

Tech Billionaire Peter Thiel Is An FBI informant Helping To Bust Tech Billionaires

Thu, 19 Oct 2023 10:58:06, swnof88, [category: news, post_tag: tech-billionaire-peter-thiel-is-an-fbi-informant-helping-to-bust-tech-billionaires]

Exclusive: Tech billionaire Peter Thiel was an FBI informant



Peter Thiel became an FBI informant in the summer of 2021, Insider has learned.
John Lamparski/Getty Images; Rebecca Zisser/Insider

[Peter Thiel buying up health data...](#)

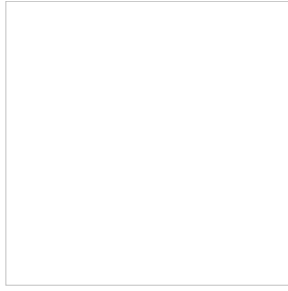
MS

[Mattathias Schwartz](#)

- ## [Surprising number of celebrities have worked as spies...](#)

[FTX Skirted Campaign Finance Laws To Funnel Stolen Customer Funds To Democrats](#)

- [About That Time SBF Accidentally Gave Beto O'Rourke \\$1 Million In Stolen Customer Funds...](#)



Peter Thiel has worn many hats over the years: Silicon Valley founder, Trump megadonor, cryptocurrency booster, democracy skeptic.

But there is yet another facet to Thiel, one that has remained secret until now: FBI informant.

In the summer of 2021, Insider has learned, Thiel began providing information as a "confidential human source," or CHS, to Johnathan Buma, a Los Angeles-based FBI agent who specializes in investigating political corruption and foreign-influence campaigns.

Charles Johnson, a longtime associate of Thiel's and a notorious figure in the far-right movement that Thiel has subsidized for a decade, told Insider in a statement that he helped recruit the billionaire as an informant by introducing him to Buma.

A source with knowledge of Thiel's relationship to the FBI, whose identity is known to Insider but who insisted on anonymity, corroborated Johnson's account, telling Insider that Johnson brokered a relationship between Thiel and Buma. Insider was able to confirm through an additional source that the FBI added Thiel to its formal roster of registered informants.

Another source close to Thiel told Insider that while they could not confirm that Thiel was a CHS, Thiel did speak to Buma occasionally. The source said that any assistance Thiel might have provided to the FBI should be understood as part of Thiel's gradual distancing of himself from Trump and the broader MAGA movement, which has vigorously criticized the FBI and other federal law-enforcement agencies.

Valuable information on a recurring basis

The FBI maintains a vast network of informants to keep tabs on organized crime, terrorist threats, extremist groups, and other criminal and intelligence targets. These sources, according to the bureau's [Confidential Human Source Policy Guide](#), are more than casual tipsters.

Confidential human sources enter "into a relationship with the FBI, and that relationship will forever affect the life of that individual," the guide says. "[They] will be either an 'FBI source' or a 'former FBI source' and, in turn, his or her conduct or misconduct will reflect upon the FBI." As such, the process for recruiting and maintaining such sources is highly regulated, requiring multiple layers of approval. Only people who are able to provide "valuable information ... on a recurring basis" are granted CHS status, according to the policy.



Then President-elect Donald Trump shakes hands with Peter Thiel during a meeting at Trump Tower in December 2016. Years later, Thiel would become a confidential human source for the FBI. He was directed not to report on his interactions with Trump or other US political figures, an associate said. Drew Angerer/Getty Images

As a CHS, Thiel was assigned a code name and an internal serial number to track his reporting. The information he passed on about foreign contacts and Silicon Valley intrigue was reviewed and "validated," or cross-checked against other sources, by his case agents and their colleagues.

Thiel did not respond to multiple requests for comment. A Thiel spokesperson stopped responding to inquiries after being told that Insider was reporting on Thiel's relationship with the FBI.

The FBI's national press office and Scott Horton, an attorney who represents Johnathan Buma, both declined to comment.

No reporting on political ties

Thiel is a citizen of Germany, the United States, and New Zealand; as of last year, he was [reportedly in the process](#) of acquiring yet another passport, from Malta. In 2016, he donated \$1.25 million to Trump's campaign and endorsed him from the stage at the Republican National Convention. After Trump won, Thiel served on his transition team.

Johnson, who said that he was also an informant for Buma, told Insider that he believes that Thiel's reporting to the FBI was largely limited to foreign contacts and attempts by foreign governments to penetrate Silicon Valley. Thiel has [publicly called on the FBI to investigate Google's ties to the Chinese government](#).

Thiel, Johnson said, was directed by the FBI not to report on his interactions with Donald Trump or other US political figures.

Many of the politicians that Thiel has bankrolled — including Trump, Sen. J.D. Vance of Ohio, and Blake Masters, a former Arizona senatorial candidate — have repeatedly attacked the bureau and its leadership in public. In 2022, Vance, whose campaign and affiliated PACs received a total of \$15 million from Thiel, falsely claimed that the FBI had [illegally wiretapped Trump's phone](#). Vance accused the bureau of "[harassing faithful Christians](#)" and pledged to block all of President Joe Biden's Department of Justice nominees in retaliation for the Trump prosecutions. (Most but not all of Thiel's donations occurred in early 2021, before the launch of Vance's campaign and the many false claims he made over the course of the race.)



