



Genocide in Gaza Supported by Venture Capital's AI Military Tech - William Hartung

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Talia Baroncelli (TB): Hi, I'm Talia Baroncelli, and you're watching *theAnalysis.news*. Today, I'll be joined by national security analyst Bill Hartung to speak about U.S. support for Israel as well as war profiteering in the defense manufacturing sector. If you'd like to give us a boost, you could go to our website, *theAnalysis.news*, and hit the donate button at the top right corner of the screen. Make sure you get onto our mailing list; that way, you're always up to date every time there's a new episode. You can also like and subscribe to the show on YouTube or on other podcast streaming services such as Apple or Spotify. Feel free to share the show with your family and friends, and stay tuned for my interview with Bill Hartung.

Joining me now is Bill Hartung. He is a national security expert as well as a U.S. foreign policy expert at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. It's really great to have you here today, Bill. Thank you.

William Hartung (WH): Yes, thank you.

TB: A few days ago, we saw the IDF target and kill seven aid workers from World Central Kitchen. We later found out that several of these aid workers were foreign nationals. One was a dual Canadian-U.S. citizen, another was Australian, Polish, as well as British. Of course, this generated an international uproar. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that the incident was a tragedy, and the IDF has said that it was unintentional. But of course, if you look at what happened, this aid convoy was very clearly marked as being a humanitarian aid convoy. It's possible that they were targeted to prevent the delivery of aid to Palestinians. This is part of a deliberate strategy to ethnically cleanse the Palestinians and to ensure that aid is not getting to them. How do you assess this change, not only in the rhetoric but potentially in policy? Recently, President Biden had a phone call with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying that this has to change, that there needs to be more aid getting in, and that they can't be targeting aid workers. You hear people like the Pentagon's spokesperson, Admiral John Kirby, even saying that there will be a U.S. assessment of what the Israeli operations have been, and the U.S. might even change their own policy towards Israel. Do

you see this entailing some conditions or conditionality on weapons deliveries to Israel?

WH: Well, it's a shame that it would have to take this to get them to act, given 33,000 people dying, many of them children, killing of journalists, there's been many other aid workers who died, the UN officials. I think this stood out partly because it was blatant and because there was an American citizen involved. These were so obviously people trying to help. This reaction should have come much sooner. They're talking vaguely about consequences and changes in policy. I think the only thing that would really be possibly effective would be to cut off arms altogether until the killing stops, until the aid comes in, and then figure it out from there. It's not clear if the Biden people are going to go that far. Certainly, they've been shaken by this. I think partly it's just a very visible thing that's hard for them to ignore.

TB: You're right. Of course, it shouldn't take the slaughter of thousands and thousands of civilians, something like over 12,000 children being killed by the IDF, for there to be a noticeable change in policy or for there to be conditionality on aid to Israel. What bothers me and a lot of people who are in the legal field is how this is actually happening. We've seen people like Matt Miller say that there have been assessments done by the Americans, that there have been no war crimes committed on the part of the Israelis, and that they've done all sorts of assessments to ensure that the Israeli military is actually in accordance with international humanitarian law and they have not broken any international laws. Based on what we're seeing unfold before us, it seems like an outright blatant lie that is being spouted in order to actually continue those arms sales.

Could you maybe walk us through how these arms sales are concluded? Is it the Pentagon that starts them, and then they're supposed to go to Congress? How has that not been happening recently? How has the way that the U.S. has been sending weapons to Israel been different from how arms sales are usually concluded?

WH: Well, under normal circumstances, major sales of a certain value would be reported to Congress in detail. Congress would have anywhere from 15 to 30 days to vote them down. Members of the key Foreign Affairs Committee could put a hold, which is not legally binding but is usually recognized by the executive branch. A lot of the sales to Israel have come out of stockpiles. There's a U.S. stockpile in Israel that is allegedly for U.S. use but, in an emergency, can be given to the Israeli armed forces. Some have come from there. They've also had 100 deals that were under the threshold for reporting to Congress. They put them in small batches, specifically to hide them from Congress and the public. Since the beginning of the war, there were two deals that were reported to Congress and 100 that were not. It's clear that they're not happy about people focusing too much on the fact that it's U.S. weaponry doing all this damage.

