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Re: Draft U.S. Government Guidance for the Export of Hardware, Software and Technology with Surveillance Capabilities and/or parts/know-how

The Information Technology & Innovation Foundation (ITIF) is pleased to submit these comments in response to the U.S. Department of State's solicitation of feedback on guidance for the export of hardware, software, and technology with surveillance capabilities.¹ ITIF is a nonprofit, non-partisan public policy think tank committed to articulating and advancing a pro-productivity, pro-innovation and pro-technology public policy agenda internationally, in Washington, and in the states. Through its research, policy proposals, and commentary, ITIF is working to advance and support public policies that boost innovation, e-transformation, and productivity.

ITIF supports the U.S. Department of State's goal of providing voluntary guidance to businesses to help them understand the human rights implications of exporting certain items with surveillance capabilities. However, the State Department should be careful that any guidance it offers does not negatively impact U.S. jobs or U.S. technological leadership. Additional resources can enable businesses to make more informed decisions regarding how and when they export their products and services to avoid adversely impacting human rights. Businesses have strong incentives to support human rights, not only because it aligns with corporate social responsibility, but because missteps would harm their company's reputation, undermine employee relations, and alienate some consumers. Indeed, there are several major examples of employees advocating that their employer address certain ethical considerations when exporting products to governments with poor human rights records.²

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¹ "Draft U.S. Government Guidance for the Export of Surveillance Technology," U.S. Department of State, September 4, 2019, https://www.state.gov/draft-u-s-government-guidance-for-the-export-of-surveillance-technology/. ² Kate Conger and Daisuke Wakabayashi, "Google Employees Protest Secret Work on Censored Search Engine for China" *New York Times*, August 16, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/16/technology/google-employees-protest-search-censored-china.html and Shelly Banjo, "Microsoft Workers Criticize Block of GitHub Protest in China," *The Star*, August 23, 2019, accessed October 2, 2019, https://www.thestar.com.my/tech/tech-news/2019/04/23/microsoft-workers-criticise-block-of-github-protest-in-china.

Voluntary guidance provides businesses in the United States flexibility so that they can continue to compete in highly contested global markets, but the State Department should provide more resources to companies to make it easier for them to operationalize this guidance because many companies will not have the capabilities to properly evaluate whether a government agency in a target export country is likely to use a product to violate human rights. While the State Department provides some guidance on these points with the references listed in Appendix 1, it should develop a more comprehensive website or online tool that combines all the information companies will need to have at their disposal to make these decisions. It is important that the State Department provide such information directly so that companies do not have to identify and validate this information from non-governmental sources.

One way to incentivize companies to use this guidance is to create a process that not only helps companies properly consider these important questions, but also allows businesses to demonstrate to the public that they have sufficiently addresses concerns about human rights. To that end, the State Department should also create a recommended process by which a company can determine that a particular export is reasonable, as well as provide a representative list of scenarios, detailing examples of products and countries, where the guidance would recommend a company not export. This will provide companies additional clarity about how to implement this guidance, as well as demonstrate the utility of the guidance.

The State Department should ensure its guidance does not unnecessarily restrict companies from exporting their products and services or harm the overall market for these products and services. In particular, the framing of the guidance is troubling. The guidance defines "Item with Intended or Unintended Surveillance Capabilities" so broadly that it arguably covers nearly any digital product or service that collects, stores, or processes data about individuals. Moreover, the use of the term "surveillance" has negative implications and is related more to how a product is used, rather than to the product itself. Labeling products as "surveillance products" could make it harder for companies to sell their products and services to other customers who intend to use them for lawful, appropriate, and ethical purposes and who may not want to be viewed as purchasing something labeled as "surveillance technology."

Moreover, Appendix 2 provides a comprehensive list of laws, regulations and government practices that could impinge on human rights. But the list is so broad as to likely include a significant share of the world's population. Coupled with the overly broad inclusion of "surveillance" technologies, the guidance risks sending a message that U.S. companies should err on the side of not selling a wide array of digital products and services in much of the world, an outcome whose principal result would be to reduce U.S. technology companies' competitiveness and jobs, while doing little to change these nation's technology-based human rights' practices.

