Pentagon awards $10 billion cloud computing contract to Microsoft

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The US Department of Defense unexpectedly awarded a massive contract for cloud computing services to Microsoft Corporation on October 25, snubbing Amazon, which had been widely considered the front-runner for the ten-year agreement.

A statement on the Defense Department's website said that the Redmond, Washington firm had been selected for the Joint Enterprises Defense Infrastructure (JEDI) Cloud contract which will "provide enterprise level, commercial Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) and Platform as a Service (PaaS) to support Department of Defense" (DoD) with a "ceiling value" of $10 billion and an expected completion date of October 24, 2029, "if all options are exercised."

Amazon Web Services (AWS) had been expected to win the contract because the firm has been managing a $600 million cloud computing contract with the Central Intelligence Agency since 2013. An AWS spokesman told National Public Radio on Saturday, "We're surprised about this conclusion. AWS is the clear leader in cloud computing, and a detailed assessment purely on the comparative offerings clearly lead to a different conclusion."

According to news reports, among the reasons the DoD selected Microsoft were objections from other contractors as well as the growing political hostility of President Trump toward Amazon and its CEO Jeff Bezos. Bezos also owns the *Washington Post,* which has been a primary media backer of the Democratic Party and its "Russian meddling" campaign and the impeachment inquiry against Trump.

Other giant tech firms such as Oracle, IBM and Google had objected to the increasingly cozy relationship between Amazon and the federal government. Oracle filed a lawsuit in late 2018 arguing that the Defense Department unfairly favored Amazon and that the bidding process was rigged. The case was dismissed by a federal judge who pointed out that Oracle had not met the bidding requirements.

IBM filed a complaint with the Government Accountability Office, arguing that the Defense Department's idea of a single cloud environment for a decade does not "provide the strongest possible foundation for the 21st century battlefield." Google dropped out of the bidding because, according to an official statement, the project conflicted with the company's new artificial intelligence principles.

In August, when the contract award was originally scheduled to be announced, it was reported that Trump ordered the decision put on hold and told Defense Secretary Mark Esper to investigate the complaints of favoritism toward Amazon by the other tech companies.

Clearly, if Trump disqualified AWS from winning the DoD contract based on political considerations—many tech reports said the deal was "gift-wrapped for Amazon"—this would put the contracting process squarely in the middle of the conflicts within the ruling establishment over strategic foreign and military policy questions that have sparked impeachment.

According to a report in the *New York Times*, "In public, Mr. Trump said there were other 'great companies' that should have a chance at the contract. But a speechwriter for former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis says in a book scheduled for publication next week that Mr. Trump had wanted to foil Amazon and give the contract to another company."

Whatever the reasons for placing the JEDI contract with Microsoft instead of Amazon, the unfolding process shows how the US military has become heavily dependent upon and increasingly interconnected with the privately owned American technology monopolies.

For their part, the Silicon Valley corporations are eager and willing participants in the deployment of big data, online information and artificial intelligence technologies for the purpose of US militarism and war and, of course, the enormous profits that come along with such deals.

In the case of Google, the company backed out of bidding on JEDI after a group of tech employees objected to participation in the Pentagon's Project Maven, a program that develops AI battlefield technologies. Google staff opposition forced the company to discontinue participation in the program after the contract expires this year. It also resulted in the adoption of AI principles stating the company would not design or deploy "weapons or other technologies whose principal purpose or implementation is to cause or directly facilitate injury to people."

The JEDI program was originally conceived of in 2017 as a single secure global computing platform that would address the US military's "lack of a coordinated enterprise-level approach to cloud infrastructure" that "makes it virtually impossible for our warfighters and leaders to make critical data-driven decisions at 'mission-speed,' negatively affecting outcomes."

Within a year, Deputy Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan issued a memo called "Accelerating Cloud Adoption Update" which emphasized the importance "a full and open competition to acquire a modern enterprise cloud services solution that can support unclassified, secret and top secret information." A major consideration for accelerating the JEDI project was the growing awareness within US ruling and military circles that China is in a race to develop its own military cloud computing platform.

A central component of the JEDI program is its mission critical support for the Pentagon's artificial intelligence plans. According to Lt. Gen. Jack Shanahan, the director of the Department of Defense Joint Artificial Intelligence Center (JAIC), "You cannot get to true impact at scale with AI without an enterprise cloud solution."

The US military is working on the basis of a dystopian theory of "algorithmic warfare" that will weaponize artificial intelligence. As reported by Ben Tarnoff at the *Guardian*, "The US military knows how to kill. The harder part is figuring out whom to kill. In a more traditional war, you simply kill the enemy. But who is the enemy in a conflict with no national boundaries, no fixed battlefields, and no conventional adversaries? This is the perennial question of the forever war."

With the merger of JEDI, AI and algorithmic warfare, the US military is deploying the most advanced technologies of modern society—that otherwise would be used to progressively transform the lives of the world's population under socialism—for the most barbaric purposes.

It should be expected that the growth of the class struggle on a world scale along with mass political opposition to both capitalism and imperialism will continue to emerge among engineers and tech employees within the global tech industries. It is significant that one year ago, a group of Microsoft employees issued an open letter titled, "Don't Bid on the US Military's Project JEDI."

The open letter says in part, "Many Microsoft employees don't believe that what we build should be used for waging war. When we decided to work at Microsoft, we were doing so in the hopes of 'empowering every person on the planet to achieve more,' not with the intent of ending lives and enhancing lethality." These are the sentiments of workers all over the world and it is becoming more and more clear that only the program of socialist internationalism is capable of fulfilling them.

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