

STATE-MEDIATED SLAVERY

THE GATING OF VITAL FUNCTIONS IN THE LEIFELD

The Digital Onopticon, Conceptual Arbitrage and Power Asymmetry across the War-Peace Continuum

Hakkı Tan

ORCID 0009-0008-8582-3132

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“The regime is not digital in essence. Digitalisation intensifies its speed, scale and opacity.”

Thesis and scope. State-mediated slavery is not a regime specific to digital technology. It arises when the vital conditions of social existence within the lifeworld are made contingent upon legal, administrative, economic, spatial or technical gates; when the subject's status is constituted by external institutions; when neither an effective appeal capable of suspending the outcome nor a materially viable alternative decision track is available; and when the resulting decisions are enforced through the state's legal, administrative or physical coercive capacities. The digital Onopticon did not create this structure. It renders it simultaneous, cross-domain, population-scale, rapidly feedback-driven and capable of dispersing responsibility. Digitalisation, the gating of vital conditions and state-mediated slavery must therefore be distinguished. A regime judgement is warranted only when all seven thresholds are documented within the same unit of analysis.

Abstract

This article does not equate state-mediated slavery with digital slavery. State-mediated slavery is a regime type grounded not in any particular technology but in the subjection of the vital conditions of social existence within the lifeworld to external institutional gates. Law, registries, debt, labour regimes, spatial confinement, citizenship, welfare and security arrangements can establish such gating without digital technology. The historical specificity of the digital Onopticon lies in its capacity to make the same structure simultaneous, cross-domain, population-scale and near-real-time, while centralising decision-making capacity and dispersing responsibility among technical and institutional components. The operative sequence is: *lived condition* -> *record or status assignment* -> *category* -> *gate* -> *material consequence*. Where there is no gate, there may be integration, but there is no regime.

A regime judgement depends on the conjunction of seven conditions within a single unit of analysis: unavoidable attachment; integrated status or ontology production; material feedback; the absence or ineffectiveness of timely, suspensive appeal; the absence of a viable alternative decision track; state-mediated enforcement; and continuity at population scale. These thresholds are generalised beyond digital systems to legal, economic, administrative and spatial regimes of gating. Digital intensity is assessed separately through simultaneity, correlation cost, enforcement speed and the visibility of accountable agency.

The theoretical framework is extended through three concepts. **The institutionalisation of asymmetry** describes the accumulation of economic gain, information and action capacity at the pole of power, while employment and life uncertainty, precarity, income loss, adaptation burdens and the costs of error are displaced onto the subject. **The evaporation of the responsible agent** does not mean that decisions become actorless; it refers to the fragmentation of legal and moral responsibility across models, vendors, institutions, managers and regulations even as causal power becomes more centralised. **Conceptual arbitrage** describes the retention of the moral prestige of concepts such as freedom, security, democracy, peace, the sacred, tradition, nation, progress and efficiency, while their operational meanings are recalibrated to serve the accumulation of institutional capacity. Modern power may thereby prioritise the management of problems over their resolution: war accumulates exceptional capacities, while peace embeds those capacities in ordinary administration.

Empirically, the article examines Palantir's operational and ideological self-descriptions as the most visible occupant of the integrator position; the consolidation of United States federal contracts; the ICE-Palantir ICM/ImmigrationOS enforcement stack; non-video evidence of Maven's deployment and institutionalisation; NATO's acquisition of MSS NATO; the Ankara Declaration's commitment to a war cloud; European efforts at substitution and refusal; the Windrush and Aadhaar mechanism cases; and the NHS and X-Road counter-cases. The acquisition of MSS NATO and the war-cloud commitment are not treated as a single procurement architecture. On the available public evidence, ICM/ImmigrationOS is classified as a high-risk candidate configuration approaching the regime threshold, not as a conclusive instance of the regime.

The conclusion is conditional. The article does not claim that state-mediated slavery has been completed everywhere. It argues that the architecture enabling it is being strengthened through the gating of vital functions, distributive asymmetry, conceptual arbitrage and the evaporation of accountable agency. Digitalisation is not the essence of the regime but its contemporary intensifier; the regime exists only where all seven thresholds close within the same case.

Keywords: state-mediated slavery; gating of vital functions; lifeworld; Onopticon; digital Onopticon; conceptual arbitrage; evaporation of the responsible agent; power asymmetry; algorithmic management; Palantir; NATO; ImmigrationOS; sovereignty; technological due process.

1. Introduction: Why Have Concepts Become Nouns and Capacity a Verb?

Contemporary official documents have not abandoned freedom, democracy, prosperity, peace or sovereignty. What has changed is their grammatical and political function. Values remain nouns to be protected, while the verbs that determine action increasingly concern defence expenditure, production, targeting, preparedness, resilience, competition, efficiency and technological superiority. This is not merely a rhetorical shift. Modern power can preserve the moral prestige of the concepts that ought to constrain it while altering their operational content to meet its own requirements for capacity. This article calls that mechanism **conceptual arbitrage**.

In conceptual arbitrage, power does not reject the concept; it appropriates the legitimacy the concept yields. Freedom may be translated from autonomy in relation to power into a choice among options within a system; security, from freedom from fear into the treatment of a population as risk; democracy, from the people's capacity to decide into the procedurally correct ratification of pre-narrowed alternatives; peace, from the ending of violence into manageable stability; tradition, from social memory into obedience; and the sacred, from an ethical limit into a demand for sacrifice. The apparently opposed resources of the sacred, the traditional and the modern can thus be assembled within the same circuit of power.

This mechanism is connected to the capacity of modern power to prioritise the management of problems over their resolution. A security apparatus need not eliminate every danger. It is sufficient to keep danger measurable, budgetable, classifiable and capable of generating a continuing rationale for intervention. The persistence of the problem sustains the institution, expertise, budget and exceptional authority attached to it. Power can therefore convert both war and peace into gains in capacity: war facilitates secrecy, mobilisation, technological acceleration and the postponement of objection; peace facilitates the insertion into ordinary administration of the data, logistics, surveillance, classification and command infrastructures built in wartime. War concentrates capacity; peace normalises it.

NATO's Ankara Summit Declaration of 8 July 2026 provides a contemporary point of entry into this transformation. The declaration commits the Alliance to investment in deep precision strike, integrated air and missile defence, uncrewed systems and intelligence capabilities; to the development of an interoperable transatlantic war cloud; and to the adoption of powerful artificial-intelligence models. It also records a commitment of EUR70 billion in military support for Ukraine in 2026 (NATO, 2026). The body issuing the declaration was not a council of defence ministers but the heads of state and government of all 32 member states. The war-cloud and AI commitments therefore become not merely technical procurement matters, but political directions endorsed at the highest level of constitutional representation.

This article does not, however, equate state-mediated slavery with digitalisation or with NATO. The concept developed here cannot be reduced to a particular technology, corporation or alliance. The historical possibility of state-mediated slavery existed before digital technology through law, debt, registries, internal passports, compulsory labour, spatial confinement, citizenship and welfare regimes. The difference introduced by contemporary digital infrastructure is that it makes the gating of vital conditions cheaper, simultaneous, cross-domain and population-scale, while centralising decision-making capacity and rendering the agent and responsibility behind decisions less visible.

Nor does the argument presuppose a single, secret and perfectly coordinated global plan. Power is treated here as a **functional sequence** closing across security bureaucracies, state agencies, alliances, technology companies, financing arrangements, labour regimes, data standards, legal exceptions and conceptual legitimations. Common intention need not be proven. It is sufficient to show the alignment of institutional incentives; the concentration of gain and action capacity at one pole and of uncertainty and life risk at the other; the external constitution of status; and the enforcement of outcomes through state power.

The article makes five contributions. First, it defines state-mediated slavery as a technology-transcending regime type rather than a condition specific to digital systems. Secondly, it distinguishes the Onopticon from the digital Onopticon: the former is an architecture of pre-recognition and feedback, whereas the latter is its contemporary intensification. Thirdly, it connects the gating of vital functions to a falsifiable seven-threshold test. Fourthly, it theorises the distribution of gain and risk, together with the evaporation of the responsible agent, as the economic and accountability dimensions of the regime. Fifthly, it shows how conceptual arbitrage can mobilise the sacred, tradition and modern values within the same accumulation of capacity across the war-peace continuum.

2. Conceptual Framework: State-Mediated Slavery, the Onopticon and the Lifeworld

2.1. The Onopticon, the Digital Onopticon and the Regime Threshold

The Onopticon is neither a generic synonym for surveillance nor a concept confined to digital technology. It is an architecture of power that establishes a field of recognition before the subject approaches the institution; links records or status assignments; produces categories of risk, eligibility, entitlement, target or deviance; and feeds those categories back into the subject's movement and material environment. Pre-digital mechanisms such as registries, passports, debt records, caste, citizenship, work permits and welfare conditions can also perform Onoptic functions.

The **digital Onopticon** is the form this architecture takes when records become machine-readable; entities and relations are organised within common ontologies; cross-domain correlation becomes routine; categories are produced at population scale; and results are fed back in or near real time. It is therefore not the entirety of the Onopticon but its contemporary intensification through speed, scale, connectivity and reduced correlation cost.

A regime judgement does not follow from visibility alone. Three distinctions are constitutive: **not layers but composition; not visibility but feedback; not integration but closure without effective contestation**. A system becomes

Onoptic when categories do not merely describe subjects but alter the field in which they can move, work, obtain income, access services, cross borders or assert rights.

2.2. The Lifeworld as Given Atmosphere and a Technology-Transcending Definition of the Regime

The concept of a 'given atmosphere' is anchored in the phenomenological notion of the **lifeworld** (*Lebenswelt*). For Husserl, the lifeworld is the pre-theoretical world of taken-for-granted meaning within which the subject lives in the natural attitude (Husserl, 1936/1970). Habermas carries this concept into social theory through the distinction between system and lifeworld, describing the intrusion of media such as money and administrative power into domains that must be communicatively reproduced as the colonisation of the lifeworld (Habermas, 1981/1987).

State-mediated slavery adds a third dimension to this line of thought, but only within strict limits. Data ontology is best treated as a new systemic infrastructure of direction that renders the operations of money and administrative power simultaneous, cross-domain and feedback-driven. Whether it constitutes a third steering medium in the specifically Habermasian sense - with its own binary code, forms of substituting for communicative agreement and capacity for generalisation across fields - remains an open hypothesis for further research. What can be established more firmly is that the colonisation of the lifeworld can now proceed not only through commodification and bureaucratisation, but through the transfer of conditions of encounter - recognition, movement, access and contestation - into machine-processable systems of classification.

The regime itself, however, is not digital by definition. Law, debt, property, registries, wage dependency, citizenship, spatial closure, welfare conditionality and security institutions can gate vital functions without machine learning or common data ontologies. Digital systems change the speed, cost, scale, persistence and opacity of the process; they do not create the underlying relation of domination.

Definition of state-mediated slavery. A regime in which the vital conditions required for a person to exist socially within the lifeworld are made contingent upon legal, administrative, economic, spatial or technical gates; the subject's status is constituted elsewhere; no effective appeal can suspend the outcome in time; no materially viable alternative decision track is available; and the resulting consequences are enforceable through the state's legal, administrative or physical coercive capacities. The concept does not claim legal identity with historical chattel slavery. It identifies a sociological regime type whose presence must be demonstrated through the seven thresholds specified in Section 10.

The adjective 'state-mediated' does not designate the state as the sole master. It identifies the state as the producer of data and status, the provider of legitimacy, the carrier of enforcement and, in some configurations, a node that is itself exposed to higher-order infrastructural power.

