

UK spy chiefs seal cloud data deal with Amazon: FT

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UK intelligence agencies have entrusted classified data to Amazon's cloud computing arm AWS in a deal designed to vastly speed up their espionage capabilities, the Financial Times reported on Tuesday.

The secret contract was signed this year and experts estimate its value at

£500 million (\$690 million) to £1 billion, the newspaper said, citing people familiar with the discussions.

It was said to be spearheaded by Britain's cybersecurity agency GCHQ, which had wanted to find a UK cloud provider but decided that none had the capability of Amazon Web Services.

The arrangement reportedly covers MI5, the UK's domestic security service, and MI6, its foreign arm, as well as other government branches, but Amazon itself will not have access to the data.

The UK government declined to comment on the substance of the report.

"We've used private-sector technology in national security applications for decades, to keep the country safe," Prime Minister Boris Johnson's official spokesman told reporters.

"And obviously ensuring the security of this technology is an absolute priority, and the same protections are afforded to classified information regardless of the provider of the technology used," he said.

Professor Alan Woodward, a computer security expert at the University of Surrey, said GCHQ had "an embarrassment of riches" in terms of data-gathering but that it takes time to sort through it.

"The likes of Amazon, Microsoft can keep a large amount of data live—that can be searched—in minutes rather than in days. It's more agile," he told AFP.

Woodward said it was likely that Amazon had agreed to build a UK facility that would be accessible only to the spy services, and noted that Britain and the US were already close intelligence partners.

The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) struck a cloud data deal with AWS in 2013 and last year expanded the contract to allow bids from Google, IBM, Microsoft and Oracle.

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