

Swiss army backs home-grown IM service amid privacy concerns

January 5 2022



The guard of honour of the Swiss Army stands ready for the arrival of Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz at the Lohn residence of the Swiss government in Kehrsatz, Switzerland, Sept. 18, 2020. The Swiss army has ordered its ranks to stop using foreign instant-messaging services like WhatsApp, Signal and Telegram for official communications, opting for a Swiss alternative in part over concerns about legislation in Washington that governs how U.S. authorities can access information held by tech companies. Army leaders called for use of the Swiss instant messaging service Threema, and a promotion for the service was

posted Dec. 29, 2021 on the Swiss army's page on Facebook—which, like WhatsApp, is owned by the U.S. company now known as Meta. Credit: Alessandro della Valle/Keystone via AP, file

The Swiss army has told its ranks to stop using foreign instant-messaging services like WhatsApp, Signal and Telegram for official communications. Instead, it's opting for a Swiss alternative—in part over concerns about legislation in Washington that governs how U.S. authorities can access information held by tech companies.

Army leaders, in a letter to top commanders last month, called for use of the Swiss instant messaging service Threema, and a promotion for the service was posted Dec. 29 on the Swiss [army](#)'s page on Facebook, which, like WhatsApp, is owned by the U.S. company now known as Meta.

Officials have cited an enhanced need for secure communications as Swiss soldiers have fanned out to support the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the Alpine country.

A letter sent to army chiefs last month said Threema "must be used for all service communications," adding that "no other messaging service will be authorized."

Army spokeswoman Delphine Schwab-Allemand, in an e-mail on Wednesday confirming reports on the issue in Swiss media, seemed to soften the army's position, saying that there was a "recommendation" that troops use Threema. It took effect on Jan. 1. She added that the army cannot and does not want to tell troops to use a particular app on their private devices.

As Threema is a Swiss-based company, information it holds isn't subject to the U.S. Cloud Act, she said, referring to legislation passed in a 2018 spending bill that governs how U.S. authorities can get electronic communications held by technology companies.

Some leading privacy groups opposed it. The Swiss army says the Threema app adheres to regulations in Europe about [data protection](#).

Unlike many other messaging services, Threema doesn't require users to provide a [phone number](#) or [email address](#).

The Swiss army said it will reimburse soldiers for the 4-franc (about \$4.40) [annual cost](#) for use of the Swiss app.

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Citation: Swiss army backs home-grown IM service amid privacy concerns (2022, January 5) retrieved 29 June 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2022-01-swiss-army-home-grown-im-privacy.html>

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