2.3. Habitat and the Conditions of Life

The 'transfer' of the lifeworld into a digital atmosphere does not mean that the lifeworld is moved from one place to another as though it were a bounded object, dataset or physical location. Such a reading misconstrues the argument. The lifeworld is the immediate world of experience that precedes systematic objectification. Precisely for that reason, it is not intrinsically calculable, exhaustively definable or indefinitely scalable. The issue is not the movement of a naturally portable world, but the subjection of the conditions of its habitability to another operational order so that they can be controlled.

The distinction may be clarified through the example of the whale. A whale is a marine mammal, but it does not breathe seawater. It must surface regularly to breathe atmospheric air. The sea is its habitat, while access to atmospheric oxygen is a necessary condition of life within that habitat. If access to the atmosphere is cut off, the whale cannot survive even while remaining in its natural habitat. The sole purpose of the analogy is to fix one distinction: a habitat is not identical to the necessary conditions that make life within it possible. One need not abolish or physically relocate a habitat in order to dominate a being. It may be sufficient to take control of the functions on which life within that habitat depends.

The transfer of the human habitat must be understood in this sense. Human beings are not physically removed from the lifeworld. They continue to move, form relationships, work, fall ill, love and die in embodied social reality. Yet the conditions under which that life is socially recognised and allowed to produce consequences are increasingly attached to other layers: the validity of identity to verification systems; economic activity to payment networks; communication to connectivity infrastructures; healthcare to processable records; spatial movement to location, permission and security systems; public rights to administrative databases; and freedom from suspicion to classification systems the subject cannot see.

The relevant distinction is between natural and produced dependency. A whale's dependency is biological and evolutionary. Human dependency on digital identity, payment systems, centralised health records or common decision ontologies is produced through technical, administrative, economic and legal decisions. A system may begin by offering convenience, then weaken alternatives and eventually make attachment a precondition of social existence. The politically decisive step is the placement of a decision gate before the vital condition.

2.4. The Gating of Vital Functions

A whale's access to air is not ordinarily contingent upon institutional recognition or permission. It need not prove its identity, enter a risk category or receive authorisation in order to breathe. Dependence on a vital condition is therefore not, by itself, domination. Domination begins when a gate is placed before the condition and control over that gate is held by a decision-maker whom the subject cannot effectively scrutinise.

Gating of vital functions. The attachment of access to socially vital functions - identity, employment, income, housing, health, movement, communication or the exercise of rights - to prior decisions made through classifications, status assignments or verification systems that the subject cannot effectively control. The operative sequence is: *lived condition* -> *record or status assignment* -> *category* -> *gate* -> *material consequence*. Where there is no gate, there may be coordination or integration, but the Onopticon has not yet formed.

This definition permits a clear distinction among three levels:

- **Digitalisation** makes functions machine-processable. It may have political consequences, but it is not sufficient for a regime judgement.
- **The transfer or gating of vital conditions** makes the social validity of a function contingent upon an external institutional layer. It creates dependency but not necessarily the full regime.
- **State-mediated slavery** arises only when gated functions are combined with unavoidable attachment, externally constituted status, material feedback, ineffective or non-suspensive appeal, the absence of a viable alternative decision track, state-mediated enforcement and continuity at population scale.

Gatekeeping is not introduced here as a new idea. Rahman distinguishes infrastructural platform power in terms of transmission, gatekeeping and scoring, while Citron shows how automation can undermine conventional procedural protections and argues for transparency, accuracy and accountability to be built into technical systems (Rahman, 2018; Citron, 2008). The originality claimed here lies in the composition: the conjunction of gatekeeping over vital functions with cross-domain status production, material feedback, state enforcement and the absence of a viable outside, formalised as a separate, falsifiable regime type.

The governing principle for the empirical analysis follows directly: a system's production of aggregate benefits does not demonstrate the absence of gating. The relevant measure is not average efficiency but whether a person harmed by error can suspend the consequence, enter an alternative channel and continue a materially viable life.

2.5. The Regime of Validity: The Operational Passage of Institutional Recognition

A legal or digital ontology is not a copy of lived reality. It selects elements from that reality and translates them into statuses such as citizen, worker, patient, debtor, eligible person, risk, target or deviant. When the subject's actual condition diverges from the condition recognised by the institution, material consequences are often produced by the reality the institution can process. A person may be ill, yet be denied care if no appropriate category is produced. A person may lawfully be present in a country but be treated as absent or irregular if documentation does not establish that presence. A person may be capable of performing a job but lose income because an administrative or algorithmic category defines them as inadequate.

What is gated, then, is not the ontological existence of the lifeworld but **the priority of lived reality in the production of social and institutional validity**. A compulsory layer of translation is inserted between lived reality and consequential reality. The power of the institution or integrator lies not in abolishing the lifeworld but in becoming a compulsory passage in determining what is visible, valid and actionable.

For Searle, institutional facts are constituted through status functions of the form 'X counts as Y in context C', sustained by collective recognition, constitutive rules and authorised institutions (Searle, 1995). A digital ontology or administrative record does not create status on its own. It attaches the recognition, verification and enforcement of institutionally constituted status to processable representations. The integrator need not possess sovereignty over status assignment to occupy its operational passage. Even without making the final decision, it can shape the objects, relationships, risks and alternatives through which the institution sees the problem.

2.6. Structural Proximity to Social Death and the Justification for the Term 'Slavery'

Patterson analyses slavery as a structure combining enduring domination, natal alienation, generalised dishonour and social death (Patterson, 1982). State-mediated slavery is not identical to this historical definition. The loss of control over the production of validity does not reproduce all of Patterson's elements. It does, however, display a structural proximity to social death where a person continues to exist legally but loses an effective claim over the conditions under which their social existence is recognised and permitted to have consequences.

The term 'slavery' cannot be used merely to borrow moral force. It is warranted only when four composite conditions are documented together:

1. **Compulsory subjection:** attachment to the vital condition is unavoidable and no viable alternative decision track exists.

2. **Loss of claim over status:** what the subject counts as is constituted elsewhere, and appeal cannot suspend the result before it takes effect.
3. **Gating of vital conditions:** identity, labour, income, housing, health, movement or the exercise of rights is attached to an external gate.
4. **Material consequences enforceable by the state:** the category is not merely symbolic; it is implemented through law, administration or physical coercion.

Digital disadvantage, discrimination, exploitation, poverty or precarity alone do not constitute state-mediated slavery. Yet when these phenomena are combined under the four conditions above and the seven thresholds specified later, the subject begins to lose not only resources but also an effective claim over the conditions of the validity of social existence.

2.7. The Institutionalisation of Asymmetry and the Evaporation of the Responsible Agent

State-mediated slavery is not only a regime of status and access. It is also an asymmetric distribution of gains, uncertainties and capacities for action. Economic gains, ownership of data, decision speed, predictive capacity and institutional flexibility may become concentrated at the pole of power, while job loss, income uncertainty, retraining burdens, precarious employment, risks to housing and nutrition, the costs of error and continuous adaptation are displaced onto the subject.

The distributive formula is:

Gains, information and capacity for action move upwards; uncertainty, adaptation burdens and risks to life move downwards.

Digitalisation did not create this asymmetry. Concentrated ownership, wage dependence, bureaucratic classification and precarious labour existed before digital technology. Its distinctive contribution is the capacity to reduce institutional uncertainty while increasing uncertainty for the subject, and to enlarge institutional action by measuring tasks, behaviour and risk continuously.

This process is completed by **the evaporation of the responsible agent**. The agent does not literally disappear. Decision-making power and causal capacity become more centralised while responsibility is fragmented across technical and institutional components. A model produces a score; a vendor claims merely to provide a tool; an institution states that it determined policy but not the individual outcome; a manager says that they followed a system recommendation; and the state says it applied the law. The consequence is entirely real, yet the subject may be unable to locate a single, accessible actor required to give reasons.

The evaporation of the responsible agent is not the disappearance of actors from decision-making. It is the concentration of action capacity alongside the dispersion of legal and moral responsibility. The subject experiences the consequence in full but cannot reach its author in full.

For this reason, accountability cannot be established merely by asking whether a human remains 'in the loop'. The relevant questions are which human can suspend the decision, under what authority, who owns the reasons, and who can be held liable for the harm.

2.8. Conceptual Arbitrage: Managing Rather than Resolving Problems

Modern power processes not only resources and infrastructures but the meanings of concepts. **Conceptual arbitrage** is the preservation of a concept's moral and historical prestige while its operational meaning is altered to meet the requirements of power. Power does not reject freedom, security, peace, democracy, tradition or the sacred; it translates them into the language of capacity accumulation.

From the sacred it may draw sacrifice, absolute purpose and inviolability; from tradition, loyalty, duty, family, nation and continuity; and from modernity, progress, science, security, efficiency, democracy and freedom. Although theoretically divergent, these elements may be combined within the same practice of government. War can be legitimised through sacred sacrifice, traditional loyalty and modern technological necessity; peace through growth, resilience, efficiency and stability.

In Foucault's analysis of security, government does not necessarily prohibit and eliminate every danger; it regulates circulations, probabilities and acceptable costs. In Beck's account of risk society, modernity converts dangers of its own production into new objects of management. On this view, the success of power may lie less in definitively resolving problems than in converting them into continuing sources of data, budgets, expertise and intervention.

War and peace are not always absolute gains for power, but power possesses the structural capacity to turn both into accumulation. War generates exceptional budgets, secrecy, mobilisation and speed. Peace can transfer capacities built for war into policing, workplaces, borders, health and ordinary administration. The problem does not disappear; it changes form and enlarges the domain of government.

Digital systems do not create conceptual arbitrage; they make it executable. 'Risky', 'eligible', 'reliable', 'efficient', 'resilient' or 'threatening' cease to be merely discursive descriptions and become data fields, scores, thresholds, access

rules and material consequences. The actor who defines the concept increasingly shapes the gate through which action becomes possible.

2.9. Mechanism Cases: Windrush and Aadhaar

The gap between lived and institutionally recognised conditions is not hypothetical. It has documented cases, neither of which involved the paradigmatic integrator examined later. This supports the claim that the theory concerns a position rather than one corporation.

Windrush is a pre-digital negative historical control. Commonwealth citizens who had lived lawfully in the United Kingdom for decades lost employment, housing, healthcare and banking access and faced detention or removal because records capable of proving their status were absent, and in some cases had been destroyed by the administration itself (Williams, 2020). A life that existed in fact was treated as institutionally non-existent because the record could not produce it.

Dimension	Windrush: pre-digital layer	Digital Onopticon
Relationship to records	Missing records are destructive	Continuous recording may become constitutive
Verification	Intermittent, human-mediated	Automated or semi-automated, simultaneous
Cross-domain transfer	Slow and costly	Low marginal cost through shared ontologies
Tempo of enforcement	Relatively slow and mediated	Near-real-time feedback
Form of error	Administrative error	Scalable category error
Visibility of responsibility	Agency and official more traceable	Responsibility can disperse across model, vendor and institution

Aadhaar is an intensive digital mechanism case. Research indicates that biometric verification has reduced leakage and corruption in some settings, while also excluding eligible recipients and raising transaction costs, particularly in Jharkhand. Cases have been reported in which failures of biometric matching and the interruption of welfare access were associated with deaths from hunger (Drèze et al., 2017; Khera, 2019). Digital identity can simultaneously produce recognition, service access, surveillance and exclusion (Weitzberg et al., 2021).

This duality does not contradict the theory. The production of aggregate benefit does not negate gating. The decisive questions are whether a person who fails to match or is misclassified can suspend the result, reach an alternative channel and sustain material life on that day.