By contrast, for Ukraine, every time they make an announcement, there's a long list of exactly what's being sent and in what quantities because they view that as the "good war,"

and they want to take credit for it. Members of Congress have talked about wanting more transparency about what's being sent there. I think that's important, but it pales in comparison with pushing a ceasefire and actually stopping this from happening.

TB: Well, we've recently seen that the U.S. has approved the sale and delivery of \$18 billion worth of F-15s, as well as the sale of over 2,000, 2,000-pound bunker-busting bombs and over 500, 500-pound bombs. These bombs are considered to be dumb bombs, meaning they're not precision-guided, so they're not always that accurate, and they can't minimize civilian death. There's obviously a lot of collateral damage that's tied to the deployment of these sorts of weapons.

We recently saw a really important report by Israeli journalist Yuval Abraham from *+972 Magazine* and *Local Call*. In this extremely lengthy investigation, he interviewed several Israeli military officers and people working in Israeli intelligence. They told him that since the beginning of the war, within a six-week period, something like 15,000 civilians were killed. A lot of the people who were killed were designated as targets by an AI machine. This AI machine is called Lavender. There's another AI tool, an AI machine called Where's Daddy, which would track supposed Hamas militants and follow them at night and basically determine when they were at home, sleeping at home with their families, and would kill them while they were at home. The really revealing aspect of this report is that they would categorize or hierarchize Hamas militants based on how important they were. The more high-caliber the militant could justify much higher collateral damage. Something like 300 civilians could be killed in order to strike just one militant, whereas if it was a lower caliber militant, then something like 15 to 20 civilians could be justified as collateral damage. This clearly underscores that international humanitarian law is not being adhered to, that the principle of proportionality is being contravened, and that Israel is indeed breaking international humanitarian law and is committing numerous war crimes.

Another aspect of this report, which is really revealing, is how quickly the AI generates targets and how, a lot of the time, the person who's administering the technology isn't checking on the raw data to see if the person who is designated as a potential Hamas militant is indeed a militant. The ways in which they actually compile these kill lists are based on a principle called "linking," in which surveillance will look at who was in a specific WhatsApp group with a supposed militant, whether those people were perhaps changing their phones or their locations very often. It assembles a list of targets based on certain metadata. It's not verified at the end, after these people have been killed, if they actually were militants or not. Obviously, the humanitarian destruction that's wrought by it and the civilians who are killed are just a huge violation of international law.

How would you say this AI generation of targets and warfare is actually shaping modern-day warfare? Would you say warfare is being fought more along the lines of AI-generating tools, which are shifting culpability from humans to what's perceived to be neutral AI software, which, of course, isn't neutral? Did the U.S. actually play a role in supporting the

development of this particular technology and providing it to Israel?

WH: Well, the advocates of using this technology, it is like what they said about drones. They're going to be more accurate. You're going to have fewer civilian casualties. That didn't prove to be the case, partly because a lot of the regimes using this didn't care about civilian casualties. They were hitting civilian targets on purpose. As with Israel hitting these aid workers, I have no way of believing that was a mistake. The AI being used by Israel, one of the things that it lets them do is hit more targets more quickly. If anything, I think it's expanding civilian casualties, not reducing them. There's this mystical cover story that more accurate weapons will only get the bad guys. It just doesn't work that way. In terms of how Israel got this, I don't know if there's a precise connection. I know there are a lot of Palantir offices in Israel. There's a lot of connections. There's been talk of Israeli money going into the tech sector that's investing in some of this weaponry. For many years, Israel has been able to use 25% of its military from the U.S. to plow it into its own arms industry. At a minimum, there was probably U.S. money that helped Israel get some of these capabilities. They're phasing that out, but they'll still be using U.S. money to build their industry until at least 2028. So not only does it arm Israel, but it's helped Israel build its own industry.