While serving as an FBI informant, Thiel bankrolled the campaign of now-Senator J.D. Vance of Ohio. Vance has made a number of false and disparaging claims about the FBI.
Anna Moneymaker/Getty

Masters, whose campaign received \$20 million of support from Thiel, has endorsed the false conspiracy theory that undercover FBI agents fomented the January 6, 2021, insurrection and accused the FBI agents who executed a search warrant on Mar-a-Lago of "going after President Trump because they hate him." (As with Vance, most but not all of Thiel's donations to Masters occurred before Masters made his most inflammatory and baseless statements during the later stages of his campaign.)

Thiel is [reportedly planning](#) to sit on the sidelines of the 2024 election.

Neither Trump, Masters, nor Vance responded to requests for comment.

Doing business with the FBI

Some of Thiel's business interests rely on the FBI and other government agencies as potential revenue sources. He retains a 10% stake in Palantir, a data company that has sold more than a billion dollars of software and related services to the federal government, including the Pentagon, the CIA, the National Security Agency, and the FBI. A \$250 million contract with the US Army in September adds to the evidence that Palantir is essentially "a government service provider," a financial analyst [said](#).

Thiel [also backed](#) Boldend, a spyware company marketing itself as an American competitor to the Israeli NSO Group, Forbes reported last year. NSO's products have been [bought and tested](#) by the FBI.

(Mithril Capital, another entity Thiel cofounded, was [reportedly a subject of FBI interest in 2019](#), although nothing appears to have come of the inquiry. Mithril's co-founder did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The FBI did not respond to a question regarding the Mithril matter.)

Johnson, who revealed Thiel's FBI ties, is a tech investor and far-right agitator with long-standing ties to both Thiel and to the network of MAGA political operators surrounding Trump. He claims to have had a hand in founding Clearview, a facial-recognition startup, and Traitwell, a genomics company. [According to Forbes](#), he worked with Thiel to help vet and select senior staffers for the Trump transition in 2017.

Johnson claimed to be an FBI informant in [a lawsuit](#) he filed against Clearview's founders. He told Insider he recruited Thiel to serve as a CHS and introduced him to Buma, the FBI special agent who was Johnson's handler.



Charles Johnson (left) with Rep. Matt Gaetz (right) and Gaetz's now-wife Ginger Gaetz (center), in 2021. Johnson told Insider that he brokered an introduction between Thiel and the FBI special agent who would become his handler.
Charles Johnson

It's unclear whether Thiel remains a CHS for the FBI. Johnson told Insider that he believes that the relationship has been severed but declined to offer details; Buma wrote in his statement to the Senate Judiciary Committee that he was ordered to cease contact with all his sources in late 2022.

Johnson's ties to Trump and Thiel are well-documented. But he is also a self-identified "troll" with a history of spreading false information and smearing his rivals. In this instance, his claims are corroborated by two additional sources, as well as supported in part by a third who says Thiel and Buma spoke occasionally.

'Join up or get crushed'

Buma came forward in August as a whistleblower, alleging that the FBI under Trump and Attorney General Bill Barr [shut down his efforts](#) to determine whether Rudy Giuliani had been compromised by a Russian asset. Insider was [the first news organization to report on his claims](#).

In a statement prepared for the Senate Judiciary Committee, Buma said that FBI headquarters had closed his most valuable human sources, including one code-named "Genius," who had reported on far-right figures involved with planning the attack on the Capitol on January 6, 2021. Johnson told Insider that "Genius" was his CHS code name. Insider was able to confirm Johnson's identity as "Genius" with two additional sources. The statement does not mention Thiel.



Thiel speaking at the Republican National Convention in 2016. He donated \$1.25 million to Trump's campaign in 2016. He backed MAGA-aligned congressional candidates in 2020 and 2022. He has said he will be staying on the sidelines of the 2024 presidential race.
Alex Wong/Getty

In a written statement to Insider, Johnson said he was stepping forward as a CHS to support Buma's effort as a whistleblower to bring about what Buma believes to be necessary reforms in how the FBI handles informants. Johnson said that he was exposing Thiel's work as a CHS as retribution for what Johnson perceives to be bad decision-making by the Founders Fund, Thiel's venture-capital firm.

Johnson also told Insider he felt betrayed that Thiel did not invest in Johnson's own startups, which he had expected Thiel to do in exchange for introducing him to Buma. Johnson said that he told Thiel that by offering the FBI a window into his contacts with foreign governments, he could demonstrate his loyalty to the United States.

He described Thiel's motivation for working with Buma as a kind of hedge in an environment where extravagant wealth no longer affords the safety it used to. He pointed to [ProPublica's reporting on Thiel's income-tax avoidance](#) and the death of Jeffrey Epstein, [who had reportedly scheduled several meetings](#) with Thiel.

"I told him to join up or get crushed," Johnson said.

The FBI's recruitment of Thiel as a CHS puts him among the bureau's most prominent assets, but he is not alone among right-wing figures who have collaborated with the bureau. Trump himself [offered to help](#) the FBI fight organized crime in Atlantic City in the early 1980s. Truth Social, the Trump-owned social-media company, has [quietly tipped the FBI off](#) to users who threaten violence, even as it seeks to cash in on their anger. At least two of the rioters who showed up to storm the Capitol on January 6 were also FBI informants, as was Enrique Tarrio, the Proud Boys leader who was sentenced to 22 years in prison for seditious conspiracy and other felonies stemming from the Capitol breach. Tarrio [reportedly served](#) as a source for federal and local law enforcement, assisting with the prosecution of more than a dozen people.

Mattathias Schwartz is chief national security correspondent at Insider. He can be reached at schwartz79@protonmail.com.