

Microsoft joins Google in US spying suit

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The new Windows Store Only at Best Buy on August 7, 2013 in Los Angeles, California. Microsoft says that a battle to shed light on secret US government requests for Internet user data would play out in court after failed peace talks.

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Microsoft and Google filed suits in federal court in June, arguing a right to make public more information about user data requests made under the auspices of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

The technology titans agreed six times to extend the deadline for the government to respond to the lawsuits, allowing time for negotiations that "ended in failure," Microsoft general counsel Brad Smith said in a blog post.

"To followers of technology issues, there are many days when Microsoft and Google stand apart," Smith said.

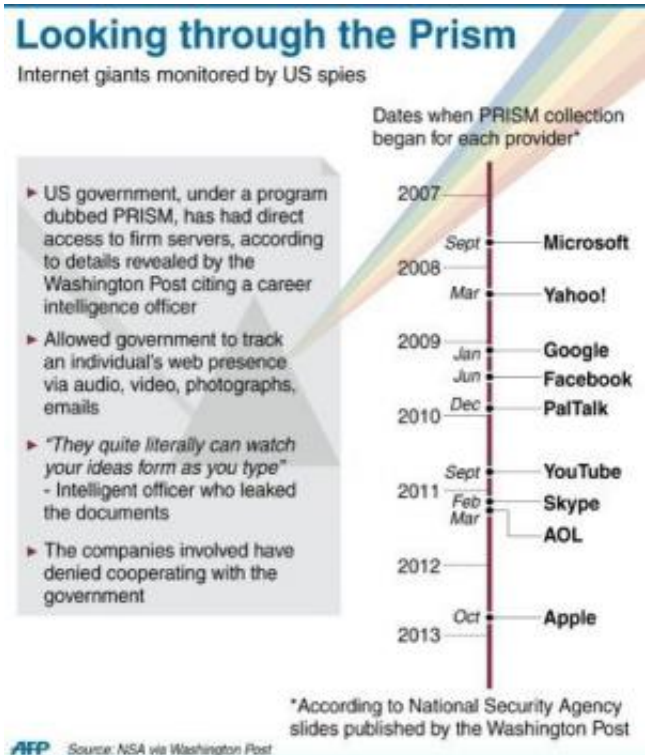
"But today our two companies stand together... We believe we have a clear right under the US Constitution to share more information with the

public."

Silicon Valley Internet titans want to be able to provide users with better insight into what information the government gets its hands on.

The issue caught fire after Edward Snowden, a former IT contractor at the National Security Agency (NSA), revealed that US authorities were tapping into Internet user data, sometimes using national security letters that bar companies from telling anyone about the requests.

US officials on Thursday said they would begin publishing annual tallies of national security requests for Internet user data, but that step is not enough, according to Smith.



Graphic timeline showing when a US agency began spying on the servers of nine Internet giants including Apple, Facebook, Microsoft and Google, according to a report in the Washington Post citing a career intelligence officer.

"For example, we believe it is vital to publish information that clearly shows the number of national security demands for user content, such as the text of an email," Smith said.

He argued that, along with providing numbers of requests, disclosures should provide context regarding what is being sought.

"We believe it's possible to publish these figures in a manner that avoids putting security at risk," Smith said.

"With the failure of our recent negotiations, we will move forward with litigation in the hope that the courts will uphold our right to speak more freely."

There has been a wave of legal action since revelations in the media about the PRISM program, believed to collect vast amounts of phone and Internet data as part of efforts to protect national security.

Internet companies have stated they release information only in response to specific court orders, and claim that reports about providing easy access to US authorities are exaggerated.

US authorities insist the surveillance programs are entirely lawful and have helped thwart dozens of terror attacks.

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