

Report says Israeli military in Gaza relying on help from Amazon, Google and Microsoft

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New York, August 8 (RHC)-- The news outlet +972 has revealed the Israeli army has been using Amazon's cloud services to store massive amounts of surveillance information on the population in Gaza.

The Israeli army has been using Amazon's cloud service and artificial intelligence (AI) tools from Microsoft and Google for military purposes amid the increasing amount of data on Palestinians and Gaza, according to reports by +972 Magazine and the Hebrew-language news site Local Call.

An audio recording they obtained reveals that Col. Racheli Dembinsky, commander of the Israeli army's Center of Computing and Information Systems Unit, disclosed the use of these technologies during a presentation to around 100 military and industrial personnel on July 10.

The Center of Computers and Information Systems oversees all data processing for the Israeli army.

Dembinsky's presentation, the first public confirmation, indicated the army's use of cloud storage and AI services from civilian tech giants in its ongoing onslaught on the Gaza Strip since Oct. 7.

The logos of Amazon Web Services (AWS), Google Cloud and Microsoft Azure appeared twice in Dembinsky's lecture slides, which highlighted the army's "operational cloud" typically stored on internal military servers.

Dembinsky described this internal cloud as a "weapons platform" that includes applications for marking bombing targets, a portal for viewing live drone footage over Gaza's skies, and fire, command and control systems.

She noted that following the Israeli army's ground invasion of Gaza in late October 2023, "the internal military systems quickly became overloaded due to the enormous number of soldiers and military personnel who were added to the platform as users, causing technical problems that threatened to slow down Israel's military functions," according to +972 Magazine.

Cloud services enhance Israel's operational efficiency in Gaza

Dembinsky emphasized that cloud services from major tech firms offer unlimited storage without the obligation to physically store the servers in the military's computer centers.

She highlighted the advanced AI capabilities provided by these services as the most significant advantage.

Working with these companies has granted the Israeli army "very significant operational effectiveness" in the besieged Palestinian enclave, she said.

While Dembinsky did not specify which services were purchased or how they helped the army, the Israeli army told +972 Magazine and Local Call that classified information and attack systems stored in the internal cloud were not transferred to the public clouds provided by tech firms.

However, detailed research by +972 Magazine and Local Call revealed that the Israeli army stores some intelligence gathered through mass surveillance of Gaza's population on servers managed by Amazon's AWS.

The research also uncovered that certain cloud providers have supplied numerous AI capabilities and services to the Israeli army since the beginning of Israel's war on Gaza.

Infinite storage capability in Gaza

The investigation involved sources in the Israeli Ministry of Defense, the Israeli arms industry, three cloud storage companies, and seven Israeli intelligence officers.

Sources indicated that the Israeli army uses private sector resources to enhance technological capacity in Gaza attacks.

Three intelligence sources described the army's cooperation with Amazon as "particularly close." AWS provided a server farm for the Israeli Military Intelligence Directorate to store large-scale intelligence aiding the army in the war.

According to multiple sources, for the army, the AWS public cloud storage system offers "endless storage" for intelligence on nearly "everyone" in Gaza.

Sources stressed that the vast intelligence collected from the surveillance of Palestinians in Gaza could not be stored solely on military servers, compelling the army to turn to the cloud services offered by tech companies.

In addition, the vast amount of information stored via Amazon's cloud services even helped to confirm aerial assassination strikes in the Gaza Strip.

Increase in cloud service purchases

In 2021, Google and Amazon signed a \$1.2 billion contract called Project Nimbus with the Israeli government to encourage ministries to transfer their information systems to the public cloud servers of the companies and obtain advanced services.

Hundreds of employees at both companies later published an open letter calling for cutting ties with the Israeli army. Google dismissed 50 employees who participated in protests organized as part of these calls after Oct. 7.

Multiple security sources informed +972 Magazine and Local Call that since October, the Israeli army has significantly increased its procurement of services from Google Cloud, Amazon's AWS and Microsoft Azure, with most purchases from the former two companies happening through the Nimbus contract.

Sources said the Amazon system contains an "infinite store" of information for the army to use.

Amazon's aggressive competition with Microsoft

Sources in the army and the weapons industry said that Microsoft Azure was Israel's main cloud provider, selling services to the Defense Ministry and army units that deal with classified information.

According to one source, Azure was supposed to provide the military with the cloud on which surveillance information would be stored, but Amazon offered a better price.

Sources in the cloud companies said that since Amazon secured the Nimbus tender, it has been aggressively competing with Azure, aiming to become the military's top service provider.

Recently, Amazon has worked closely with the security agencies of the US, UK and Australia.

This month, the Australian government announced a \$1.3 billion investment to create a cloud for "top secret" intelligence material on Amazon's servers.

While Google and Microsoft declined to respond to requests for comment as part of the investigation, Amazon Web Services said "AWS is focused on making the benefits of our world-leading cloud technology available to all our customers, wherever they are located."

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