The layer of translation is not new. Seals, registers, title deeds, passports and work documents also produced validity. What is historically distinctive about the digital form is its simultaneity, low correlation cost, speed of enforcement and capacity to reduce the visibility of the responsible actor. The pre-digital layer was often slower, local, forgetful and evadable; the digital Onopticon can operate continuously, across domains, at population scale and in or near real time.

Transfer does not mean moving the lifeworld as an object. It means attaching the conditions of life within the lifeworld to external institutional gates. Digitalisation does not create those gates; it can make them faster, more integrated and less accountable.

3. Method, Rules of Evidence and Falsifiability

The study separates a technology-transcending regime definition from an analysis of digital intensity. The first level tests the seven thresholds of state-mediated slavery independently of whether the relevant instruments are legal, administrative, economic, spatial or technical. The second assesses the intensity of the contemporary digital form through the simultaneity of records, cross-domain correlation, enforcement speed and the visibility of accountable agency. This makes it possible to investigate the regime in the absence of digital technology and, where digitalisation is present, to specify how far it accelerates closure and disperses responsibility.

Primary institutional documents are prioritised: legislation and judicial decisions; procurement and contract records; documents issued by NATO, NCIA, the United States Army, DHS/ICE and the NHS; Palantir's SEC filings and published manifesto; parliamentary records; and independent audit reports. These are followed by peer-reviewed research and high-reliability journalism. Institutional self-description is treated as **asymmetric evidence**: it is strong evidence for capacities, purposes and functions that an institution explicitly acknowledges, but not for the absence of flows or functions it does not disclose. A manifesto documents not what a company necessarily does in practice but how it positions itself, how it uses concepts and what it regards as legitimate.

Evidence is classified into four statuses:

5. **Documented fact**: an event, contract, capacity or use verified through primary evidence or mutually independent reliable sources.
6. **Strong inference**: a conclusion most plausibly supported by documented facts but not directly recorded.

7. **Risk scenario:** an outcome that the existing architecture could produce under specified conditions, with indicators defined in advance.
8. **Unverified hypothesis:** a theoretically possible claim that cannot be advanced on the available public record.

Conceptual arbitrage is analysed through a three-stage protocol rather than as free-standing discourse analysis: the normative meaning of the concept; its operational redefinition in institutional texts; and the connection of that redefinition to a budget, category, threshold or enforcement decision. The evaporation of the responsible agent is likewise mapped rather than merely asserted: the decision-and-responsibility chain is traced across data provider, model owner, vendor, institution, manager, human reviewer and enforcing state. The fact that no single actor makes the final decision alone does not eliminate causal or legal responsibility.

The principal thesis would be weakened if any of the following patterns were established systematically: high compositional integration and rapid feedback operating over time together with category visibility and suspensive appeal; economic and operational gains being shared with subjects while risks and error costs are returned to institutions; a clear and sanctionable chain of responsibility; replacement of the integrator permanently interrupting the closed functional sequence rather than merely changing the vendor; the same accumulation of capacity remaining sustainable without conceptual legitimation; common ontologies having no measurable effect on the decision horizon; or identical outcomes emerging without the state occupying a carrier role.

Falsifiability is therefore two-directional. Negative cases show why digitalisation or integration does not amount to the regime. Counter-cases show how its conditions can be interrupted through law, procurement design, human oversight, collective bargaining, transparency and alternative decision tracks. The NHS, X-Road, the German Federal Constitutional Court, the ChapsVision transition, the Bundeswehr's refusal and labour-law requirements for human review are used for this purpose.

4. From the Given World to the Defined World: What Does Digitalisation Change?

The given world was not without power. Land registers, caste and citizenship orders, colonial records, internal passports, debt, property and wage regimes could determine what people counted as, where they might live and which resources they could access without digital technology. The argument is not that people were previously free. It is that the cost, speed, scale and accountability structure of gating vital conditions have changed qualitatively in the digital age.

The difference between the given world and the contemporary defined world is specified through four measurable variables:

9. **Record simultaneity:** the record ceases to be a trace produced after an event and becomes a condition of the event's occurrence.
10. **Correlation cost:** linking status and conduct across different domains to the same person becomes routine.
11. **Enforcement delay:** the interval between category production and material consequence contracts.
12. **Visibility of the responsible agent:** the decision chain is distributed across model, vendor, institution, manager and regulation, making responsibility harder to locate.

A digital network does not merely transmit data about reality. It senses, processes in a common language, correlates and alters reality through actuators, workflows and institutional decisions (NIST, 2016; 2020). None of these properties alone constitutes state-mediated slavery. Digital transition may reduce the cost of a transaction, accelerate a service and lower error rates. The regime question concerns the distribution through which those benefits are produced and the rights available to a subject when error occurs.

For power, the principal benefit of digitalisation is not efficiency alone. An institution can reduce its own uncertainty, predict a population in finer detail and decide more quickly, while the subject's employment, income, housing and status become less predictable. Institutional flexibility may take the form of individual precarity. Gains can be institutionalised while risks are individualised.

The military-academic origins of networked computing were not a programme of social enslavement; the historical evidence lies not in original intention but in the functional sequence constructed today (DARPA, 2026). Nor is every digital innovation a project of domination. Yet when vital functions become unsustainable outside the network, alternative channels close and status production becomes opaque, voluntary use can become infrastructural compulsion. A physical outside may remain while a socially viable outside contracts.

Digitalisation is therefore not the source of state-mediated slavery. It is a contemporary intensifier that lowers the cost of closure. The existence of the regime is tested through the seven thresholds; its digital intensity through the four variables above.

5. The Integrator's Manifesto: Palantir in Its Own Words

5.1. Two Layers of Self-Description

Two forms of primary self-description are available for Palantir and must be read together.

The **operational self-description** is contained in the company's S-1 filing (2020). Palantir states that its clients require platforms through which to 'model the world and make decisions'; that Gotham and Foundry cover the data lifecycle from raw information to the highest levels of institutional decision-making; that decisions are written back into the software to create operational feedback loops; and that Gotham facilitates movement from analyst to operator and the planning and execution of responses in the real world (Palantir Technologies, 2020). This is the Onopticon's functional sequence - access, translation, correlation, decision and feedback - expressed in the company's own business-model language.

The **ideological self-description** is found in Karp and Zamiska's *The Technological Republic: Hard Power, Soft Belief, and the Future of the West* (2025) and in the 22-point manifesto published through Palantir's corporate account in April 2026 as a condensed statement of the book's argument (Karp & Zamiska, 2025; Palantir Technologies, 2026; Fortune, 2026).

5.2. Content Analysis of the Manifesto

On the public record, the manifesto's main propositions can be grouped as follows (Fortune, 2026; Futurism, 2026; EU Perspectives, 2026):

13. **Moral debt and mobilisation.** Silicon Valley is said to owe a moral debt to the country that enabled its rise, and engineering elites are presented as obliged to participate in national defence. This provides an ideological rationale for Detachment 201, through which technology executives were commissioned as lieutenant colonels: the circulation of personnel is treated not as an anomaly but as a programme.
14. **The movement of deterrence into epistemic infrastructure.** The atomic age is described as exhausted and future deterrence as dependent upon artificial intelligence, with hard power in this century to be built through software. The proposition corroborates, in the company's own language, the article's argument concerning the privatisation of the eye, memory and decision horizon of organised violence.
15. **The delegitimation of objection.** Adversaries are said not to engage in 'theatrical debates' about AI weapons, and technology firms are urged not to capitulate to employee protest or public ethical objection. Google's 2018 withdrawal from Maven after employee pressure is coded as a weakness to be avoided. Within the present framework, this is the ideological legitimisation of the fourth threshold: objection is treated not as a constitutive element of the decision circuit but as noise to be removed from it.
16. **Rejection of pluralism and cultural hierarchy.** The text calls for resistance to an allegedly empty or exhausted pluralism and implies a hierarchy in which some cultures are superior and others mediocre or harmful (Fortune, 2026). When a company involved in constructing operational ontologies repudiates pluralism at an ideological level, the matter is not technically irrelevant: an actor participating in the production of categories through which relations become threats and lives become risks devalues plurality in the categories themselves.
17. **A programme of rearmament.** The post-war demilitarisation of Germany is described as an overcorrection, and Japanese pacifism as having exceeded its purpose. Here the integrator moves beyond the position of vendor and articulates a political programme for the constitutional security identities of present and prospective client states.

To reduce selective interpretation, the themes carrying theoretical weight are coded systematically below. The table paraphrases the relevant points as reproduced in public accounts of the manifesto rather than quoting them directly. It also functions as a control on selectivity: themes not linked to the theory, including national service, institutional belief and industrial policy, are left visibly uncoded.

Manifesto theme (paraphrased)	Analytical code	Onopticon/threshold connection
Adversaries will not engage in 'theatrical debates' about AI weapons; firms should not yield to protest	Costing and delegitimation of objection	Threshold 4: ideological legitimisation of non-suspensive appeal
Silicon Valley owes the country a moral debt; engineering elites must support defence	Mobilisation of technical elites	State-corporate personnel circulation (Detachment 201)
Deterrence is moving from the atomic sphere to AI; hard power will be built through software	Weaponisation of epistemic infrastructure	Strategic centrality of the integrator position
Pluralism is empty or exhausted; cultures can be hierarchised	Ontological hierarchy	Principled rejection of categorical plurality
Germany and Japan should rearm	A programme for client states' security identities	Reversal of the vendor-sovereignty relationship

5.3. Conceptual Status of the Manifesto and Conceptual Arbitrage

Critics have described the text as 'techno-fascist', while the company has maintained that it makes tools rather than rules (EU Perspectives, 2026). The argument here differs from both positions and follows the evidential rule stated above. A manifesto does not demonstrate what a company does in every deployment. It does, however, document the world the company treats as normal and the concepts through which it legitimises that world.

The architecture of an AI system – which data are included, what produces an alert and what remains invisible – is itself a form of policy-making (American Immigration Council, 2025). The ideological self-description of the actor that constructs the representational field is therefore relevant evidence concerning the direction in which design ambiguities are likely to be resolved. The manifesto presents the integrator not as a neutral infrastructure supplier but as a mission partner in the construction of the West's operational reality.

This does not mean that the integrator defines the problem alone. The stronger and more defensible proposition is that it constructs the representational field through which institutions see objects, relationships, risks and operational alternatives. Its power lies not in formal sovereignty over the final decision but in the pre-decisional space of ontological possibility.

The manifesto also exemplifies conceptual arbitrage. 'Security' becomes accelerated weapons development; 'moral debt' becomes the mobilisation of engineering elites; 'national service' becomes the circulation of corporate personnel into military structures; and 'pluralism' becomes a weakness to be overcome. The prestige of public concepts is retained while their operational meanings are redirected towards the accumulation of hard power.

6. Mapping the State: NATO-Mediated and Bilateral Ties

This section maps state ties to the integrator across three rings: the core, comprising the United States federal system; the alliance level, comprising NATO and the war cloud; and the bilateral or indirect ring, comprising member and partner states. The map is based on public contract, procurement and reporting records. Under the evidential rule adopted here, disclosed capacity is a floor, not a ceiling.

6.1. The Core Ring: The United States Federal System

In the United States, the relationship is no longer a collection of isolated contracts but a process of institutional consolidation. In July 2025, the Army entered into an enterprise service agreement that consolidated 75 separate contracts and established a **maximum potential ceiling** of USD10 billion for purchases over ten years. The figure is neither committed expenditure nor a guaranteed payment (U.S. Army, 2025a). In the same period, the Maven contract ceiling was raised to approximately USD1.3 billion and the user base expanded beyond 20,000 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2024; 2025).