TB: Well, we're all pretty familiar with what are called the Big Five, the five defense manufacturers that include Raytheon and Lockheed Martin. Aside from those Big Five defense contractors or weapons manufacturers, would you say that there is perhaps a new industry emerging where companies primarily or initially focused on civilian technology are shifting towards military technology or perhaps dual-use technology. These companies are being funded by private asset managers and venture capital.

WH: Yes, that's been happening for a while. It's starting to get more attention. A lot of the big venture capital firms are trying to foster these military start-ups, building AI-driven technology and drones and so forth. Their idea is if we float 10 of them and one hits it big, we'll cash in. They've also been hiring former military and Pentagon officials as "advisors," which really are disguised lobbyists because the new tech firms are in a little bit of a battle with the Big Five over the Pentagon budget for things like R&D. They need the same system that the big companies have in terms of lobbying and so forth.

I think one difference is that the heads of these VC firms that are pushing this; firms like Andreessen Horowitz and also players like Peter Thiel, who not only has his own company, Palantir, but also invests in other start-ups, they're quite openly hawkish. They sell the idea that they're the ones who are going to help us beat China. Of course, if we ever got in a war with China, it would be an unprecedented disaster because two nuclear-armed powers fighting each other is a huge risk. Their ideology is that technology will save us. We're the ones who know how to do it. Maybe we don't need so much government because tech people can solve that. We're the new patriots. It's a whole evangelism and egocentric approach to this stuff, which I think is particularly dangerous because I think that type of thinking would be even more likely to get us into war than the traditional company would be. There's a lot of

money to be made.

If you're a retired general, you go to work for one of these VC funds, and they hit it big on an investment, you could make millions. If you go to the board of Lockheed Martin, it's not nothing, but you'd make 100,000 a year or so. There's all this money driving this. The danger is that there won't be as much scrutiny of how dangerous are these weapons. How are they going to change the face of warfare? If they don't work, are people going to be slaughtered through these unintended errors? If they do work, what type of wars will result? Will it be easier to go to war? All these questions have to be addressed. But if there's money driving it and money to be made, and there are advocates in the Pentagon, like Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks, who's also very keen on this approach. It's a real danger. I don't think it's been adequately understood. I think people are more accustomed to thinking about Lockheed Martin, Boeing, and Raytheon, which pose their own problems. But I think if we're going to have a disastrous conflict, these new companies may be even more at fault or more driving that militaristic foreign policy.

TB: Right. These new technologies and companies seem like they also have a different financial model. They get in there, and they have more short-term production capabilities. To me, that seems like they're more geared towards just making profits and then getting out. Perhaps I'm wrong, but their approach to it seems very different from the Big Five, for example, which have definitely formed monopolies, and there are all sorts of problems with that, which we can also speak about. It does seem like their approach to production and also to profits are slightly different.

WH: Yeah, I think the idea is you seed a bunch of start-ups, and then some of them hit it big. They get big depending on contracts. They start making money, and then, at which point, investors hit it big. But it means they're pushing a lot of research, a lot of prototypes, just a lot of work in this area that I think makes it more likely that they'll develop some of these systems sooner. The thing is, there's a whole history of technology that will save us in the military sector. In Vietnam, they had this thing called the electronic battlefield, which was supposed to find the Viet Cong. It was a complete disaster. During the Gulf War, they had the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs go in to target the bombs and overwhelm the enemy. It ended up that also didn't work. Of course, it wasn't relevant to fighting the wars they fought in Iraq and Afghanistan. They damage people and they damage countries, but they do not actually win wars. I think this could be similar. They'll make these huge claims for what the technology can do. It won't do it, but it will encourage them to go to war on the theory that this is the great new solution.

