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‘Deliberate Fabrication’: Telegram Denies Foreign Spies Can See Messages Russian Soldiers Send

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Ilya Moskovets / URA.RU / TASS

Telegram has denied claims by Russia’s Digital Development Minister Maksut Shadayev that foreign intelligence services can see messages sent by Russian soldiers in Ukraine, as authorities continue tightening restrictions on the popular messaging app.

“No breaches of Telegram’s encryption have ever been found... The Russian government’s allegation that our encryption has been compromised is a deliberate fabrication,” Telegram told Reuters on Thursday.

On Wednesday, Shadayev told State Duma lawmakers there is “ample evidence” that covert access to Telegram messages was used in combat operations against Russian forces fighting in Ukraine. He did not specify which country’s intelligence services were involved.

Shadayev spoke after public uproar over state media regulator Roskomnadzor announcing

new restrictions on Telegram last week.

Roskomnadzor accused Telegram of failing to combat fraud and to protect the personal data of its users, while Shadayev said the company ignored 150,000 government requests to remove banned content, including child pornography.

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Telegram said the new curbs were "intended to justify outlawing Telegram and forcing citizens on to a state-controlled messaging platform engineered for mass surveillance and censorship." The company was referring to Max, Russia's government-backed messenger.

WhatsApp, with more than 100 million users in Russia, made similar accusations last week after the Kremlin confirmed that Roskomnadzor was blocking the messaging app.

Shadayev expressed hope that Russian soldiers would switch to Max, but vowed to keep Telegram working in areas near the front lines in Ukraine after pro-war bloggers and State Duma members argued the curbs would disrupt command and control systems for Russian troops.

Telegram, based in Dubai, and its founder, Pavel Durov, have regularly denied sharing user data or private messages with governments.

Meanwhile, President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday that the latest restrictions did not affect the Kremlin's own Telegram channel.

"We have many compatriots abroad, and many foreigners are interested in the president's agenda. It's in our interest to communicate that agenda," Peskov told a journalist with the Telegram channel Life, who said he could not load any of the Kremlin's videos.

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