Within domestic security, ICE's Investigative Case Management platform, in use since 2014, was extended in 2025 through the ImmigrationOS development. The stated functions include target identification, acceleration of apprehension processes, visa-overstay and voluntary-departure tracking, removal logistics and 'near-real-time visibility' (U.S. ICE/SAM.gov, 2025; American Immigration Council, 2025; ACLU, 2026). An inter-agency agreement to share tax information with immigration enforcement was reported publicly and was followed by senior resignations (Associated Press, 2025). Litigation has also challenged the use of Medicaid information for enforcement purposes (ACLU, 2026).

The evidential distinction must be maintained throughout. The opening of tax and health data to immigration-enforcement agencies is documented. The technical pathways, frequency and decision points through which those data may be combined within the ICM/ImmigrationOS stack are not fully ascertainable from public records. Institutional access capacity is not identical to documented active data flow. That distinction governs the analysis even in one of the sharpest publicly documented instances of potential cross-domain composition.

The importance of the United States case lies in the strong public documentation of state-mediated coercive enforcement and of the declared category-to-consequence relationship. Cross-domain access capacity is also documented, although the active integration of all relevant flows remains only partially visible. The following pilot coding preserves that distinction.

6.1.1. Full Case Test: Pilot Coding of the ICE-Palantir ICM/ImmigrationOS Enforcement Stack against the Seven Thresholds

The case architecture contains three analytical levels and they must not be treated as completed parts of a single regime. The **ICM/ImmigrationOS enforcement stack** is the case closest to a regime test applied to an internally governed subject. Aadhaar (Section 2.9) is an intensive mechanism case of vital-function gating. MSS NATO (Section 6.2) is a different-level mechanism case concerning the standardisation of state decision infrastructure.

The unit of analysis is deliberately named as a stack. Public documents describe ImmigrationOS not as an independent product but as an extension to ICM, an infrastructure operating since 2014 (U.S. ICE/SAM.gov, 2025). There is strong evidence that the ICM ecosystem can access a broad range of federal and private data. That does not

establish that every data type is actively combined within ImmigrationOS for the same person. Coding is therefore conducted at the level of the stack - ICM legacy, ImmigrationOS development and the wider ICE data ecosystem - and the evidential layer is specified in each instance.

Two methodological rules govern the coding. First, the direction of the thresholds is standardised: 'satisfied' always means that a condition of regime formation is present. The fourth threshold is therefore coded as the **absence or ineffectiveness of timely, suspensive appeal**. Secondly, the thresholds are conjunctive and all seven are necessary. Their roles within the decision procedure are nevertheless asymmetric. Thresholds 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 are critical closure conditions capable of excluding a case at preliminary assessment. Thresholds 2 and 7 remain equally necessary to a final judgement but measure compositional depth and population scale. The necessity of the second threshold is constitutive: the Onopticon is based on composition rather than mere layering. A single-domain system without cross-domain composition may constitute domain-specific gating but not state-mediated slavery. Where any required threshold remains uncertain, no conclusive regime judgement can be made; the table is not a majority vote.

A data-absence protocol is also applied. 'Uncertain' means neither that the capacity is absent nor that secret capacity should be presumed. The principal target population consists of non-citizens, who are nevertheless internal subjects in the sense that they are continuously exposed to the administrative and coercive capacities of the state in which they live. Expansion of the scope to citizens is treated as a risk indicator, not as a documented fact.

Threshold	Public evidence	Assessment	Rationale
1. Unavoidable attachment	Recognition of immigration status for the target population is attached to a single federal enforcement system; records are generated independently of the subject's consent.	Strong support	Attachment is not a voluntary service relationship but unilateral addressability.
2. Integrated ontological inclusion	ICM access to immigration records, criminal histories, biometrics, vehicle registrations and address data is documented. Tax and health-data agreements have been reported (Associated Press, 2025; ACLU, 2026). Active combined flows within ImmigrationOS are not disclosed.	Strong for the ICM ecosystem; partial for active ImmigrationOS flows	Declared access capacity and documented active combination are not the same; asymmetric evidence applies.
3. Decision feedback	The declared function is enforcement rather than analysis alone: target prioritisation, apprehension support and removal logistics (U.S. ICE/SAM.gov, 2025). Individual decision logs are not public.	Strong at the level of declared function; partial at the level of operational case records	The category-consequence link is clear in contract language, but the category triggering each individual operation is not documented.
4. Absence or ineffectiveness of timely, suspensive appeal	Immigration adjudication provides legal avenues of appeal, but no documented right exists to inspect the stack's categories, scores and reasons; error rates and independent audit are undisclosed; the appeal-to-consequence ratio cannot be calculated.	Uncertain, with serious risk indicators	Available evidence suggests that contestation occurs after rather than before categorisation and consequence, but definitive documentary proof of absence remains unavailable.
5. Absence of a viable outside	The question is whether the subject can access an alternative decision track not based on the same data and closed classification logic, and one that guarantees independent human review, suspension before consequence, category visibility and protection against cross-domain propagation. Public evidence establishes neither its presence nor its absence. Leaving the country is not an outside; it is an intended enforcement outcome.	Not yet established conceptually or empirically	In state-monopoly functions, the outside must be measured as an alternative decision track rather than escape from the state function itself.
6. State-mediated enforcement and accountability	Enforcement is conducted by a federal agency under legal authority and backed by physical coercion. The integrator supplies technical infrastructure but does not hold formal sovereignty over the decision.	Strong support	The state-mediated element and the division of labour between company and state are documented.
7. Scale and continuity	The institutional lineage of ICM/ImmigrationOS exceeds a decade and involves population-scale addressability; ImmigrationOS itself remains a comparatively recent development.	Strong for the institutional lineage; early for ImmigrationOS alone	The carrier stack is durable, while the continuity of the new layer requires monitoring.

Methodological gain: the threefold refinement of the fifth threshold. Pilot coding required three successive corrections. First, in state-monopoly functions such as immigration enforcement, taxation and adjudication, asking whether the subject can exit the state function is circular: by definition, no such external version of the function exists. Secondly, defining the outside as a route that bypasses the same integrator is also insufficient. Replacing a vendor does not create an outside if the ontology remains equally opaque and enforcement equally immune to contestation; it merely changes the owner of the gate. Thirdly, the outside must therefore be defined in relation to the decision logic rather than the supplier.

The appropriate unit is the **alternative decision track**. Can the subject access a process not based on the same data and closed classification logic and equipped with independent human review, pre-consequence suspension, category visibility and protection against cross-domain propagation? These safeguards are derived from the architecture of openness developed in Section II. The deliberate overlap with the second threshold reflects the fact that an alternative track must also interrupt propagation. This three-stage refinement - viable outside, integrator bypass, decision-track alternative - is itself evidence that the framework can develop through case application rather than merely absorb every outcome.

Pilot judgement. The public record supports the classification of the ICE-Palantir ICM/ImmigrationOS enforcement stack as a **high-risk candidate configuration approaching the threshold of state-mediated slavery**. There is strong support for thresholds 1, 3 at the level of declared function, 6 and 7 at the level of institutional lineage. A conclusive regime judgement is nevertheless precluded by the conjunctive rule. Active cross-domain data flows remain insufficiently documented under threshold 2; the absence of timely suspensive appeal is not conclusively established under threshold 4; and the availability of an alternative decision track cannot yet be determined under threshold 5. More recent contract records indicate expansion of the pilot, but data sources, error rates and safeguards remain undisclosed (WIRED, 2026). A conclusive judgement would require FOIA disclosures, litigation findings and independent audit reports. The negative result of the NHS pilot and the high-risk-candidate result here demonstrate that the framework can produce graded distinctions rather than either condemning or acquitting every integrated system.

6.1.2. Maven's Operational Status without Reliance on Video Evidence

The operational status of Maven Smart System cannot be established through controlled videos released at corporate or institutional events. Such material shows, at most, the workflow the institution chooses to display. It does not demonstrate field use, reliability or causal contribution to a specific military outcome. The judgement must instead be constructed at the intersection of deployment, exercise, unit-use, training, contract and audit records.

The United States Department of Defense stated that Project Maven's first AI capabilities were delivered to a theatre of operations within six months of the programme's creation, and that real-world field data were fed back into model development (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019). This establishes that Maven did not remain an archived research programme; it does not establish accuracy or effectiveness.

The GAO recorded that Scarlet Dragon target-recognition capabilities using Project Maven data were exercised at ninety-day intervals in live-fire settings and, in October 2021, were tested across Army, Air Force and Navy platforms for the identification and engagement of targets (GAO, 2022). This is not evidence of a real combat operation, but it is evidence of practical integration into a targeting exercise.

A professional publication of the United States Army situates Maven Smart System within the command-and-control infrastructure used by XVIII Airborne Corps for planning, operations and fires. The same account identifies data-transfer delays, incompatibility across systems and manual stages in the workflow (Bartlett et al., 2025). The public record therefore supports operational integration but not a flawless, fully automated or uninterrupted sensor-to-weapon chain.

The Combined Arms Command programme to incorporate Maven into command-and-control training and professional military education shows movement from a temporary pilot towards institutional capability (U.S. Army, 2026). Contract records from 2024 and 2025 also document the expansion of Maven licences and capacity under long-term funding extending to 2029 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2024; 2025).

Public evidence of performance remains limited. A later GAO procurement review found that early Maven contracts lacked sufficiently explicit AI-specific requirements through which vendors could be held accountable and that later contracts had to add testing, performance and data-rights provisions (GAO, 2026). The Department of Defense Inspector General's 2026 evaluation of Maven integration is classified and has no publicly available redacted version. Model accuracy, error rates, superiority to human analysis and effects in real operations cannot therefore be assessed independently from the public record (DoD OIG, 2026).

Claim	Evidential status
Maven has been deployed to a theatre of operations	Documented fact based on an official deployment record
Maven data have been used in live-fire, multi-service targeting exercises	Documented fact based on GAO records
MSS has been integrated into planning, operations and fires workflows	Documented fact based on Army usage records

Claim	Evidential status
Maven is being incorporated into military training and education	Documented institutionalisation
Maven can accelerate the decision cycle	Strong inference supported by user and exercise records
Maven's accuracy and error rates are adequate	No independent public evidence
Maven determined the outcome of a specific lethal strike	Unverified
A flawless, fully automated sensor-to-weapon chain has been established	Not supported; public records document technical and manual limitations

Even with video excluded from the evidence chain, Maven's deployment, integration into targeting and command workflows, and institutionalisation are strongly documented. The unresolved issue is not whether the system exists or is used, but the fact that its performance, error rates and causal contribution to lethal outcomes remain closed to public scrutiny.

6.2. The Alliance Ring: NATO and the War Cloud

In April 2025, NCIA announced the acquisition of Maven Smart System NATO for Allied Command Operations. According to the agency, the system combines intelligence fusion and targeting, battlespace awareness, planning and accelerated decision-making within a shared data-enabled warfighting capability (NCIA, 2025). The use of an urgent procurement route prompted criticism among some Allies, particularly France (Delafon, 2026). NATO's 2025 Data Strategy made semantic interoperability and a Defence and Security Domain Ontology constitutive elements of the Alliance's data architecture, while the Ankara Summit linked that trajectory at head-of-state and government level to commitments concerning a war cloud and powerful AI models (NATO, 2025; 2026).

The alliance ring functions differently from bilateral contracting. At NATO level, standardisation pressure can operate independently of an individual state's procurement preference. A United Kingdom Ministry of Defence contract, for example, expressly required the service to be interoperable with Palantir systems used by NATO and other allied countries (Euronews, 2026). Interoperability can therefore become a de facto procurement vector. Even where a state selects another platform domestically, the obligation to connect with alliance-wide ontologies and interfaces can preserve the gravitational field of the incumbent integrator position.