It's like that illusion never ends, this enthusiasm for technology. I think, undoubtedly, part of it is because there's money to be made. People convinced themselves that not only are they cleaning up financially, but they're doing some social good. That's particularly a disease of Silicon Valley, I think.

TB: Right. These technologies are seen as the solution; of course, there needs to be a place to

test them. It seems like the Gaza Strip right now is a technological testing grounds for a lot of these technologies to see how effective they are on the ground, on the so-called battlefield, and then to say that they are tried and tested to be able to then sell them to other countries who are willing to buy them.

Why don't we speak about the Big Five? Companies such as Lockheed Martin and Raytheon have definitely formed monopolies within the defense sector. They have arguably contributed to the rise of prices of the armaments that they're selling. They're price gouging as well as in certain cases, actually reducing production of their armaments. I'm not suggesting that they should ramp up the production of the weapons that they're making. I'm not really supportive of that. In certain instances, that could actually pose a security threat to the United States if they've sold so many of their weapons to, say, Ukraine or to other countries. If the U.S. were to be struck and they don't have the weapons that they need, then in that particular case, there could be a threat to the security of the United States. How did these five companies form the monopolies that we see right now Would you pinpoint it to the Clinton era in which there was huge deregulation, or does it go back even further?

WH: Well, the core of the military-industrial complex goes back to the '50s. But within that, there were more firms. There were probably 50 major firms making weapons, and there was limited competition for some big contracts. At the end of the Cold War, there was this meeting called the Last Supper, which was run by Deputy Secretary of Defense William Perry. Essentially, he said to the contractors who came to the meeting, "Half of you are going to have to go away. There's not enough money to support all these factories." They encouraged mergers and even subsidized them with tax money in terms of helping them pay for closing factories or even for golden parachutes for board members of companies that lost their jobs. There was tax money floating that. You had Lockheed merged with Martin Marietta, you had Northrop merge with Grumman, you had Boeing merge with McDonnell Douglas. Lockheed Martin actually was a combination of a dozen or more firms that they gobbled up. The CEO of Lockheed Martin, Norm Augustine, was the one who put down the big bet. He was like, "Let's vacuum it as many companies as possible. Yeah, there's been a dip in Pentagon spending now, but it's going to come back. When it comes back, we'll be the biggest player." That's how it worked out. In one year, they got \$70 billion in contracts, more than the State Department and the Agency for International Development combined to just one company. They routinely get \$10 or \$20 billion more than the other big contractors year after year.

It goes to the Clinton era, and they argued that this would be a way to get rid of overhead, it would be more efficient, and you'd get cheaper equipment. That, of course, never happened because the flip side was the monopoly. Once they give one of these contracts, they usually don't have anywhere to go. The company, if it overcharges, underperforms, the Pentagon is stuck with it unless they're willing to literally cancel the program and start over. This has given these companies a great deal of power. Then, of course, they also, like Lockheed Martin, the general who approved the F-35 for production, went to their board immediately after leaving government. They've developed these huge political networks. Lockheed Martin

claims they have facilities in 47 or 48 states, which means members are a little wary of cutting their programs because they don't want to be seen as hurting jobs in their area. It probably has increased the power of the military-industrial complex just because you've got these larger firms with greater reach and more ways to influence Congress and the public.

TB: Well, recently, there were six senators who have proposed to create a modern-day Truman Committee, and that includes Bernie Sanders, Senator Ron Wyden, Elizabeth Warren, Ed Markey, Jeff Merkley, and Senator Peter Welch, who has also been very outspoken on Gaza, calling for a ceasefire. They're calling on Senator majority leader Chuck Schumer, the Democrat, of course, to set up this committee. This committee refers back to Senator Truman from Missouri. At the time, he was a senator. Between 1935 and 1945, he was a senator under Roosevelt. He was seen as the guy who would basically check if war profiteers were making a killing or if the money that was being spent on these contractors was actually being used in the right way. Apparently, there was a lot of money that was being misused or just completely wasted or lining the pockets of weapons manufacturers. That committee was set up in 1941, and I guess this new style of a Truman Committee would seek to do the same thing and monitor war profiteering.

