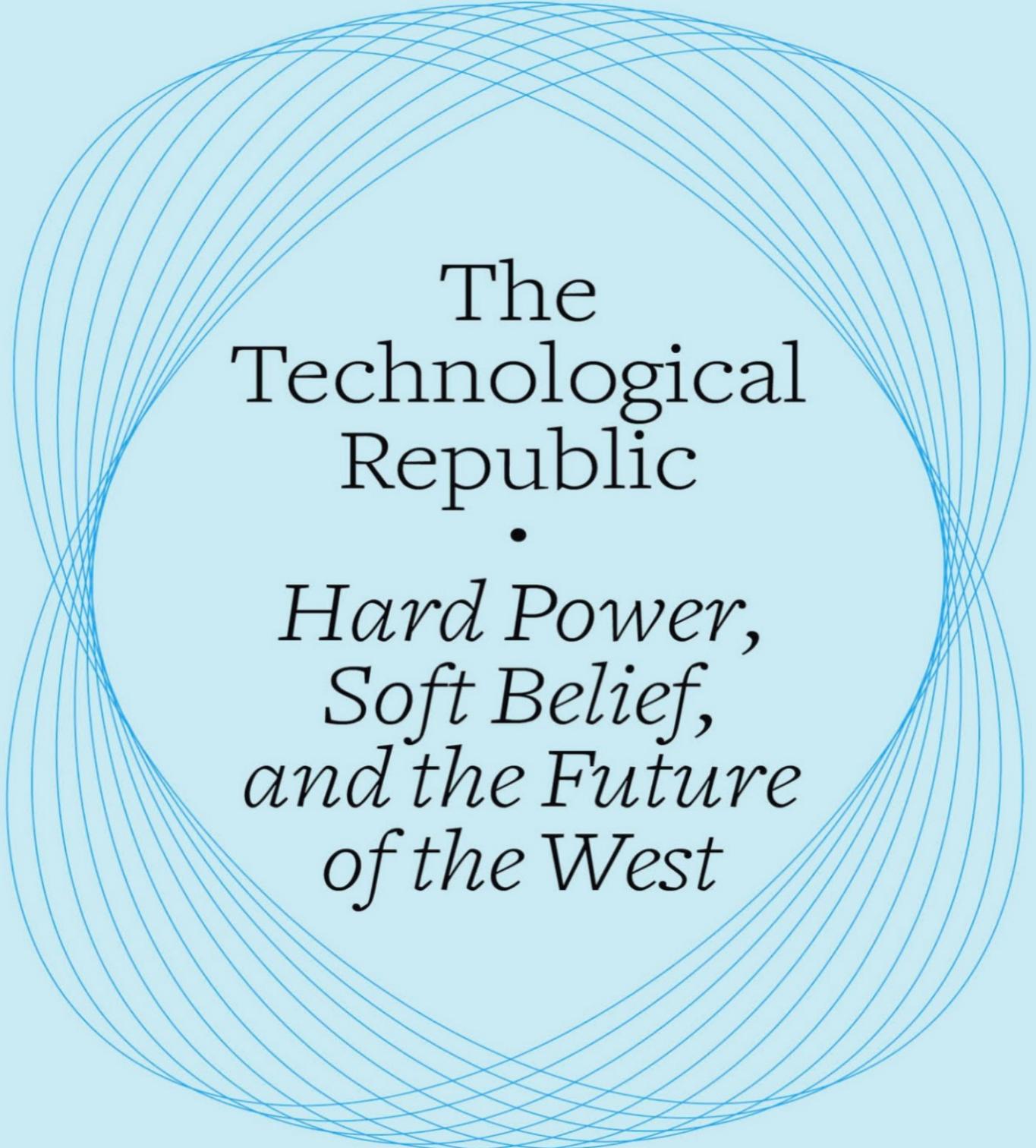


“Fascinating and important.”  
—Walter Isaacson, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author



The  
Technological  
Republic

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*Hard Power,  
Soft Belief,  
and the Future  
of the West*

Alexander C. Karp  
*and* Nicholas W. Zamiska

## Advance Praise for *The Technological Republic*

“The wizards of America’s digital revolution have produced many shiny consumer products and apps. But they have often remained aloof from engaging in a sense of national purpose or common good. This book is a rallying cry, as we enter the age of artificial intelligence, for a return to the World War II era of cooperation between the technology industry and government in order to pursue innovation that will advance our national welfare and democratic goals. A fascinating and important work.”

