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Foreign Intelligence Can See Russian Military's Telegram Correspondence, Minister Claims

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Digital Development Minister Maksut Shadayev. **Yaroslav Chingaev / Moskva News Agency**

Foreign intelligence services can see Telegram correspondence sent by Moscow's troops in Ukraine, Russia's digital development minister claimed on Wednesday after authorities moved to curb the popular messaging app's operations in the country.

"While Telegram was initially considered a fairly anonymized service and was used by our military at the start of the special military operation, there is now ample evidence confirmed by our agencies that foreign intelligence services have access to Telegram correspondence," Maksut Shadayev said in the lower-house State Duma.

He said the alleged access was being used in combat operations against Russian forces in Ukraine but did not specify which country's intelligence services were involved.

Shadayev also accused Telegram of ignoring 150,000 requests from state communications

watchdog Roskomnadzor to remove banned content, including child pornography and advertisements for illegal drugs.

He said 150,000 fraud-related crimes had been committed via the messenger, including 30,000 cases linked to acts of sabotage and terrorism.

Telegram did not immediately respond to Shadayev's claims.

The Dubai-headquartered company and its founder Pavel Durov have previously denied sharing user data or private messages with governments.

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Authorities have decided not to restrict Telegram in areas near the front lines in Ukraine, Shadayev added.

"Our military can keep communicating there, but we hope that over time they will switch to another messenger," he said.

Roskomnadzor announced new restrictions on Telegram's operations in Russia last week, accusing the company of failing to combat fraud and to protect the personal data of its users.

Some State Duma deputies and pro-war bloggers have slammed the restrictions, arguing that they could disrupt command and control systems for Russian forces in Ukraine, where Telegram remains a primary means of communication.

The Kremlin has cast doubt on that assessment.

"I don't think it's possible to imagine that frontline communications are maintained via Telegram or some other messenger," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Away from the front lines, Telegram's 93.6 million users in Russia rely on the app for a wide range of everyday needs, from consuming news and coordinating work communications to receiving updates from government officials.

Telegram founder Durov accused authorities in Moscow of restricting the app in an attempt to force Russians to switch to Max, the government-backed messenger that critics argue was created for surveillance and political censorship.

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