

# Press release: Semantic Visions wins \$250,000 Tech Challenge to Combat Disinformation

Semantic Visions has been announced as the winner of a \$250,000 grant to help fund the development of cutting-edge new technology to combat disinformation online.

“The Tech Challenge” was created as part of a transatlantic crackdown on the spread of disinformation – a collaboration between the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Cabinet Office and the US State Department’s Global Engagement Centre (GEC).

Held yesterday in Bristol, the competition brought technology companies from across the globe together and gave them the opportunity to showcase new product ideas for tackling disinformation.

After a competitive pitch process, Semantic Visions secured the funding award to finance their platform which provides real-time detection of adversarial propaganda and disinformation and gives user joint situational awareness of event and emerging trends.

‘The Tech Challenge’ forms part of a series of UK Government initiatives to address the growing threat of disinformation and ensure citizens are safe online.

Margot James, Minister for Digital said:

This event brought our international partners together to help foster creative solutions to a shared problem – I congratulate all who helped bring it to life. Soon I will be setting out the actions UK government has taken to address this issue in the publication of our Online Harms White Paper. It will establish a range of new measures – including clear responsibilities for tech companies – to improve the safety of UK citizens online.

CEO of Semantic Visions, Frantisek Vrabel, winner of the competition said:

Having worked on creating ways to counter disinformation since 2016, this is the first major recognition we have received on our work. It is an honour and a pleasure to receive this grant. We look forward to working with the UK and U.S government on helping to protect democracy.

Semantic Visions is a Czech company that collects and analyses 90% of the

world's online news in real time, and using their Open Source Intelligence platform they will work with the UK and US to provides real-time detection of adversarial propaganda and disinformation and act as an early warning system for governments and institutions.

Lea Gabrielle, Special Envoy & Coordinator of the U.S.-based Global Engagement Center said

The Global Engagement Center first kicked off its Tech Demo Series in the summer of last year to identify technological solutions and build stronger public-private partnerships in the fight against foreign propaganda and disinformation. Today's Tech Challenge in Bristol, organized in close partnership with the UK government, shows how far this effort has already come and the potential it has to continue to grow.

The competition attracted entries from both sides of the pond and 7 finalists were selected from UK, Indiana, Bulgaria, Italy, Ukraine, and the Czech Republic. Deep Seer and the Changing Character of War Centre represented the UK.

Minister for the Constitution, Chloe Smith said:

A flourishing democracy is based on citizens being empowered, through fact-based public debate, to make informed decisions. The UK Government has been publicly consulting on the requirement for digital election material to include the details of who has produced it and I am encouraged to see these tech companies playing their part to help protect the news environment from disinformation.

In addition to exhibiting technology companies, speakers included experts from the UK Government, NATO, and EUCOM, who provided further insight on the challenges brought by the ever-evolving online media landscape.

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## **Notes to editors**

Competitors were judged by a panel of senior UK and US government representatives. Their product ideas where reviewed against their potential to tackle the following criteria:

- Digital defence (content moderation)
- Indicators & warnings (social media monitoring)
- Information assurance (blockchain-based info authentication)
- De-anonymisation (social media credentialing)
- Fact discernment (crowd-sourced fact checking)
- Psychological resilience (tech-enabled media literacy training)

## **Description of Entries**

- Semantic Visions is a Czech company that collects and analyses 90% of the world's online news in real time. Using data analytics and risk assessment that have developed and operate a complex Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) system, which allows them to detect unknown events, identify trends and put them into context to provide actionable intelligence. This includes being able to better identify disinformation and act as an early warning system for governments and institutions.
- DeepSeer is a UK company that provides a new and unique online platform that tracks and maps online influencers. DeepSeer looks at what people see, as well as what people say, to help build a view of influence at both an individual and network level. This platform can be used to help better identify how disinformation is spread online.
- Changing Character of War Centre is a partnership between the University of Oxford and Artis Looking Glass, which seeks to marry up social science with machine learning and artificial intelligence, to provide more robust defensive measures against online hostile state disinformation campaigns.
- Observatory on Social Media is a programme from the Indiana University Network Science Institute that provides a suite of free online tools for journalists, NGOs and citizens to help identify BOTs and disinformation, including Hoaxy- a visualisation tool for misinformation diffusion networks and Botometer- a tool to help spot twitter bots.
- Sensika Technologies is a Bulgarian based company that works with NGOs and Universities to build and provide digital tools and global media monitoring analytics across all the social and broadcast media, and would use their tools to help better identify disinformation.
- WaterOnMars is a social media monitoring company that uses tailor made tools to provide social media intelligence, identify new trends and reputational threats; including the diffusion of disinformation through organised BOT networks.
- Information System Security Partners is a Ukrainian cyber security company that seeks to set up a non-for-profit platform for NGOs, activists and journalists to crowd source and geographically map the origin, spread and dispersion of disinformation.