Furthermore, there are several elements in the guidance that have negative repercussions for technological innovation. For example, the document recommends that companies use "privacy by design" features such as

"data minimization" which would mean companies could collect no more data than is necessary to meet specific needs (e.g., processing a payment). However, "privacy by design" methods significantly limit the ability of companies to innovate with data as they do not know which data will be most valuable when initially deciding what data to collect.³ And often that data generates significant societal benefits. Companies that choose not to use this method should not be considered non-compliant with this guidance. Moreover, for technology intentionally designed for surveillance purposes (i.e. where it is intended to facilitate closely observing and tracking subjects), the concept of "privacy by design" is out of place. Finally, privacy-by-design is a concept that Congress has considered in various comprehensive privacy bills, but never passed, and it would be inappropriate for the State Department to adopt this controversial policy without a clear mandate. Therefore, a "privacy by design" recommendation should be eliminated.

This guidance has many strong points. For example, it appropriately notes that not all "red flags" carry the same weight and the presence of a "red flag" does not mean a transaction should necessarily be cancelled. The Department of State is correct to provide guidance but leave some of these determinations to companies who are best positioned to evaluate the specifics of a given transaction.

To ensure this guidance strikes the right balance in encouraging innovation and safeguarding exports from potential misuse by importing nations, ITIF offers the following edits to the proposed guidance (edits in red).

³ Alan McQuinn and Daniel Castro, "A Grand Bargain on Data Privacy Legislation for America" (Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, January 2019), http://www2.itif.org/2019-grand-bargain-privacy.pdf.

DRAFT U.S. GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE FOR THE EXPORT OF HARDWARE, SOFTWARE, AND TECHNOLOGY WITH SURVEILLANCE CAPABILITIES AND/OR PARTS/KNOW-HOW

"Business enterprises should respect human rights. This means that they should avoid infringing on the human rights of others and should address adverse human rights impacts with which they are involved." – UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

Items with intended and unintended surveillance capabilities ("item(s)") have the vast potential to provide positive contributions to a country's economic, defense, and societal wellbeing. These items can be a force multiplier in providing solutions to urgent policy challenges facing society. Such items promise to reshape healthcare and manufacturing, among others sectors, around the world.

At the same time, these items can be misused to violate or abuse human rights when exported to government end-users or private end-users that have close relationships with the government. In some cases, governments have misused these items to subject entire populations to arbitrary or unlawful surveillance, violating the right to privacy as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). In other cases, governments employ these items as part of a broader state apparatus of oppression that violates human rights and fundamental freedoms enumerated in the UDHR and ICCPR, including freedoms of expression, religion or belief, association and peaceful assembly.

The misuse of an item can take many forms, including to stifle dissent; harass human rights defenders; intimidate minority communities; discourage whistle-blowers; chill free expression; target political opponents, journalists, and lawyers; or interfere arbitrarily or unlawfully with privacy. Arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy is a particular concern in this context, especially since such interference may also impede the enjoyment of other human rights, such as the rights to freedom of expression, to hold opinions without interference, and to freedom of association and peaceful assembly. These and other rights are among the foundations of any democratic society.

Purpose:

This guidance seeks to assist exporters of items with intended and unintended surveillance capabilities with implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) as well as the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (Guidelines). The guidance aims to provide insight to exporters on considerations to weigh prior to exporting these items. It also offers businesses greater understanding of the human rights concerns the U.S. government may have with the export. Appendix 1 provides a list of recommended resources that businesses may find helpful to consult when conducting due diligence on the export of items with intended and unintended surveillance capabilities. For global context,

Appendix 2 provides a list of general issues of human rights concern that have arisen related to such items, including examples of relevant government laws, regulations and practices.

