

U.S., ALLIES PUSH FACEBOOK FOR ACCESS TO ENCRYPTION

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The U.S., the U.K. and Australia have called on Facebook Inc to not go ahead with end-to-end encryption across its messaging services unless law enforcement officials have backdoor access, saying encryption hindered the fight against child abuse and terrorism.

The U.S. and U.K. also signed a data agreement that would fast track requests to technology companies for information.

Law enforcement could get information in weeks or even days instead of the current wait of six months to two years.

The latest tug-of-war between governments and tech companies over user data could also impact Apple Inc, Alphabet Inc's Google and Microsoft Corp, as well as smaller encrypted chat apps like Signal.

Washington has called for more regulation and launched anti-trust investigations against many tech companies, criticizing them over privacy lapses, election-related activity and dominance in online advertising.

In an open letter to Facebook and Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg, the three allies said that while they supported strong encryption, it was necessary to balance the need for secure data with public safety.

They urged Facebook and other companies to “enable law enforcement to obtain lawful access to content in a readable and usable format”.

The letter was signed by U.S. Attorney General William Barr, UK Secretary of State for the Home Department Priti Patel and Australian Minister of Home Affairs Peter Dutton.

“Unfortunately, Facebook has not committed to address our serious concerns about the impact its proposals could have on protecting our most vulnerable citizens,” the letter reads.

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