

Starmer faces questions over visit to Palantir office alongside Mandelson

Former ambassador was also shareholder in lobbying group that counted US tech firm as a client

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Downing Street has refused to say whether Sir Keir Starmer knew Palantir was a client of Peter Mandelson's lobbying firm when they both visited the company in Washington last February — ahead of it winning a £240mn UK government contract.

At the time, Mandelson was both Britain's ambassador to the US and a shareholder in Global Counsel, the lobbying firm he co-founded in 2010 that counts Palantir as a client.

During the visit, which was arranged by Mandelson's office, Starmer met Palantir chief executive Alex Karp and the company's UK chief Louis Mosley at the company's showroom on February 27 2025. Starmer held a press conference with US President Donald Trump that same day.

Several months later Karp signed a strategic partnership with the Ministry of Defence, in which the government agreed to spend up to £750mn on Palantir's defence technology over the next five years.

As part of that agreement, Palantir last month won a £240mn contract from the MoD for "data analytics capabilities supporting critical strategic, tactical and live operational decision-making" over three years.

The deal was worth three times more than a previous MoD agreement the company signed in 2022.

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Mandelson stepped down as chair of Global Counsel but retained a large stake in the lobbying firm when he became ambassador in early 2025, with a promise to gradually sell it down over time.

The former peer agreed to put the shares, worth millions of pounds, in a “blind trust” to ensure compliance with UK government rules until they were sold off.

Global Counsel said on Friday that it had struck a deal for Mandelson to sell his 21 per cent stake in the business.

In June last year two Global Counsel lobbyists — including co-founder Benjamin Wegg-Prosser — attended a reception at the British embassy in Washington with Rachel Reeves, the chancellor of the exchequer.

Wegg-Prosser was Starmer’s “first choice” to be investment minister in the Labour government after the 2024 general election, although he rejected the offer in order to stay running the advisory firm.

Wegg-Prosser resigned on Friday following disclosures about Global Counsel’s links to the sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Palantir also has ties with the UK health service. Ahead of winning a contract worth up to £330mn in 2023 to help manage patient data, Palantir recruited two senior NHS officials specialising in AI and data, a move which raised concerns about the company’s growing ties to the health service.

Palantir has also hired civil servants from departments including the UK’s MoD and the Home Office and forged other links with British government officials. It has used former high-level civil servants, such as former MI6 chief Sir John Sawers, to broker introductions in the UK.