Why is Amazon building a 'top secret' $2 billion cloud for Australia's military intelligence?

July 5 2024, by David Tuffley

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Amazon has secured a A$2 billion contract with the [Australian Signals Directorate](#)—the agency responsible for foreign signals intelligence and information security. A local subsidiary of Amazon Web Services will

build a [Top Secret Cloud](#) to provide secure data storage for military intelligence.

The deal will securely manage top secret data vital to Australia's national security. This contract is expected to last over a decade. It will build three secure data centers at undisclosed locations in Australia.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese [stated this project will](#) "bolster our defense and national intelligence community to ensure they can deliver world-leading protection for our nation."

Set to be operational by 2027, the project is expected to create over 2,000 jobs and cost billions more in operating expenses over the coming years. So—why Amazon? And does Australia really need it?

Why Australia needs a secret cloud

Australia faces a rising tide of security challenges. The capability to securely store military intelligence is vital to guard against a host of potential threats.

The Australian Signals Directorate's Director-General, Rachel Noble, explained [the project will provide a](#) "state-of-the-art collaborative space for our intelligence and defense community to store and access top secret data."

The cloud is also part of the directorate's [REDSPICE](#) program, which aims to improve Australia's intelligence capabilities and cyber defenses. By moving to a modern cloud system, Australia can better protect its sensitive data. It will also improve coordination between different security agencies.

Why Amazon Web Services?

You may only know of Amazon as an online retail giant. [Amazon Web Services](#) (AWS) is a tech subsidiary of Amazon. It was actually a pioneer in the cloud services business.

Today, it provides cloud computing services to [tens of thousands of businesses](#) and governments worldwide.

AWS's [market share](#) among the top ten cloud providers grew to 50.1% in 2024. Microsoft Azure and Google Cloud are the next two largest providers.

Known for its reliability, scalability and security, AWS already provides similar services to other governments and organizations globally. This includes the United States Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), as well as all three of the [United Kindgom's intelligence agencies](#).

Will the new cloud be safe?

When we think of "the cloud," we often picture the internet we use every day.

However, the Top Secret Cloud that AWS will build for Australia's military is very different. It's a private, highly secure system entirely insulated from the public internet.

While AWS is the contractor, the data centers will be built to the Australian Signal Directorate's [specifications](#).

The cloud will use advanced encryption to protect data. No system is

completely hack-proof, but this setup makes it extremely difficult for unauthorized individuals to access the information.

The Australian government has emphasized it will maintain full control over the data stored in the cloud. Only staff with high-level security clearance will work on the project.

Broader trend

This move to a secure cloud is part of a broader trend in government and military technology worldwide. Many countries are updating their old computer systems to take advantage of new technology. This can offer greater flexibility, better performance, and potentially lower costs in the long run.

The project also has international implications. The Top Secret Cloud will ease collaboration with partner nations.

Similar data clouds have already been established in the US and UK, allowing for the sharing of large amounts of information between allies. It's worth noting that potential adversaries are also investing heavily in similar technology.

By developing this Top Secret Cloud, Australia aims to stay ahead of the game in the rapidly evolving cyber threat environment. In the coming years, we'll likely see more countries adopt similar cloud systems for their defense and intelligence needs.

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