The relevant form of compulsion is not a command backed by formal legal sanction. It is **infrastructural compulsion**: the cost of incompatibility, the risk of operational exclusion, the inability to share data, stranded investment in accreditation and training, and reduced participation in alliance operations. The stakes are not merely administrative. The declared price of non-alignment is exposure to an adversary.

The protection-exposure dilemma. Infrastructural compulsion narrows the field of options asymmetrically rather than closing it absolutely. A state that remains outside the dominant infrastructure is exposed to the named adversary and to the operational blindness of non-integration; a state that enters it is exposed to the infrastructural leverage of the protector and supplier, including control over ontologies, updates, access and models. Under the present configuration, the choice is often less between security and exposure than between forms of exposure. Alternative alliance architectures - national stacks, plural procurement and open-standard layers - have not been eliminated, and the severity of the dilemma must be measured by their practical availability.

The asymmetry also concerns what can be named. Exposure to the adversary occupies the centre of security discourse: it can be budgeted and written into declarations. Exposure to the protector's leverage is harder to articulate within the same discourse because the securitisation of an ally can be coded as disloyalty. The Denmark-Greenland stress test in Section 8.2 considers how this second exposure may become speakable only when the protector itself produces an explicit threat.

The dilemma radicalises the alliance-security problem of abandonment and entrapment by moving it into epistemic and infrastructural dependence (Snyder, 1984). Where the provider of protection also participates in producing the operational representation of the threat, the boundary between protection and the production of dependency becomes blurred. The threat may be real; what counts as the threat, and how it is rendered actionable, may still be shaped at the integrator position. The comparison with Bateson's double bind must remain conditional. The structure becomes a full double bind only if questioning the frame of choice is demonstrably punished as disloyalty within alliance practice. Palantir's manifesto supplies an ideological indication in that direction by coding objection as theatrical debate; a single corporate text does not establish an alliance-wide prohibition on meta-communication.

The dilemma produces a testable prediction and a potential natural experiment: **Germany**. The question is not whether Germany can operate without integration infrastructure; no modern military can. The test is whether Germany can preserve NATO interoperability and decision sovereignty without entering a Palantir-specific closed stack. The Bundeswehr's position should be characterised as a provisional refusal rather than an irreversible break. If the dilemma is as restrictive as hypothesised, Germany should eventually face either pressure to reverse the refusal or operational marginalisation. If Germany preserves equivalent interoperability and decision sovereignty outside the closed stack, the dilemma is weaker and the thesis must retreat on this point. This is a longitudinal test, not a single observation.

Two documented facts must be kept distinct. First, NATO acquired MSS NATO for Allied Command Operations. Secondly, the Ankara Declaration committed the Alliance to developing an interoperable transatlantic war cloud and powerful AI models. The declaration does not identify the supplier or suppliers of the war cloud. The correct formulation is therefore that the MSS NATO acquisition and the war-cloud commitment are mutually reinforcing elements of the same institutional direction but cannot yet be identified, on the public record, as a single procurement architecture. The incumbent's ontology, accreditation and user familiarity may make it a natural candidate; exclusive integrator status remains an unverified hypothesis and is not asserted here.

Claim	Evidential status
NATO acquired MSS NATO for Allied Command Operations	Documented fact (NCIA, 2025)
NATO is developing a war cloud and adopting powerful AI models	Documented fact (NATO, 2026)
Common ontologies and interoperability requirements create a supplier gravitational field	Strong inference based on contract requirements and the economics of standards
Supplier access could become leverage among allies	Risk scenario (Section 8.2)
Palantir is the exclusive integrator of the war cloud	Unverified and not asserted

6.3. The Bilateral and Indirect Ring: Member and Partner States

The available record documents the breadth of the network as follows:

State	Nature of relationship	Documented content
United Kingdom	Deep, multi-domain and strategic	At least GBP670 million across more than 34 public contracts; NHS Federated Data Platform; a GBP240 million Ministry of Defence agreement and strategic partnership, including a GBP1.5 billion investment commitment and designation of London as the company's European defence hub; management services connected to the nuclear deterrent (The Nerve, 2026; Hansard, 2026)
Ukraine	Deep and war-conditioned	Kyiv office; active agreements with four ministries; Braver Dataroom, through which national defence-industry AI models are trained on battlefield sensor data using Palantir infrastructure (Escudo Digital, 2026)
France	Long-term, in a process of exit	DGSI relationship since 2016; use during the Paris 2024 Olympics; renewal in December 2025; subsequent decision to transition to ChapsVision (Escudo Digital, 2026; Strasbourg Centre, 2026)
Germany	Fragmented and contested	Gotham in Bavarian, Hessian and North Rhine-Westphalian policing; the 2023 Federal Constitutional Court restriction; BfV selection of ChapsVision; Bundeswehr cyber command's refusal to permit industry personnel access to a national military database (Euronews, 2026; heise, 2026)
Spain	Sectoral	EUR16.5 million direct-award intelligence-fusion contract for the Armed Forces Intelligence System (Escudo Digital, 2026)
Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark and Baltic states	Indirect or high-risk	Indirect dependency through subcontracting and classification as high-risk in independent reporting (Escudo Digital, 2026)
Greece and the Netherlands	Temporary and sectoral	Foundry used for public-health data management during COVID-19 (EU Perspectives, 2026)
Italy	Commercial	Presence through corporate rather than public-sector clients, including Stellantis and UniCredit (Escudo Digital, 2026)

The map identifies three levels: **direct, deep integration** in the United States, United Kingdom and Ukraine; **sectoral integration** in French intelligence, Spanish military intelligence and German regional policing; and **indirect or alliance-mediated dependency** through interoperability and subcontracting. For the present theory, the decisive issue is not the number of contracts but the existence of the third level. A state without a direct contract can still become a feeder layer in the same decision circuit through an alliance ontology and war cloud. Within its borders, the state acts as integrator; at alliance level, it can itself become data for a higher-order circuit.

7. Competition Analysis: Can Attached States Compete with the Integrator?

The question must be asked at two levels: can states build a technically equivalent product, and, even if they can, can they recover the **position**? The public record yields different answers.

7.1. Structural Asymmetries

Five asymmetries impede competition. First, the **mission-incubation advantage**: operational maturity accumulated over more than two decades in real intelligence and combat environments cannot be reproduced in laboratory conditions alone. Access to problem definition is scarcer than capital. Secondly, **network effects and standardisation**: NATO ontologies and interoperability requirements reduce the cost of adapting to the incumbent while increasing the cost of transition to an alternative. Thirdly, **non-portability of institutional inheritance**: where data models, analytical histories and workflows accumulated over years are locked into proprietary intellectual property, changing supplier risks the loss of institutional memory. Fourthly, **entry pricing**: reporting on the United Kingdom describes a pattern in which symbolic initial pricing is followed by sharply rising renewal costs, converting a one-pound entry into dependency worth millions (EU Perspectives, 2026). Fifthly, a **vicious circle**: without a political purchasing commitment, domestic investment does not emerge; in the absence of investment, the claim that no suitable domestic solution exists drives policy back towards the United States provider (heise, 2025).

7.2. Failure Case: Artemis

France launched the Artemis project in 2017 to build a national platform equivalent to Gotham. The project was transferred in 2019 to Athea, an Atos-Thales joint venture. In 2021 a member of parliament described it as non-functional, and by 2024 planned transition had not occurred despite spending exceeding EUR120 million (Delafon, 2026). The case suggests that even a state with substantial capital and engineering capacity may fail to replace the position without the incumbent's mission-incubation advantage and access to institutional users. A two-year replacement forecast issued by Thales management in 2020 remained unrealised six years later (Strasbourg Centre, 2026).

7.3. Partial Success: ChapsVision and the Bundeswehr Refusal

The 2025-26 record also demonstrates that competition is not impossible. After a decade-long relationship with Palantir, France's DGSi decided to transition to the domestic ChapsVision/Argonos platform. In May 2026, Germany's domestic intelligence service selected the same supplier, signalling a deliberate sovereignty preference against a United States provider (Strasbourg Centre, 2026; heise, 2026). The Bundeswehr's cyber command also rejected access by industry personnel to a national military database (Euronews, 2026). In each case, the enabling condition was not technical superiority alone but political decision and contract design: portability, auditability and purchasing commitment had to be established in advance.

7.4. The Competition Judgement

The synthesis is that states can compete conditionally at the **product level**. Competition at the **positional level**, however, requires more than an isolated national decision; it requires reversal of the cost gradient. Four levers are visible: legal counter-pressure, as in the German Federal Constitutional Court; institutional veto, as in the Bundeswehr; procurement architecture based on portability and audit; and purchasing-guaranteed industrial policy, as in the ChapsVision pattern.

Where these levers are absent, a sovereignty project can itself become a form of 'sovereignty-washing' through the incumbent's participation. Palantir's membership of Gaia-X was criticised at the time through the image of appointing the fox to guard the henhouse (Gaia-X analysis in *Information, Communication & Society*, 2025). The answer to the competition question is therefore conditional: **yes, but only for states that deliberately disrupt the threshold conditions of state-mediated slavery rather than merely nationalising the same closed position.**

8. The Manipulability of Sovereignty, Labour and Concepts

8.1. Summit-Level Commitment: Binding the Highest Layer of Sovereignty

The institutional form of the Ankara Summit is as important as its content. The declaration was issued not by a council of defence ministers but by the heads of state and government of all 32 member states (NATO, 2026). This has three implications for sovereignty.

First, the commitment to a war cloud and powerful AI models is elevated from a sectoral procurement matter to a constitutive political direction. For future governments, reversal would involve not merely overturning a departmental decision but departing from summit-level consensus.

Secondly, summit commitment does not eliminate national decision-making authority. NATO decisions are translated into implementation through consensus-based procedures, while budgeting, procurement and constitutional oversight vary among member states. The commitment may nevertheless narrow the range of subsequent debate, generate sunk costs and interoperability dependencies, and raise the political price of reversal. Its actual effects must be demonstrated country by country.

Thirdly, sovereignty at its highest representative level authorises the construction of common data and AI infrastructure that may shape its future decision horizon. The declaration does not endorse a named company or an exclusive integrator. The conditional conclusion is that, if the infrastructure is built in closed form and made difficult to substitute under a private or foreign integrator, an act of sovereignty may become a partial externalisation of the conditions through which sovereignty sees and decides.

8.2. The Denmark-Greenland Stress Test: The Potential Leverage of Supplier Dependency

This section does not allege a completed act of manipulation. It constructs a risk scenario to test how supplier dependency could become leverage during political conflict within an alliance. The documented premise is that critical security infrastructure can be attached to a legal and procurement ecosystem that is allied but foreign. The inference is that such dependency could become epistemic and operational leverage under conditions of political conflict.

Leverage need not take the form of seizing data. Ontology, software updates, licences, model access, accreditation, technical support, user training and interoperability standards can together create a field of modulation. Data flows, model versions and conditions of use may be altered without shutting down an entire system.

The **protection-exposure dilemma** therefore denotes asymmetric narrowing rather than an absolute absence of exit. A state outside the infrastructure may face external threat and operational blindness; a state within it may face the protector-supplier's infrastructural leverage. National stacks, plural procurement and open standards remain possible. The severity of the dilemma depends on whether those alternatives are materially available.

Germany provides a live process test. The question is not whether Germany can operate without integration, but whether it can preserve NATO interoperability, data sovereignty and decision control without entering a Palantir-specific closed stack. Success would weaken the dilemma. Transfer of the same dependency to another closed integrator would change the supplier but not the position. Operational marginalisation or subsequent reversal would strengthen the thesis.

