propensities) - is well worth the time to read or listen to, if only as advisement on re-balancing your investment portfolio, if not prepping for an apocalypse.

Thiel and Musk and lesser known AI dudes (nearly all dudes, btw) like Demis Hassabis have a particular focus on individual human immortality, and it’s far beyond just technology that extends our/their lifetimes another 50 years. Thiel, who is obsessed with “stagnation” resulting from “wokeism”, has a fascination with the lack of progress curing dementia, getting to Biblical prophecies and gettring to Mars.

In the Douthat interview the money-moment is when he struggles to quickly answer the question of whether he hopes the human race should endure.

“ROSS DOUTHAT: But the world of AI is clearly filled with people who at the very least seem to have a more utopian, transformative, whatever word you want to call it, view of the technology than you’re expressing here, and you were mentioned earlier the idea that the modern world used to promise radical life extension and doesn’t anymore.

It seems very clear to me that a number of people deeply involved in artificial intelligence see it as a kind of mechanism for transhumanism, for transcendence of our mortal flesh and either some kind of creation of a successor species, or some kind of merger of mind and machine.

And do you think that’s just all kinds of irrelevant fantasy? Or do you think it’s just hype? Do you think people are trying to raise money by pretending that we’re going to build a machine? God. Right. Is it, is it hype? Is it delusion? Is it something you worry about? You. I think you, you would prefer the human race to endure. Right? You’re hesitating. Well, I, Yes.

PETER THIEL: I don’t know. I, I would, I would.

ROSS DOUTHAT: This is a long hesitation.

PETER THIEL: There’s so many questions and pushes.

ROSS DOUTHAT: Should the human race survive?

PETER THIEL: Yes.

ROSS DOUTHAT: Okay.”

Again, I don’t want to belabor this right here and now. A bit like climate change, the thought of the race into AI is disspiriting. It seems far beyond the control of any of us … not invested in Palantir. But the head-long rush into an AI “utopia” is something worth paying serious attention to. It won’t all be miracle drugs and nuclear fusion. Downsides are inevitable.

And let’s not forget who’s running the public show right now. The crew “managing” the bizarre dreams of real Deep State billionaire guys like Peter Thiel are the same C- grifters, cosplayers and toadies firing actual experts and scientists by the hundreds, day after day after d