The United States government is committed to the promotion and protection of human rights. In that spirit, the exporter of an item should carefully review this guidance, and consider whether to participate in, or continue to participate in, an export transaction if the exporter identifies a risk that the end-user will likely misuse the item to carry out human rights violations or abuses. Exporters are encouraged to integrate human rights due diligence into export control compliance programs. Such integration should include support from the highest levels within an exporter's organization, training on relevant human rights considerations for employees, documentation, and communication of both commitment and steps taken in this regard.

This guidance is not intended to be, nor should it be interpreted as, comprehensive or mandatory. The Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) and the State Department's Directorate of Defense Trade Controls (DDTC) are responsible for regulating the export of many types of dual-use items, defense articles and defense services, respectively. BIS maintains a set of Red Flag Indicators and "Know Your Customer Guidance" for exporters to follow when exporting items subject to the Export Administration Regulations. This guidance is also not meant to address any requirements under export control laws. Exporters are responsible for obtaining appropriate licenses and/or approvals for the export of controlled dual-use items, defense articles and defense services.

Definitions:

Due Diligence: For the purpose of this document, "due diligence" is defined as the process by which an exporter works to identify, anticipate, prevent, mitigate, and account for how it addresses actual or potential adverse impacts on human rights of individuals. This includes impacts that it may cause or contributes to, or to which it is otherwise directly linked. Due diligence is an integral part of business decision-making and risk management systems.

Characteristics of due diligence include but are not limited to:

- Assess and Address Risk: The level of due diligence and how much due diligence to conduct should be commensurate with the severity and likelihood of an adverse impact, where more significant risks are prioritized.
- **Ongoing Assessment of Monitoring and Evaluation:** Ongoing, responsive, and changing process that includes monitoring, evaluation, and feedback loops to verify whether adverse impacts are being effectively tracked and addressed, and new potential impacts identified.
- Stakeholder Engagement: Ongoing communication with those whose interests could be affected by the exporter's activities. [Does this text refer to specific groups which might be subject to human

rights violations? It is unclear how an exporter would necessarily be in a position to engage with such stakeholders or independently evaluate any claims it receives.]

- **Public Communication:** Communication of the exporter's commitment to a rigorous internal and external review of human rights risks and to adequate measures to address these risks.
- Alignment with Human Rights Instruments: Review process should be based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Legitimate Law Enforcement Purpose: For the purpose of this document, "legitimate law enforcement purpose" means use by law enforcement, including government agency providing security services, consistent with state commitments to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Red Flag: For the purpose of this document, a "red flag" is any information that arises through any source where follow-up, assessment, and/or further due diligence is warranted. Not all red flags carry equal weight – rather, it depends on the context and surrounding circumstances. The mere existence of a red flag does not mean that an action or transaction should be terminated, but rather that it should be evaluated in the context of other red flags and context-specific factors. This document does not provide an exhaustive list of red flags.

Item with Intended or Unintended Surveillance Capabilities: For the purpose of this document, "item with intended or unintended surveillance capabilities" [also referred to as "item(s)" in this document] includes hardware, software, technology, technical assistance, services, and/or parts/know-how that is marketed for or can be used designed and marketed primarily for the monitoring, interception, collection, preservation and/or retention of information that has been communicated, relayed or generated over communications networks to a recipient or group of recipients and does not have significant non-surveillance uses. [The original definition is much too broad and could conceivably include almost any technology that collects, stores, and processes data about individuals.]

Surveillance: [Recommend the State Department add a definition of surveillance.]

Items covered by this guidance ranges from consumer-grade to dual-use items listed on the Commerce Control List and defense articles and defense services listed in the International Traffic in Arms Regulations. Examples of items with surveillance capabilities, include, but are not limited to: spyware; crypto-analysis products; penetration-testing tools; information technology products with deep packet inspection functions; specialized computer vision chips; non-cooperative location tracking [products that can be used for ongoing tracking of individuals' locations without their knowledge and consent]; cell site simulators (Stingrays);

automatic license plate readers; body-worn cameras; drones and unmanned aerial vehicles; facial recognition software; thermal imaging systems; rapid DNA testing; automated biometric systems; social media analytics software; gait analysis software; network protocols surveillance systems; and devices that record audio and video and can remotely transmit or can be remotely accessed.