8.3. The Transformation of the Border: From a Line to a Surface of Query

The border can remain fixed on the map while its functions disperse throughout the population. The ImmigrationOS case shows how a border may cease to be a line crossed once and become a continuous surface of query reproduced through address, status, tax, health, biometric and movement records. Whether a person counts as inside or outside becomes attached not only to geographical position but to the status through which the institution processes them.

In the opposite direction, the processing of battlefield sensor data in infrastructure located beyond national borders extends the border outwards. In both cases, it is not the cartographic line but the function that determines who is accessible, identifiable, risky or targetable that becomes open to modulation from another position.

8.4. Decision Superiority in War, Management Superiority in Peace

The development and deployment of AI do not merely create new technical capacity; they can deepen the asymmetry between power and society. In war, this takes the form of decision superiority over an adversary. In peace, it may become management superiority over workers and citizens. The common structure is that power sees more, processes more quickly, classifies earlier and executes sooner, while the classified subject sees less of the data used, the category imposed and the pathway by which the decision was produced.

The basic sentence of technological competition is: 'If we do not develop it, our rival will.' The same security dilemma operated in the development of the atomic bomb, but it did not stop at research. Its tacit continuation is: *if we develop it, we must use it; if we use it, we must incorporate it into strategy; if we incorporate it into strategy, we must continue developing it*. The Manhattan Project was created to produce a usable weapon, and atomic bombs were used within weeks of the Trinity test (U.S. Department of Energy, 2010; 2026). Once established, capacity generated institutions, budgets, doctrine and new domains of application beyond its original justification.

With AI, the boundary between development and use is still weaker. A system is deployed, generates usage data, is retrained and is inserted into additional domains. A pilot may be the first phase of permanent settlement rather than an alternative to use. The military and economic value of the technology arises from its connection to the data and decision flows of real institutions, not from remaining in an archive.

In war, asymmetry is produced by combining sensor, intelligence and operational data within a shared decision infrastructure. Power need not know everything correctly. It may be sufficient that it can transform its own prediction into a material consequence for the other side. If the target cannot inspect or correct the classification and

cannot suspend the circuit before attack, the cost of error is imposed upon the target's life rather than upon the system owner (ICRC, 2024).

In peace, the same asymmetry can turn towards workers, job applicants, patients, migrants, welfare claimants, debtors and insured persons. Task allocation, monitoring, evaluation and sanction can be partially or wholly automated through algorithmic management (Rani, Pesole & Gonzalez Vazquez, 2024; Milanez, Lemmens & Ruggiu, 2025). An employer may measure speed, screen activity, speech, error and predicted productivity while the worker cannot see model weights, comparison groups or the output's influence on the final decision.

War and peace systems do not invariably share the same technical genealogy. Their relation should be separated into three levels:

18. **Direct technology transfer:** the same platform or a derivative moves from military or security use into civilian administration.
19. **Institutional transfer:** companies, personnel, procurement practices and standards circulate across domains.
20. **Functional homology:** the same grammar of sensing, classifying, prioritising and executing emerges without a direct line of technical descent.

Not every civilian algorithm is military in origin. The same grammar of power can nevertheless recur through making a population visible, ranking options in advance and converting central decisions into material consequences.

The asymmetry operates across at least seven dimensions:

Dimension	Content	Corresponding threshold or apparatus
Representation	Power represents the subject through its own categories; the subject does not participate equally in constructing them	Threshold 2 and the validity regime
Epistemic	The institution accumulates information about the subject; the subject cannot inspect the institutional model	Threshold 4
Temporal	The system produces consequences rapidly; appeal is delayed	Appeal-to-consequence ratio and suspensive protection
Scale	The institution processes millions at once; each subject defends an individual file	Threshold 7
Enforcement	A category can become wage loss, denial of access, detention or welfare interruption	Thresholds 3 and 6
Memory	The institution stores and correlates the past; the subject's ability to be forgotten or change context contracts	Threshold 2
Risk	Gains and control accrue to the institution; the cost of error and exclusion is imposed upon the subject	Distributive asymmetry

The decisive asymmetry is not that a machine calculates faster than a person. It is that power makes the person calculable while the person cannot gain equivalent access to power's calculation.

8.5. The Centralisation of Gain, the Subjectivation of Life Risk and the Evaporation of the Responsible Agent

AI and automation can, in principle, produce shorter working hours, fewer dangerous tasks, cheaper services, higher productivity and more free time. Technical capacity does not determine how those benefits will be distributed. Where productivity gains are not shared through ownership, bargaining power, taxation, social protection and labour law, producing the same output with fewer workers can appear to the firm as a cost reduction and to the worker as a threat to income and housing.

The ILO's 2025 global index shows that generative AI may transform a wide range of occupations, with exposure concentrated in clerical and highly digitalised work. It considers task transformation more likely than mass disappearance in the short term, while emphasising that outcomes depend upon job design and institutional choice (Gmyrek et al., 2025). Acemoglu and Restrepo show that automation can shift tasks from labour to capital, displace some groups from employment opportunities and account for a substantial share of changes in the United States wage structure (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2022).

Algorithmic management carries this distribution into everyday employment. OECD research indicates that such tools automate managerial functions of instruction, monitoring and evaluation. They promise productivity and faster decisions while generating concerns about work intensification, continuous surveillance and the quality of automated judgement (Milanez, Lemmens & Ruggiu, 2025). More favourable outcomes where workers participate in technology selection and implementation confirm that harm arises from relations of power and design rather than from an inescapable essence of technology.

The central contradiction is that society simultaneously announces a declining need for human labour and continues to attach food, housing, health and social standing to paid employment. If necessary labour decreases while the right to live remains conditional on selling labour, labour-saving technology produces the discipline of unemployment rather than free time.

The asymmetry is preserved through the evaporation of the responsible agent. Dismissal or interruption of welfare may be produced across the model, data provider, vendor, institution, manager and regulation. Each actor assumes only a fragment of the decision; none may appear before the subject as the owner of the whole. The European Union's platform-work rules, which require safeguards concerning automated monitoring and decision systems, human oversight, explanation and review, recognise this accountability gap as a legal problem (Directive (EU) 2024/2831).

Where increasing action capacity would ordinarily imply increasing responsibility, a digital regime may produce the inverse:

■ **Action capacity becomes centralised; legal and moral responsibility becomes fragmented.**

The contemporary economic form of state-mediated slavery accumulates economic gain and decision capacity at one pole and employment uncertainty, life risk, precarity and adaptation burden at the other, while drawing the actor responsible for that distribution into the architecture itself.

8.6. Conceptual Arbitrage and the Permanent Management of Problems

The capacity of modern power does not arise only from possessing more data or weapons. It also expands by altering the meanings of concepts that ought to restrain it. The convergence of war and peace, the sacred and the secular, tradition and modernity within one ideological formation is therefore not a contradiction but a mode of conceptual arbitrage.

Schmitt's claim that central concepts of modern state theory are secularised theological concepts suggests that the sacred did not disappear from the modern state but changed form within the language of sovereignty and exception (Schmitt, 1985). Koselleck's history of concepts shows that freedom, progress, revolution and democracy do not simply describe reality; they constitute the field of political struggle (Koselleck, 2004). The actor that defines the concept influences which demands appear reasonable and which objections can be represented as enemies of the concept itself.

Within the framework of state-mediated slavery, conceptual arbitrage operates as follows:

Concept	Normative promise	Risk of operational redefinition
Freedom	Autonomy in relation to power	Pre-defined choices within the system
Security	Protection from fear and threat	Continuous processing of the population as risk
Democracy	The people's capacity to decide	Procedural ratification of narrowed alternatives
Peace	The ending of violence	Uninterrupted normalisation of security capacity
Tradition	Memory, belonging and reciprocal obligation	A demand for loyalty and obedience
The sacred	Transcendent morality that limits power	Sacrifice and an inviolable objective
Progress	Reduction of human burden and necessary labour	Technological expansion as an unquestionable necessity
Efficiency	A better life from the same resources	Lower labour cost and more intensive supervision

In Foucault's security analysis, power does not necessarily abolish the problem but manages it within probabilities, costs and acceptable limits. In Beck's risk society, modernity converts dangers of its own production into new fields of expertise, insurance, security and regulation (Beck, 1992). The continuation of a problem is therefore not always institutional failure; for some organisations it can be the condition for continuing budgets, authority and legitimacy.

It would be empirically excessive to claim that modern power is always the sole winner in war and peace. Its structural capacity to turn both into accumulation should nevertheless not be underestimated. War constructs exceptional capacity. Peace places it within everyday life. The sacred supplies sacrifice, tradition supplies loyalty and modernity supplies technological inevitability. Power may therefore prioritise the usability of concepts over their fulfilment and the governability of problems over their resolution.

The digital Onopticon renders this semantic operation executable. 'Safe', 'risky', 'eligible', 'efficient' and 'reliable' become not merely political descriptions but data fields, scores, access thresholds and material outcomes. The actor who monopolises the meaning of a concept also influences the logic through which the gate operates.

9. Historical Comparative Morphology: The Conversion of Coordination Nodes into Power

The methodological status of this section must be stated at the outset. It does **not** establish a historical genealogy or a continuous causal lineage. No direct transfer is claimed among the Church, chartered companies, network infrastructures, financial messaging and the military-industrial complex. The section instead shows that **coordination nodes can acquire comparable functions of power in different historical periods**. It is therefore not historical proof but **hypothesis-generating comparative morphology**. The aim is neither to place the contemporary data-ontology node within an inevitable historical sequence nor to propose a universal law that power always penetrates strong structures. The more modest observation is that, under specified conditions, coordination nodes can acquire positions of power independent of the purposes for which they were originally created.

Five cases are compared through six common questions: What is transferred or standardised? Who operates the node? What role does the state play? How is the cost of exit produced? Can the node impose sanctions? Does the standard survive a change of operator?

The Church network in medieval Europe. As Roman administrative order weakened, parts of its local functions - literacy, record-keeping and communication across scales - were reorganised unevenly through episcopal networks. This was not a linear transfer but a fragmented assumption of functions. Rather than abolishing kingdoms, the Church crowned them and became a node of legitimacy and vital records, including baptism, marriage and death. Kings remained sovereign; some conditions of recognition of that sovereignty were constituted elsewhere.

Chartered companies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The English and Dutch East India Companies were privately capitalised hybrids established through state privilege, able to maintain armies and collect taxes. The morphological parallel must be specified at the level of mechanism: state incubation through problem definition and monopoly privilege; concentration of capacity in private ownership; repurchase of that capacity by the state in the form of services and revenue; and state assumption of the function when the company failed. The transfer of the East India Company's government to the Crown in 1858 is a historical example of a position outliving its occupant. The objects transferred were goods and organised violence.

Railways and telegraphy in the nineteenth century. Those who set track gauge, time zones and protocols also influenced the speed at which regions connected to markets, armies and news. States later nationalised many networks, but the standards retained path dependencies created by their early builders. The morphological lesson is that the standard can survive the operator, offering a historical instance of the distinction between actor and position.

Financial messaging in the twentieth century. Two distinct institutional structures must not be conflated. Bretton Woods was an intergovernmental monetary arrangement. SWIFT, established by banks in 1973 as a private cooperative headquartered in Belgium, was not an organ of Bretton Woods. The morphological commonality lies not in institutional lineage but in function: both route the operation of monetary sovereignty through coordination nodes. The age of sanctions reveals a specific vulnerability. A state may issue its own currency, yet if it does not control the node carrying the **message** of that currency, its transactional sovereignty can be suspended.