I guess a big question, or several questions, is how effective it could be. If there is a foreign policy of war and belligerence and supporting Israel, sending more weapons to Ukraine when it doesn't seem like the war is going anywhere, if you have 800 bases around the world in this belligerent foreign policy, then how would this committee be effectual in any way, shape, or form?

WH: Well, I think the main value would be that they probably could impose stricter regulations on these companies, which means perhaps they wouldn't be ripping off the taxpayers quite as badly. But you're right. I mean, if your foreign policy is about military dominance, you're not going to reduce the Pentagon budget very much. The current strategy is, well, we should be able to win a war against Russia or China, intervene in the Middle East or against North Korea, maintain the global war on terror, send troops to the border, and all manner of missions to have the biggest nuclear arsenal in the world. If that's your strategy, how do you reduce the budget? A lot of members talk about waste because it's politically neutral. They don't have to take a position against the U.S. interventionist policies, and nobody's for waste, as far as I know. It's dodging the bigger issue, which is we need to rein in our foreign policy. It shouldn't be military first. We shouldn't have this huge global military footprint. We should be scaling back nuclear weapons, not building more. Those are the issues that will determine whether you can reduce the Pentagon budget and weaken the power of these companies. I think going after price gouging, war profiteering, perhaps has some value in getting the public's attention to these companies and perhaps delegitimizing them a bit. President Biden, since Ukraine, has been talking about the arsenal of democracy with reference to these companies and their workers. Now, that would be surprising to the people of Yemen who were slaughtered with weapons sent to the Saudi regime or places like Egypt, Nigeria, or the Philippines, where U.S. weapons are used by repressive governments either against their own people or against neighboring countries. They're trying to use Ukraine and

fetishize it as if we're in World War II again and the industry is an unrelenting positive force for our society, which is certainly not the case.

I think exposing the fact that they're basically in it for the money might help open the door to asking some of these other questions. But taken by itself, it can be played from any different angle. Some people would just say, "Oh, yeah, we need better weapons for the warfighters," and still want to fight the wrong wars. A lot of it depends on how it's portrayed to the public and the purpose of it.

TB: Well, I do have one final question, and that's on U.S. foreign policy. What's your general assessment of the direction of foreign policy in the Middle East, which is pretty much Israel, right or wrong? We recently saw the Israelis strike an Iranian diplomatic building in Syria, and that, of course, is illegal. It's stated in the Vienna Convention and international norms that you can't strike consular or diplomatic buildings, especially if there are people inside them. They obviously killed a few Iranian high-ranking generals. But aside from that fact, this policy of just blindly supporting Israel and giving them a blank check to do whatever they want is arguably endangering the region and perhaps endangering U.S. national security interests as well.

WH: Yeah. I think if you just took a cold hard look at the impact of this policy of supporting Israel, regardless of what it does, it's bad for U.S. security. It's bad for the security of the region. In the long term, it's bad for the people of Israel because they're essentially being treated as a pariah state on a broad scale. The ability to have an actual peace agreement is much reduced. No matter how you look at it, this is a terrible policy. Then along with it, there's in the back burner as well this Abraham Accords. Maybe they could get the Saudis to normalize relations with Israel and create a coalition against Iran, a coalition that would, of course, be sold a lot of U.S. weapons. There's the Israel right or wrong problem. There's the cozying up to the Saudi regime. It's all contrary to the notion that had been put forward that the U.S. was going to pull back from the Middle East, not get engaged in the wars there that have happened in this century. This all pushes in the other direction.

TB: Bill Hartung, it's been great speaking to you today. Thanks so much for joining us on *theAnalysis*.

WH: Yes, it was great talking.

TB: Thank you for watching *theAnalysis.news*. We really can't make this content without you, so feel free to support us by going to our website, *theAnalysis.news*. Feel free to make a small contribution if you can. Thanks a lot for watching.

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