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France, UAE Hacked Telegram Founder Durov's Phone in 2017 – WSJ

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French and Emirati spies hacked Telegram founder Pavel Durov's iPhone in 2017, The Wall Street Journal reported Wednesday, citing anonymous sources familiar with the matter.

The joint spy operation code-named "Purple Music" reportedly stemmed from concerns about the Islamic State's use of Telegram, a private messaging app, for recruitment and plotting attacks — and came years before Durov's surprise arrest in Paris over the weekend.

France had been pursuing a "long-term effort" to "compromise Telegram," WSJ cited an unnamed former French intelligence official as saying, though they did not comment on the hacking of Durov's phone.

It was not clear from WSJ's reporting whether French President Emmanuel Macron was aware of the hack and whether the spies still had backdoor access to Durov's phone.

The newspaper also said there was no indication that the hacking of Durov's phone played a

role in his detention on Saturday.

Politico reported Tuesday that Macron was an early adopter of Telegram while French authorities were frustrated by the app because of its reluctance to cooperate.

Related article: Why Pavel Durov's Detention Shook Both the Russian Opposition and Putin's Regime

Durov, 39, was detained at Le Bourget airport outside Paris late Saturday on suspicion of 12 offenses related to failing to curb criminal content on Telegram.

He is set to learn on Wednesday whether he will face charges and be remanded in custody.

Durov left Russia in 2014 after claiming he faced pressure to share users' private messages from the social media website VKontakte with Russian law enforcement officials.

Despite his public break with Russia, he traveled to the country more than 50 times between 2015 and 2021, the IStories investigative outlet reported Tuesday, citing leaked FSB data.

WSJ reported that Macron attempted to persuade the tech entrepreneur to move Telegram to Paris when the two had lunch together in the French capital in 2018.

Durov ultimately decided to base Telegram in Dubai.

He obtained both French and UAE citizenship in 2021, and Abu Dhabi invested $75 million into Telegram that year.

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