## **UK Panellists**

- Clare Cameron: Head of Innovation, Ministry of Defence
- Professor Tom Rodden: Chief Scientific Advisor at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

## **US Panellists:**

- Daniel Kimmage: Deputy Special Envoy, Global Engagement Centre
- Patricia Watts: Acting Chief Science & Security Office, Global Engagement Centre
- Justin 'JD' Maddox: Senior Technology Advisor, Global Engagement Centre

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New technologies demonstrated at Dragon's Den style 'Tech Challenge' will help fight disinformation and keep citizens safe online

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## **Press release: Sellafield's 'locked vault' ready to be emptied**

Machinery to remove waste from one of Europe's most hazardous nuclear buildings is now in place.

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## **Press release: Sellafield's 'locked vault' ready to be emptied**

Engineering teams have installed equipment to scoop up and remove material from Sellafield's Pile Fuel Cladding Silo.

Safely decommissioning the 70-year-old facility is one of the highest priorities for Sellafield Ltd and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority.

The building was originally designed to be permanently sealed, meaning innovative ways of accessing and removing its inventory have had to be developed.

The retrievals equipment is contained in 9 huge modules.

It has been lifted into place on top of a modern 'superstructure' built on the side of the building.

Waste retrieval trials are expected to begin later this year, moving into larger scale waste removal in 2020.

Kevin Brown, Head of the Pile Fuel Cladding Silo programme at Sellafield Ltd, said:

The teams are incredibly proud to have completed one the most complex challenges in the site's history.

We have opened up a building designed to be sealed forever and engineered a way for getting the waste out.

After years of intensive planning, preparation and investment, seeing the retrievals modules in place next to the Pile Fuel Cladding Silo is a huge moment for those involved.

It has been a real example of collaboration, working together with Bechtel Cavendish Nuclear Solutions to take us one step closer to significantly reducing the UK's nuclear hazard.

The nuclear site is moving into a 100-year programme of environmental remediation, which means speeding up the decommissioning of old facilities and moving the waste into safe containment for centuries to come.

The Pile Fuel Cladding Silo was built in the 1950s when the site's purpose was to make material for nuclear weapons.

In 2016, six holes were cut into the side of the silo, the first breaking of the structure since it was built.

Six giant steel doors were then installed to provide a safe barrier between the outside world and the waste inside the silo, until it starts to be removed by the 'grabbing' machine.

To remove the waste, a crane will extend through the hole in the side of the silo, a grabber will be lowered to scoop the waste up, the grabber then lifts and retreats back through the hole before depositing the waste in a specially-designed metal box, for safe and secure storage in a modern facility which is currently being built at the site.

The work is being carried out in collaboration with Bechtel Cavendish Nuclear Solutions, a US-UK joint venture appointed by Sellafield Ltd to help design, manufacture, test and install the machinery needed to empty the silo.

The equipment has been trialled at Rosyth, Scotland at a mock-up model of the silo. It took 18 months to design and 18 months to manufacture, test and commission – an incredibly tight timescale for a nuclear process.

Paul Smith, managing director of nuclear services at Cavendish Nuclear said:

Cavendish Nuclear is committed to driving down the cost of decommissioning by delivering innovative nuclear clean-up solutions that are faster, safer and more economical.

Our collaboration with Bechtel and Sellafield Ltd on a project of a strategic national importance is set to give Sellafield the tools it needs to accelerate hazard reduction at the site.

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