The military-industrial complex in the twentieth century. Eisenhower's 1961 warning that the conjunction of a permanent arms industry and military bureaucracy could acquire unwarranted influence over public decision-making, together with Mills's analysis of the power elite, provides the most recent established discussion of the conversion of a node into power (Eisenhower, 1961; Mills, 1956). Detachment 201 is a contemporary personnel-level expression of this morphology. The difference is that the node is moving from the quantity of production towards **pre-decisional epistemic infrastructure**.

Case	What is transferred or standardised?	Operator	Role of the state	Cost of exit	Sanctioning capacity	Does the standard outlive the actor?
Church network	Legitimacy, vital records, literacy	Clerical hierarchy	Recipient and protector of legitimacy	Risk of excommunication or non-recognition	Yes, religious and legal	Yes; record functions moved to the state after the Reformation while the form survived
Chartered company	Goods and organised violence	Private company under state charter	Incubator, client and ultimate successor on dissolution	Impossibility of non-monopoly trade	Yes, through private armies and courts	Yes; the function transferred to the Crown in 1858
Railway and telegraph	Movement and messages	Private or mixed, later public	Regulator and nationaliser	Exclusion from line and standard	Indirect, through denial of access	Yes; standards survived nationalisation
Financial messaging	Payment messages	Intergovernmental order and, separately, a private cooperative	Founder, regulator and user of sanctions	Cost of banking outside the system	Yes; exclusion functions as de facto sanction	Partly; alternative networks remain limited
Data-ontology integrator	Categories of reality and decision flow	Mission-incubated private company	Incubator, data provider and carrier of enforcement	Non-portability of ontology and analytical inheritance	Indirect; category followed by state enforcement	Under test in Sections 7 and 11

What follows from the matrix is a hypothesis, not proof. Across these cases, the conversion of coordination into power appears alongside a common economy of indispensability, rising exit costs and appropriation of the structure's legitimating language – faith, commerce, progress, stability or security. This co-occurrence is more than a decorative analogy, but it does not constitute a causal law.

The morphological distinction of the contemporary case lies in what the node carries. Earlier nodes carried goods, messages and money; the data-ontology node carries categories of reality. This is not a claim that reality categories have become objects of power for the first time. Churches, law, education, registries and colonial classifications also shaped conditions of encounter with reality. The historical specificity lies in the simultaneous, cross-domain, population-scale and near-real-time processability of those categories. Whether that difference produces the regime cannot be decided through historical analogy; it must be established through the seven-threshold test.

10. The Mechanism and Threshold Conditions of State-Mediated Slavery

The sovereign state is not abolished, because it remains an indispensable carrier of identity, law, taxation, security, property, labour regulation and coercion. The state produces records and statuses; institutions, markets or integrators correlate them and translate them into categories; those categories return as consequences in employment, income, movement, housing, health, welfare, security or the physical environment. Citizens and internal subjects often encounter the decision of their own state or employer rather than a foreign company, even where the reality being enforced was not constructed by any single actor.

State-mediated slavery may be asserted only where the following seven conditions are documented together within one declared unit of analysis. The thresholds are technology-neutral and can be applied to legal, economic, administrative, spatial and technical forms of gating. Digital intensity is measured separately.

Two rules are binding. First, 'satisfied' always means that a condition of regime formation is present. Secondly, the thresholds are conjunctive: where any one remains uncertain, no conclusive regime judgement can be made. Some thresholds may eliminate cases more quickly during preliminary assessment, but all are required for the final judgement.

Threshold	Empirical question	Observable indicators
1. Unavoidable attachment	Can the subject sustain vital, legal and economic existence outside the gate?	Population coverage of alternatives; cost and duration of gate-external transactions; effects of non-attachment on employment, income, housing or status
2. Integrated status or ontology production	Are records, rules or statuses from different domains combined around the same subject?	Number of domains combined; common identifier or equivalent institutional link; cross-domain querying and status transfer
3. Material feedback	Does the category return as a consequence in conditions of life?	Movement from category to wage, service, mobility, welfare, detention or sanction; proportion of automated or semi-automated decisions; decision logs
4. Absence or ineffectiveness of timely, suspensive appeal	Can the subject inspect the status and reasons and suspend the result before implementation?	Appeal duration; automatic or interim suspension; visibility of category and reasons; independent review; appeal-to-consequence ratio
5. Absence of a viable alternative decision track	Can the subject access a materially viable, human-reviewed route that does not depend upon the same closed classification logic?	Alternative track; analogue, cash or local channels; rate of off-track transactions; whether ontology and contestation change when the supplier changes
6. State-mediated enforcement and responsabilisation	Is the outcome applied through the state's legal, administrative or physical coercive capacity, and is the subject held responsible for a status they did not constitute?	Legal basis of sanction; enforcing institution; authority of human review; vendor-institution-state responsibility chain
7. Scale and continuity	Is the structure a durable carrier capable of addressing a population rather than an isolated event?	Population covered; institutional or contractual lineage; cross-domain propagation; intergenerational or long-term continuity

The temporal indicator for the fourth threshold is defined as follows. Let T_i be the time required to conclude an effective appeal and T_k the time required for the category to produce a material consequence. The ratio is:

$$R_t = T_i / T_k$$

Where $R_t > 1$, appeal follows consequence and risks practical ineffectiveness. The ratio is not decisive on its own. If filing an appeal automatically or provisionally suspends implementation, a lengthy appeal can still interrupt the circuit in time. The ratio and the suspensive effect must therefore be coded together.

Regime presence is a binary judgement: have all seven thresholds closed at a minimum level? **Regime intensity** is graded: each threshold can be scored from 0 to 4 and reported as an intensity vector ($s_1, \dots, s_7$). A scalar sum cannot

establish regime presence by itself. A high score without conjunctive minimum closure indicates only a high-risk candidate configuration.

10.1. Digital Intensity Profile

Digital technology is not one of the seven thresholds. It is a profile of the intensity of the contemporary form. Four variables should be reported separately:

Dimension of digital intensity	Question
Simultaneity	How closely do recording and verification approach the moment of action?
Correlation	How far have the cost and time of combining different domains around the same person fallen?
Speed of enforcement	How much has the delay between category and material consequence contracted?
Visibility of the responsible agent	To what extent can an accessible actor who can give reasons and be sanctioned be identified within the decision and responsibility chain?

This distinction is conceptually critical. Digital intensity can be high while the seven thresholds remain open; X-Road and auditable health systems demonstrate that possibility. Conversely, a historical system with low digital intensity but high compulsory subjection and state enforcement can approach the regime. Digitalisation is not the regime's name but its contemporary accelerator.

10.2. Distribution and Responsibility Tests

The seven thresholds measure the presence of the mechanism. Two horizontal tests identify its social direction.

Distribution test: Who accumulates economic gain, information and action capacity, and upon whom are error, uncertainty, precarity and adaptation costs imposed?

Responsibility test: Who are the causal, administrative and legal owners of the decision? Whom can the subject reach for reasons and reparation? Does responsibility grow with decision capacity, or is it fragmented?

These tests do not establish the regime on their own. They make visible the evaporation of the responsible agent and the direction of asymmetry. Where the thresholds are closed, gains flow upwards, risks downwards and responsibility disperses, regime intensity increases.

Subject positions are defined by circuit type rather than citizenship. The **internal subject** is any person, regardless of nationality, continuously exposed to a state's population-internal recording, classification and coercive enforcement circuit. The **external subject** is a person targeted by military or transnational decision circuits without inclusion in the state's domestic rights and appeal regime. **Homovictimus** is the higher-order subject form common to both: the person compelled to convert will into tactics of adaptation and survival within a field whose conditions have been constituted elsewhere.

II. Counter-Cases: Where Can the Circuit Be Broken?

Closure without effective contestation does not require malicious intent; a cost gradient can be sufficient. Transparency, human review, data portability, alternative tracks, collective bargaining and suspensive appeal impose visible costs upon institutions. The costs of a closed system can instead be externalised onto subjects experiencing error, other institutions and the future. The shared function of the counter-cases is to raise the institutional price of closure, make the responsible agent visible again and prevent risk from being placed entirely upon the subject.

German Federal Constitutional Court, 2023. The Court's restriction of automated police-data analysis demonstrates that closure is not inherent in technology. Legal counter-pressure can narrow the scope and purposes of data composition. Category production does not acquire automatic priority over constitutional rights.

Palantir v. United States Army, 2018. The case demonstrates that the state is not a unitary actor, that state-corporate entanglement does not eliminate institutional conflict and that procurement preferences can be tested through law. It may not produce subject-centred openness, but it shows that the integrator position is not inevitable.

NHS Federated Data Platform pilot coding. Public records show large-scale health-data integration and operational feedback. They do not, however, document together unavoidable attachment, cross-domain closure, ineffective subject appeal, the absence of an alternative decision track and state-mediated responsibilisation. On current evidence, the NHS case does not meet the threshold of state-mediated slavery.

X-Road/X-tee. This case shows that high integration can coexist with query visibility, distributed architecture and the citizen's ability to see who has accessed their data. It is one of the clearest negative examples demonstrating that digital intensity and the regime judgement are not identical.

ChapsVision transitions and the Bundeswehr refusal. The DGSi and BfV transitions to a domestic supplier and the Bundeswehr's objection to closed access arrangements are live tests of whether the integrator position can be replaced through political decision and procurement architecture. Supplier change alone is not liberation. Recovery of the position requires termination of operational ties with the former supplier; portability of data models; preservation of analytical history; avoidance of capability loss; prevention of mere nationalisation of the same opacity; and establishment of subject-facing appeal and independent audit.

Platform Work Directive and human oversight. Directive (EU) 2024/2831 establishes minimum protections concerning transparency, human oversight and review of automated monitoring and decision systems in platform work. It demonstrates that the evaporation of the responsible agent is not inevitable. Human oversight must mean real authority to change the decision rather than symbolic approval; explanation must mean access to reasons and to a route capable of suspending the result, not merely notification that a model exists.

Collective bargaining and participatory technology design. OECD and ILO findings indicate that outcomes can be more favourable where workers or their representatives participate in selecting, implementing and auditing AI and algorithmic-management systems. This demonstrates that technological harm is not inevitable but varies with power and bargaining structures. Participation in decision architecture can interrupt representational asymmetry; collective bargaining can interrupt distributive asymmetry; independent review can interrupt accountability asymmetry.

The counter-cases yield a common **architecture of openness**:

21. Visibility of category and reasons.
22. Automatic or interim suspension before consequence.
23. Independent human review with genuine authority.
24. Portability of data, models and analytical inheritance.
25. Multiple suppliers and alternative decision tracks.
26. Legal firewalls limiting cross-domain propagation.
27. A responsibility record identifying causal and legal ownership of the decision.
28. Participation by subjects, workers and public representatives in technology selection.
29. Distribution of productivity gains through working-time reduction, wages, social security or public services.

These conditions amount to more than technical transparency. Institutional sovereignty and subject sovereignty are distinct. A state may escape a foreign supplier while retaining the same opaque and uncontestable gate through a national company. The circuit is broken only where state procurement independence and the subject's category visibility, appeal, alternative track and material security are strengthened together.

12. Distinction from Adjacent Theories and Theoretical Location

Corporate-state entanglement is not new (Mills, 1956; Eisenhower, 1961). This article adds a functional mechanism to the circulation of elites: within which status order are vital conditions gated; which category is produced; how does the result return to whose life; how are gains and risks distributed; and where does the responsible agent become invisible?