—WALTER ISAACSON, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“Alex Karp’s book might be titled *A Freethinker’s Manifesto*. He decries the arrogance and small-mindedness of Silicon Valley and explains his passionate commitment to defending the West and its cultural values. Karp is a polymath: He and his co-author, Nicholas Zamiska, take the reader on an intellectual tour from anthropology to art and music to history and philosophy to explain what matters for our survival and success. He subtly quotes many brilliant thinkers, but I think the best summation of Karp’s own iconoclastic style in creating his wildly innovative software company, Palantir, is a quote from the comedian John Mulaney: ‘Likability is a jail.’”

—DAVID IGNATIUS, *Washington Post* columnist and bestselling author  
of *Phantom Orbit*

“Alex Karp is what the Germans call a *Querdenker*—an orthogonal thinker, if not a downright contrarian one. Convinced that software could provide a service to national security as well as consumer gratification, he has built a unique business. *The Technological Republic* combines fascinating insights into Palantir’s mode of operation (it’s influenced by the way bees swarm, comedians improvise, and Isaiah Berlin thought) with Karp’s uncompromisingly national-liberal political philosophy. This is a stirring manifesto for a

new Manhattan Project to ensure U.S. victory in the AI-enabled wars of the future. ‘Silicon Valley, awake!’ is Karp and Zamiska’s message. ‘You risk losing everything if you choose cynicism over patriotism.’ ”

—NIALL FERGUSON, Milbank Family Senior Fellow at Stanford University’s Hoover Institution and *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Ascent of Money* and *Doom*

“In today’s complicated geopolitical, technological, and economic environment, the authors’ ability to be both well spoken and outspoken in *The Technological Republic* can help us understand important issues about the future prosperity of the United States and its allies. The book is by turns provocative and insightful, and Alex Karp’s resilience, patriotism, and depth of experience in our rapidly changing world provide instructive lessons and intellectual arguments for all of us to consider.”

—JAMIE DIMON, chairman and CEO of JPMorgan Chase

“*The Technological Republic* should be read by everyone who cares about how technology should contribute to the protection of American values and our security. Alex Karp and co-author Nicholas Zamiska are unafraid to offend those among the technocratic elite who have drifted away from vital national questions to instead develop a smug and complacent focus on shopping websites, photo-sharing apps, and other shallow but wildly lucrative endeavors. To them, there is no point to fighting over who gets the most luxurious stateroom on the *Titanic*. Without a renewed commitment to addressing the most existential national threats we face, serious risks to our country will continue to grow—rendering mere business success quite hollow. Readers may not agree with every observation in this compelling, essential book, but it demands to be read, particularly at this dawn of the age of Artificial Intelligence. Alex Karp is a true patriot—a loving critic of his industry and his country who wants them both to be better.”

—GENERAL JAMES N. MATTIS (USMC Retired)

“Karp’s rallying cry for a ‘Technological Republic’ sets out clearly what must happen for the democratic world to maintain its preeminence in the age of artificial intelligence. Engineers and technologists must use their talents to ensure the digital future enhances our democratic freedoms, not undermines them. This book is a wake-up call for tech entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley and beyond.”

—ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN, founder of the Alliance of Democracies  
Foundation and former NATO Secretary General (2009–2014)



# The Technological Republic

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*Hard Power,  
Soft Belief,  
and the Future  
of the West*

Alexander C. Karp  
*and* Nicholas W. Zamiska



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To those who seek to move the hearts of others and know their own



*You will never touch the hearts of others, if it does not emerge from your own.*

*(“Werdet ihr nie Herz zu Herzen schaffen, Wenn es euch nicht von Herzen geht.”)*

—JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

*The power to hurt is bargaining power. To exploit it is diplomacy—vicious diplomacy, but diplomacy.*

—THOMAS SCHELLING



*Fundamentalists rush in where liberals fear to tread.*

—MICHAEL SANDEL

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## *Preface*

**T**HIS BOOK IS THE PRODUCT of a nearly decade-long conversation between its authors regarding technology, our national project, and the perilous political and cultural challenges that we collectively face.

A moment of reckoning has arrived for the West. The loss of national ambition and interest in the potential of science and technology, and resulting decline of government innovation across sectors, from medicine to space travel to military software, have created an innovation gap. The state has retreated from the pursuit of the kind of large-scale breakthroughs that gave rise to the atomic bomb and the internet, ceding the challenge of developing the next wave of pathbreaking technologies to the private sector—a remarkable and near-total placement of faith in the market. Silicon Valley, meanwhile, turned inward, focusing its energy on narrow consumer products, rather than projects that speak to and address our greater security and welfare.

The current digital age has been dominated by online advertising and shopping, as well as social media and video-sharing platforms. The grandiose rallying cry of a generation of founders in Silicon Valley was simply to build. Few asked what needed to be built, and why. For decades, we have taken this focus—and indeed obsession in many cases—by the technology industry on consumer culture for granted, hardly questioning the direction, and we think misdirection, of capital and talent to the trivial and ephemeral. Much of what passes for innovation today, of what attracts

enormous amounts of talent and funding, will be forgotten before the decade is out.

