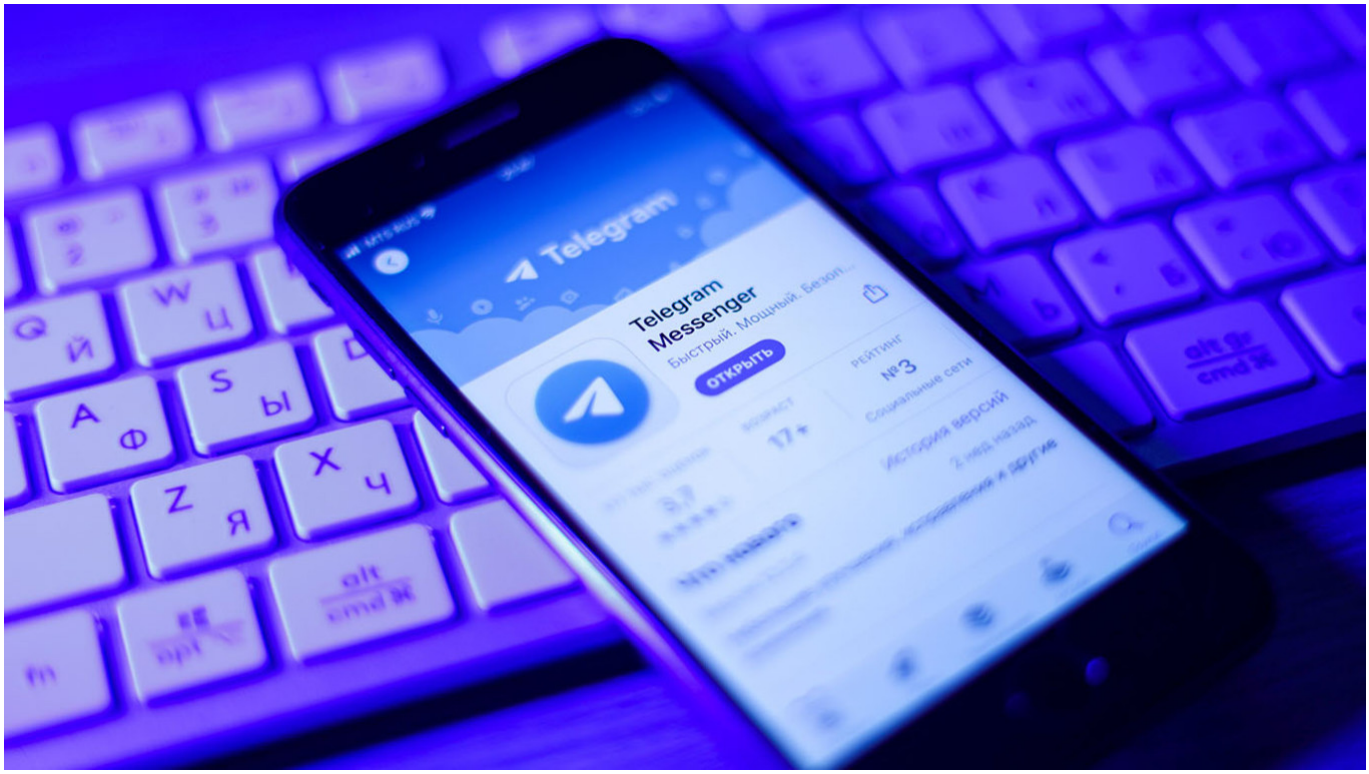
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Russia Plans to Block Telegram in April, Sources Say

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Moskva News Agency

Russia plans to block Telegram this spring amid government calls to tighten media controls over claims the messaging app serves as a haven to criminals and is being used by foreign intelligence services as a tool of "hybrid warfare" against the country, Russian media reported Thursday, citing anonymous sources familiar with the matter.

Two sources close to the Kremlin told the RBC news outlet that the decision to block the platform was "final," while a third source familiar with internal government discussions on the issue said Telegram could be made inaccessible inside Russia as early as April.

The independent outlet The Bell, citing its own sources in the telecom industry, reported that Russian authorities have already informed major internet and mobile providers of the decision to block Telegram.

"Things could still change over the next month and a half — there are differing views within the government on this issue. But for now, the information we have is that there will be a full

block beginning on April 1," one of those sources said.

Russia's media regulator Roskomnadzor neither confirmed nor denied the reports, which were published just days after it was revealed that the FSB security service is investigating Telegram founder Pavel Durov on allegations of aiding and abetting terrorism.

Related article: FSB Investigating Telegram Founder Pavel Durov on Terrorism Allegations

Moscow has long flirted with the idea of blocking Telegram, an app with around 90 million users in Russia and one that has become a critical tool for free speech in an otherwise tightly controlled media environment. Russia unsuccessfully tried to block the platform in 2018 and 2020.

However, the government's latest campaign to restrict access to the app looks different.

In August, Roskomnadzor blocked voice and video calls on Telegram as an anti-fraud measure. And earlier this month, it began throttling download speeds, making it difficult for users to access media content such as voice notes, videos and images.

Authorities in Moscow argue that their clampdown on Telegram, as well as the Meta-owned messaging platform WhatsApp, is based on security concerns as the country faces an increasing number of attacks blamed on Ukraine and its Western allies.

According to Russian security services, Telegram has refused to provide encryption keys that would allow it to access messages sent by suspected criminals, as well as Ukrainian agents who recruit Russians through the app to carry out acts of sabotage and killings.

The company has dismissed accusations that it is enabling criminal and terrorist activity, calling the restrictions an attempt to force Russians to switch to the state-backed messenger Max, which critics say was created for mass surveillance and censorship.

Telegram founder Durov, who lives in Dubai and also holds French and UAE citizenship, said this week that Russia is trying to "fabricate pretexts" for a total ban on the app.

Mounting government efforts to restrict features on Telegram have been met with condemnation from both ordinary Russians and some government officials. Pro-war bloggers and Russian soldiers who say they use the encrypted app for battlefield communication have also questioned the restrictions.

An anonymous source told RBC on Thursday that Telegram would remain available to Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine should the government move to completely block the app.

It was not immediately clear how that would be achieved technically, or why the authorities still consider Telegram safe for soldiers to use despite urging Russians to switch to Max over safety concerns.

Despite the government restrictions, Telegram appears to remain mostly functional when Russians use a virtual private network, or VPN, on their devices. VPNs are widely used in Russia today to bypass internet restrictions, including to access blocked platforms like

Instagram and X.

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