The distinction from Scott's legibility and Haggerty and Ericson's surveillant assemblage lies in connecting the regime threshold not merely to visibility or data accumulation but to material feedback, suspensive appeal, alternative decision tracks and state enforcement (Scott, 1998; Haggerty & Ericson, 2000). The affinity with Foucault's milieu and security apparatus, Deleuze's modulation and Mann's infrastructural power lies in the operation of power through environments, circulation and capacity rather than direct prohibition alone (Foucault, 2007; Deleuze, 1992; Mann, 1984). The distinctive move is to specify through seven thresholds the point at which such management reaches the gating of vital functions and to measure the responsibility chain separately.

The analysis shares Amore's and Rouvroy and Berns's diagnosis of anticipatory power. The regime judgement, however, does not follow from probabilistic calculation alone. It depends upon integrated status production, material feedback, closure against effective contestation, absence of a viable outside and state enforcement (Amore, 2013; Rouvroy & Berns, 2013). The distinction from Zuboff's surveillance capitalism is that the central relation is not limited to the marketing of behavioural surplus. Law, citizenship, labour, security, welfare and coercive enforcement can converge within the same regime of gating (Zuboff, 2019).

The relation to Habermas is an infrastructural extension rather than a claim to supersession. The argument accepts the colonisation of the lifeworld and proposes data ontology as a systemic steering infrastructure that renders money and administrative power simultaneous, cross-domain and feedback-driven. Whether data ontology qualifies as a third steering medium in the specifically Habermasian sense remains open. Demonstration would require a distinctive code, such as valid/invalid, operating stably across domains; practical substitution for communicative justification; analytical separability from money and administrative power; and generalisation across social fields.

The mechanism added to Habermas is **the evaporation of the obligation to justify**. A person's communicative claim - 'this is who I am; this is my situation; this category does not fit me' - may be displaced by a record, score or eligibility result. Contestation becomes an application to correct data rather than a demand that a decision-maker give reasons; the decision-owner recedes within a technical and institutional chain. Reading the thresholds in reverse translates the

defence of the lifeworld into legal and engineering terms: suspensive appeal, visible categories, responsibility records, portability and plural decision tracks.

The affinity with Beck's risk society lies in modernity's conversion of dangers of its own production into new fields of expertise and management (Beck, 1992). The distinction is that the present framework measures not only the production of risk but its distribution and the transformation of risk management into vital gates. If institutional uncertainty falls while the subject's employment, income and status uncertainty rises, risk management is not neutral. The distribution test asks where manufactured risk accumulates as gain and where it accumulates as a threat to life.

Koselleck's conceptual history shows how political concepts constitute fields of struggle, while Schmitt's political theology traces formal continuities between modern state concepts and sacred sources (Koselleck, 2004; Schmitt, 1985). **Conceptual arbitrage** moves these lines to the operational level. Change in meaning is not merely discursive: once definitions of security, eligibility, efficiency or risk become scores, budgets, contracts, access thresholds and sanctions, conceptual struggle acquires infrastructural consequences.

The relationship to Patterson is structural proximity rather than identity. The term state-mediated slavery is justified not because the regime reproduces every feature of historical slavery, but because compulsory subjection, loss of claim over status, gating of vital conditions and state-enforceable material consequences can together approach an infrastructural form of social death (Patterson, 1982). The concept cannot be used without those four composite conditions and the seven thresholds.

Finally, state-mediated slavery is not a theory of technology but a theory of a regime of power. The digital Onopticon is the subordinate concept explaining its contemporary intensification. Even if technologies change, the regime question remains: who gates vital conditions; who constitutes status; who takes the gain; who bears the risk; who enforces the result; and who accepts responsibility?

13. Conclusion: The Technology-Transcending Core and Digital Intensification of State-Mediated Slavery

The article's principal intervention is to correct the conceptual hierarchy. **State-mediated slavery is not a digital regime; the digital Onopticon is its contemporary intensifier.** Vital conditions could be gated before digital technology through law, debt, labour, registries, spatial orders, citizenship and security. Digitalisation makes the process simultaneous, cross-domain, population-scale, rapidly feedback-driven and capable of fragmenting responsibility.

13.1. What This Article Demonstrates

Socially vital functions - identity, labour, income, housing, health, payment, movement and the exercise of rights - can be attached to external institutional gates. Digital systems are not the only form of such gates, but they are their most intensive contemporary form. Windrush demonstrates the destructive potential of pre-digital translation and status layers. Aadhaar demonstrates the dual effects of digital matching on access to vital services. ICM/ImmigrationOS reveals a high-risk relationship between classification and state enforcement. The NHS and X-Road demonstrate that high digital integration does not necessarily produce the regime.

Private integrators can enter the operational passages of state decision-making. Palantir's S-1 describes the data-decision-feedback function; its manifesto presents the company not only as a provider of tools but as a political and civilisational mission partner. Maven's deployment to a theatre of operations, use in live-fire exercises and insertion into command workflows and training can be documented independently of promotional video. Its accuracy and causal effect in lethal outcomes cannot be established from public evidence.

13.2. What This Article Strongly Infers

Interoperability requirements, contract consolidation, institutional memory and common ontologies can create a supplier gravitational field. Such dependency does not abolish states, but it can partially externalise the conditions under which states see and decide. The protection-exposure dilemma indicates that seeking security against an external threat can create a new dependency upon protective infrastructure, although open standards, plural procurement and national stacks can weaken the dilemma.

Decision superiority produced by AI in war can be translated into management superiority in peace. This does not always occur through direct technology transfer; it may take the form of institutional transfer or functional homology. The shared direction is power's capacity to make society more visible while making its own decision architecture more opaque, rapid and scalable.

At the economic level, gains from productivity and control may accumulate in institutional centres while job loss, income uncertainty, retraining, precarious work and risks to housing and nutrition are imposed upon the subject. Digitalisation does not create this asymmetry but can regularise it through measurement, comparison and

automation. The evaporation of the responsible agent does not make decisions actorless; it fragments responsibility across model, vendor, institution, manager and state as action capacity becomes centralised.

13.3. The Political Consequence of Conceptual Arbitrage

The success of modern power does not arise solely from resolving problems. It can turn problems into permanent objects of management and concepts into sources of legitimacy for capacity accumulation. War generates exceptional budgets, secrecy and mobilisation; peace embeds those capacities in everyday governance. The sacred supplies sacrifice, tradition supplies loyalty and modernity supplies imperatives of progress and efficiency.

The presence of words such as freedom, security, democracy, peace and progress in official texts does not demonstrate that they operate in the subject's favour. Their normative prestige can be retained while their operational meanings are altered. The digital Onopticon converts that semantic change into data fields, scores, thresholds and material consequences. Conceptual abuse thereby influences not only what can be thought, but who can access what.

13.4. What This Article Does Not Yet Establish Conclusively

The article has not demonstrated the completion of a global or total regime of state-mediated slavery. It neither demonstrates nor claims that Palantir is the exclusive integrator of NATO's war cloud. It does not demonstrate that the ICM/ImmigrationOS stack conclusively satisfies all seven thresholds. It does not argue that every form of automation increases unemployment, that every digital-identity system produces exclusion or that every conceptual redefinition is conscious manipulation. Nor has it shown that states and societies are incapable of generating counter-pressure.

13.5. Conditional Regime Judgement

A judgement of state-mediated slavery can be made only when all seven thresholds close within the same unit of analysis. Digital intensity, distributive asymmetry, evaporation of the responsible agent and conceptual arbitrage explain the regime's intensity and modes of legitimation; none establishes its presence alone.

The problem of consent becomes visible within this conditional framework. The architecture of gating can be constituted above the level at which the subject can give meaningful consent - summit commitments, alliance standards and long-term contracts - and below it - routine consent boxes, workplace scores and automated eligibility checks. As the distance between the level of consent and the level of decision widens, voluntariness can remain merely formal.

The final question is not whether 'AI decides instead of humans'. The questions are:

- Who determines the status through which a person is recognised?
- Who constructs the gate to vital functions?
- Where do economic gain and action capacity accumulate?
- Upon whom are uncertainty and life risk imposed?
- When a decision is wrong, where can the subject suspend the circuit before experiencing the consequence?
- Who remains accessible as the agent and responsible owner of the outcome?
- Do security, freedom, peace and progress protect the subject, or legitimate the gate?

The seven thresholds and counter-cases show that the answer is not destiny. The antidote is not technical transparency alone. It includes suspensive appeal, visible categories, an accountable decision-owner, portable data and analytical inheritance, plural decision tracks, collective bargaining, distribution of productivity gains and a materially viable outside.

■ **Where these conditions close together, the resulting regime is state-mediated slavery.**

As a summary of the defined regime type:

■ **State-mediated slavery does not leave the person without a state. It binds the person to their own state, employment and means of life while gains and action capacity accumulate elsewhere, uncertainty and risk are imposed upon them, and the agent responsible for the decision evaporates into institutions and technical architecture - all in the name of freedom, security, peace, tradition or progress.**

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This bibliography is self-contained and does not refer to earlier versions. Online sources were last accessed on 14 July 2026. The source hierarchy is: (1) legislation, judicial decisions, contracts and official institutional documents; (2) corporate SEC filings and technical documents; (3) parliamentary records; (4) peer-reviewed research; (5) high-reliability news agencies; (6) advocacy and think-tank materials; and (7) commentary and analysis. The evidential status of each major claim – documented fact, strong inference, risk scenario or unverified hypothesis – is stated in the relevant section.

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Appendix: Limits of the Evidence

Document or theoretical group	What it establishes	What it does not establish on its own
Palantir S-1 and the 22-point manifesto	Operational self-description; the data-decision-feedback claim; the company's conceptual and ideological self-positioning	That every deployment follows the manifesto's programme; that every technical choice is directly derived from ideology
United States federal contract records: Army ESA, Maven and ICM/ImmigrationOS	Contract consolidation, long-term investment in capacity and the declared functions of ICM/ImmigrationOS	Active integrated data flows, error rates or the claim that every decision is made by the integrator
Maven deployment, exercise, training and audit records	Deployment to a theatre of operations, use in live-fire exercises and insertion into command-and-control and training	Model accuracy, superiority to human analysis or causal contribution to specific lethal operations
Ankara Declaration and NATO/NCIA records	Head-of-state and government commitment to a war cloud and AI; acquisition of MSS NATO	That Palantir is the exclusive integrator of the war cloud; that national oversight has automatically disappeared
European contracts and transition records	Breadth of relationships, interoperability pressure and attempts at substitution or refusal	That transitions are complete; that the new supplier is more open to subjects; that all allies have the same degree of dependency
Windrush and Aadhaar research	Pre-digital and digital forms of the status-record gap; the coexistence of benefit and exclusion in systems of gating	That every record regime is state-mediated slavery; exclusive causation in individual deaths
ILO, OECD, EU labour-law and automation research	The spread of algorithmic management; problems of work intensity, autonomy, bargaining power and responsibility; the need for human oversight and review	That automation raises unemployment in every workplace; that all uses of AI operate against the subject
Acemoglu-Restrepo and labour-economics literature	Mechanisms of task displacement and wage inequality associated with automation	That every productivity gain necessarily becomes a wage loss
Foucault, Beck, Koselleck and Schmitt	Theoretical grounds for problem management, manufactured risk, conceptual struggle and political theology	That every conceptual redefinition is deliberate abuse; that power is always the sole winner in war and peace

Document or theoretical group	What it establishes	What it does not establish on its own
Historical morphology cases	The possibility that coordination nodes acquire comparable functions of power in different periods	A direct genealogy, teleological necessity or identity between the current case and past cases
Seven thresholds, digital intensity and distribution-responsibility tests	A research protocol for measuring regime presence, contemporary intensity and the direction of asymmetry separately	Filling gaps in non-public data flows, decision logs or responsibility chains through presumption