

Australia: Greasing the Revolving Door: Palantir Recruits Down Under

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Region: [Oceania](#)

Theme: [History](#)

When [he announced](#) at the end of April that he would be retiring, thereby vacating the federal seat of Eden-Monaro, the Australian Labor Party's Mike Kelly (image below) welled up. He noted persistent "health issues" from his time in the service of the Australian Defence Forces, including a worsening osteoarthritic situation and deteriorating renal condition. He had endured some ten invasive surgeries in recent times. He spoke, implausibly, of having made no enemies in politics. He had "stared into the face of true evil, whether it was genocidal warlords in Somalia, or murdering militia in Timor, or war criminals in Bosnia, or staring into Saddam Hussein's face and the dirty-dozen, so called, in Iraq."

Labor leader Anthony Albanese [was full of lapping praise](#). "Mike Kelly is an extraordinary Australian, and he has brought a great deal of dignity, talent, capacity and commitment to this Parliament." His labours "on defence and national security issues" in Parliament had been "second to none".

Then came the revolving military door, where evil dons a different visage for its recruits. "I have been fortunate," Kelly [revealed](#) even before the dust had settled, "to be able to take up a job offer with Palantir Technologies Australia that will enable me to work within my physical limitations but still be in a position to make a difference in relation to the issues that matter to me." Good of the Silicon Valley-based Palantir: generous to an ailing man; considerate of his limits but happy to stroke the ego.

To work with the data mining security outfit Palantir Technologies can hardly be regarded as ethically elevating, certainly for a former member of parliament who had supposedly spent time gazing at faces evil and malevolent. But then again, his gaze must lack a certain resistance, bewitched as he is by this "amazing organisation" staffed by "some of the finest talent and quality personnel in the world."



In recent times Kelly has given Palantir some free parliamentary advertising. In 2018, [he told](#) his fellow members that, “Companies like Palantir ... effectively vectored Osama Bin Laden’s location so these are companies and capabilities that we need to work with.” The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security [was also informed](#) by Kelly of the Palantir’s “massive \$US12 billion international effort on security issues.”

The company oozes of the slime that is the military-industrial complex, and counts the Central Intelligence Agency as an exclusive customer, though its client list has ballooned to include other government agencies, hedge funds and big pharma. In 2003, it got off the ground with US information analysts, among them Peter Thiel, champing at the bit to use data mining tools developed for Paypal.

Since then, the entity has developed search tools have given it pride of place in the security environment, earning it a credible fourth place in the [“evil list”](#) of technology companies compiled by *Slate*. Its software [has found its way](#) into the operations of the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) and the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC). But in addition to encouraging bouts of faux patriotic heroics (Kelly notes the company’s role “in over 30 countries in the fight against COVID-19”), it has also veered into disdainfully murky territory. The same company, for instance, linked arms with Berico Technologies and HBGary Federal in 2011 to target WikiLeaks and smear the credibility of journalist Glenn Greenwald. The plan was [revealed in emails](#) obtained by the hacker group Anonymous, which managed to penetrate the servers of HBGary to unearth the nasty proposal to wage a campaign of misinformation against WikiLeaks and its supporters.

At the time, Palantir chief-executive Alex Carp, in a statement, was all contrite in severing ties with HBGary. With his hands firmly in the cookie jar, Carp [claimed](#) that his company “does not build software that is designed to allow private sector entities to obtain non-public information, engage in so called ‘cyber-attacks’ or take other offensive measures.” He also apologised specifically to Greenwald “for any involvement that we may have had in these matters.”

Carp and his company have since busied themselves with such humane endeavours as

finding, in his words in a [CNBC interview](#), “people in our country who are undocumented.” Over the years, Palantir’s role in aiding US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)’s deportation efforts has been skirted over. Its public relations arm [has insisted](#) that only Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) within ICE is of interest to them, rather than Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO). This is a distinction with bare difference, given that ERO [avails itself of Palantir’s technology](#) in conducting its deportation operations.

Kelly’s decision has caused a flutter of interest in various media stables, from [Crikey](#) to Sky News. Despite being at different ends of the journalist’s spectrum, they are in broad agreement that the decision to join Palantir reeks. Chris Kenny, an anchor for Sky, [picked up](#) on the sick card played by Kelly and was far from impressed. “Remember it’s less than two weeks since former Labor frontbencher Mike Kelly resigned from his seat saying he was too sick to serve out the term.” Not to be deterred, he confirmed with some swiftness that he had “already taken up a new job”, one with “a major US technology firm that does a lot of defence work.” Such behaviour demonstrated, in Kenny’s eyes, that the member was “apparently ... not up to serving out another two years in parliament, but he is up to lobbying for a US tech giant.”

Kelly is yet another addition to the military-industrial complex that snaps up public servants and representatives at will. In February 2020, Australia’s former domestic intelligence spy chief, Duncan Lewis, [was appointed](#) to the board of the world’s tenth largest weapons making concern, Thales. He had waited a mere five months. At the time, [few pundits deemed it problematic](#) that a man privy to a nation’s secrets would take up a post with a French company which, admittedly, has a 35 percent share of Naval Group, the lead contractor of Australia’s bloated Future Submarines project.

A stint in public service, it seems, is merely a prelude for moneyed rewards in the security sector, where conflicts of interest cease to be relevant, and lobbies run riot. Accountability is not so much diminished and ditched along the way. Companies operating in this realm know that securing a notable ex-politician or civil servant will grease the wheels and lead to deals. The gullible citizenry are left none the wiser.

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