The market is a powerful engine of destruction, creative and otherwise, but it often fails to deliver what is most needed at the right time. The Silicon Valley giants that dominate the American economy have made the strategic mistake of casting themselves as existing essentially outside the country in which they were built. The founders who created these companies in many cases viewed the United States as a dying empire, whose slow descent could not be allowed to stand in the way of their own rise and the new era's gold rush. Many of them essentially abandoned any serious attempt to advance society, to ensure that human civilization kept inching up the hill. The prevailing ethical framework of the Valley, a techno-utopian view that technology would solve all of humanity's problems, has devolved into a narrow and thin utilitarian approach, one that casts individuals as mere atoms in a system to be managed and contained. The vital yet messy questions of what constitutes a good life, which collective endeavors society should pursue, and what a shared and national identity can make possible have been set aside as the anachronisms of another age.

We can—we must—do better. The central argument that we advance in the pages that follow is that the software industry should rebuild its relationship with government and redirect its effort and attention to constructing the technology and artificial intelligence capabilities that will address the most pressing challenges that we collectively face. The engineering elite of Silicon Valley has an affirmative obligation to participate in the defense of the nation and the articulation of a national project—what is this country, what are our values, and for what do we stand—and, by extension, to preserve the enduring yet fragile geopolitical advantage that the United States and its allies in Europe and elsewhere have retained over their adversaries. It is, of course, the protection of individual rights against state encroachment that took its modern shape within “the West”—a concept that has been discarded by many, almost casually—without which the dizzying ascent of Silicon Valley would never have been possible.

The rise of artificial intelligence, which for the first time in history presents a plausible challenge to our species for creative supremacy in the world, has only heightened the urgency of revisiting questions of national identity and purpose that many had thought could be safely cast aside. We might have muddled through for years if not decades, dodging these more essential matters, if the rise of advanced AI, from large language models to the coming swarms of autonomous robots, had not threatened to upend the global order. The moment, however, to decide who we are and what we aspire to be, as a society and a civilization, is now.

Others might prefer or advocate for a more careful and deliberate division between the domains and concerns of the private and the public sectors. The blending of business and national purpose, of the discipline that the market can provide with an interest in the collective good, makes many uneasy. But purity comes at a cost. We believe that the reluctance of many business leaders to venture into, in any meaningful way and aside from the occasional and theatrical foray, the most consequential social and cultural debates of our time—including those regarding the relationship between the technology sector and the state—should give us pause. The decisions we collectively face are too consequential to be left unchallenged and unexamined. Those involved in constructing the technology that will animate and make possible nearly every aspect of our waking lives have a responsibility to expose and defend their views.

Our broader hope is that this book prompts a discussion of the role Silicon Valley can and should play in the advancement and reinvention of a national project, both in the United States and abroad—of what, beyond a firm and uncontroversial commitment to liberalism and its values, including the advancement of individual rights and fairness, constitutes our shared vision of the community to which we belong.

We recognize that a political treatise of this nature is an unusual project for those in the private sector to undertake. But the stakes are high, and growing. The technology industry's current reluctance to engage with these fundamental questions has deprived us of a positive vision for what this

country or any other can and should be in an era of increasing technological change and risk. We also believe that the values of the engineering culture that gave rise to Silicon Valley, including its obsessive focus on outcomes and disinterest in theater and posturing—while complex and imperfect—will in the end prove vital to our ability to advance our national security and welfare.

Too many leaders are reluctant to venture into the discussion, to articulate genuine belief—in an idea, a set of values, or a political project—for fear that they will be punished in the contemporary public sphere. A significant subset of our leaders, elected and otherwise, both teach and are taught that belief itself is the enemy and that a lack of belief in anything, except oneself perhaps, is the most certain path to reward. The result is a culture in which those responsible for making our most consequential decisions—in any number of public domains, including government, industry, and academia—are often unsure of what their own beliefs are, or more fundamentally if they have any firm or authentic beliefs at all.

We hope that this book, including by its very existence, suggests that a far richer discourse, a more meaningful and nuanced inquiry into our beliefs as a society, shared and otherwise, is possible—and, indeed, imperative. Those in the private sector should not cede this terrain to others in academia and elsewhere out of a perceived lack of authority or expertise. Palantir itself is an attempt—imperfect, evolving, and incomplete—at constructing a collective enterprise, the creative output of which blends theory and action. The company's deployment of its software and its work in the world constitute the action. This book attempts to offer the beginnings of an articulation of the theory.

ACK AND NWZ  
NOVEMBER 2024

• Part I •

## *The Software Century*

