

UAE denies developing popular Mideast app as spy tool

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The United Arab Emirates on Saturday denied reports that a popular mobile application developed in the country was used for government spying.

Apple and Google removed the ToTok app from their marketplaces last week following a report claiming it allowed the UAE government to track users' conversations, movements and other details.

But the country's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority said in a statement that UAE laws "prohibit any kind of data breach and unlawful interception".

It continued: "The TRA reaffirms that all certified telecommunications applications in the UAE are in compliance with these standards."

ToTok became popular by offering free calling and messaging to millions of users in countries like the UAE where internet calling services like Skype are blocked.

But US intelligence officials and a security researcher determined the app was being used by the UAE government for detailed surveillance, The New York Times reported on December 22.

Security researcher Patrick Wardle, who assisted the newspaper, said in a blog post that ToTok appeared to be part of a "mass surveillance operation", which "likely afforded in-depth insight in a large percentage

of the country's population."

ToTok appeared to trick users of iPhones and Android devices into handing over access to their location and private data on their devices, Wardle said.

It was also promoted by what appeared to be fake reviews, he said.

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