



Former spy-chief-turned-arms-firm-adviser says military AI can be moral in shock to nobody

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military ai

Ex-spy chief David Omand has decided military AI can be taught to be moral. Which is nice for him. And probably nice for the various private defence interests he advises too. The *Guardian* [published](#) an extended interview with Omand.

He told the paper he used to think AI drones were a bad thing. But changed his mind:

My call is to really get some work done on this, so that weâ??re not left in a situation where there isnâ??t a moral component built into future AI-powered weapon systems.

Omand is [an advisor](#) to Paladin Capital Group. Paladin [has](#) major AI and cybersecurity interests. Campaign against the Arms Trade (CAAT) has [reported](#) Omand worked with arms firms Leonardo and Babcock. He previously led UK spy agency GCHQ during his time in the civil service.

The *Guardian* [reported](#) Omand felt:

AI technology was now capable of weighing the factors that go into a human drone operatorâ??s targeting decisions, such as whether a target was legitimate, whether there would be civilian casualties and whether the target has been correctly identified.

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This was not inventing new ethics, added Omand, but putting the current one used by the military into a form that can be deployed by a machine.

UK officials use Palantir software to decide what Palantir products to buy. Palantir founders Alex Karp and Peter Thiel openly espouse a far-right ideology.

The UK military police NHS and, allegedly, the Telegraph newspaper have started to use Palantir technology. Palantir is involved in Israel's genocide in Gaza. It maintains a permanent desk in southern Israel Trump's paramilitary immigration operations also use the firm's gear.

Military AI: in or on the loop?

Omand said it was a matter of "on the loop" systems versus "in the loop" systems:

The term "in the loop" is commonly used in debates about reigning in powerful AI systems and refers to a human being intimately involved in the decision-making process.

For Omand increasing AI decision making is:

It's a physical and operational reality. The term "on the loop" means you still have human supervision and it's human who sets the parameters of a mission.

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In that sense humans still have moral control. But individual decisions in the heat of combat, or where time is very short, you just won't have time for a human to make them.

Omand said he felt that it is now possible that:

The ultimate result [of AI advances] could be a moral decision-making system that is ethically superior to human decision making.

The former spy said

It could actually work, whereas relying on humans in a very fast-moving seconds matter for warfare is probably going to lead to far worse results in terms of collateral damage.

Not everyone is quite so chipper about the idea. Drone Wars director Chris Cole said

AI is simply not capable of making a judgment. It merely processes data, completely lacking the ability, for example, to distinguish civilians from combatants or to judge whether loss of life is proportionate to military advantage.

Cole is right, of course. Omand seems to enjoy nerding out over the abstract philosophical questions, but AI is a product of whatever is loaded into it. And that depends who controls it. In the case of firms like Palantir, we are talking about a clique of hyper-wealthy far-right Trump allies who are at ease with

genocidal violence. In short, David Omand can jog on.

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By [Joe Glenton](#)

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