HUMAN RIGHTS DUE DILIGENCE AND RISK MITIGATION CONSIDERATIONS:

1. In general, tailor the item to minimize the likelihood that it will be misused to commit human rights violations or abuses.

- Integrate safety and 'privacy by design' privacy features that:
 - enable tracking of deployment; [Tracking customer usage may be inappropriate in many cases where government users have a reasonable expectation of autonomy. Recommend deleting.]
 - o alert the exporter to misuse;
 - o enable the exporter to strip certain capabilities from the item prior to export;
 - o limit the use once sold;
 - provide a kill switch; [Kill switches can also be used for censorship or other negative purposes and introduces vulnerabilities. Recommend deleting.]
 - o limit upgrades, software updates, and direct support;
 - provide for data minimization; [Data minimization provisions will discourage data-driven innovation. Recommend deleting.]
 - auto deletes data. [Auto deleting data without the consent of the customer likely violates reasonable expectations of autonomy. Recommend deleting or clarifying.]

2. Review the capabilities of the export in question to determine potential for misuse to commit human rights violations or abuses by government end-users and private end-users that have close relationships with a foreign government.

Due Diligence Considerations:

• Review item and conduct assessments to determine if such item could be misused to violate or abuse human rights, including the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, freedom of association, and the right to be free from arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy.

Red Flags:

- Information (e.g. reports, articles, publications) that indicates similar item has been misused to commit human rights violations or abuses;
- The export includes item that could be used to build, customize, configure, or integrate a system that is known to be misused to commit human rights violations or abuses or it is likely that it will be.

3. Review the human rights record of the government agency end-user of the country intended to receive the export.

Due Diligence Considerations:

- credible reports of the human rights record of the recipient government agency end-user, including the S. Department of State's annual Human Rights Report, news reports, and information from non-governmental and/or local sources. Reviews should focus on the specific entity within the government, as feasible. See Appendix 1 for additional recommended sources and Appendix 2 for general examples of laws, regulations, and practices that have raised human rights concerns;
- Reach out to non-governmental organizations (globally and on the ground) to access first-hand knowledge of the human rights record of the recipient government agency end-user. See Appendix 1 for a list of some organizations to engage;
- relationship between the importing government agency and the part of the government that provides security services;
- In cases where the government agency end-user is a provider of security services, consider whether there are instances where item has been misused, for something other than a legitimate law enforcement purpose.

Red Flags:

- Information regarding government agency end-user's misuse of the item to commit human rights violations or abuses (e.g. reports, articles);
- Laws, regulations, or government practices that unduly restrict civic space and/or target individuals or members of a group solely on the basis of their race, sex, language, religion, political opinion, national origin, or any other grounds inconsistent with international human rights law;
- Ongoing conflict or political turmoil in region being exported to;
- Ongoing abuse or arbitrary detention of members of minority groups, civil society members, or journalists (e.g. for exercising freedom of expression);
- Lack of independent judicial oversight/rule of law;
- Government agency end-user provides security services and has misused the item for something other than a legitimate law enforcement purpose;

- Government agency end-user has a close relationship with the part of the government that provides security services and that part of the government has misused the item to commit human rights violations or abuses;
- Government end-user has a record of human rights violations or abuses, including where a government end-user's record on human rights is so poor that it raises credible concerns that the exported item would be misused to facilitate governmental human rights violations or abuses;
- Government purchases the item from other governments with poor human rights records or from private actors with a history of unsavory exports to such governments; [This requirement applies to government exporters, so it does not appear relevant to commercial exporters.]
- Government end-user has a history of exporting items to other countries with authoritarian governments and history of committing human rights violations or abuses.

4. Review whether the government end-user's laws, regulations, and practices that implicate items with surveillance capabilities are consistent with the ICCPR. See Appendices 1 and 2.

Due Diligence Considerations:

- Review laws, regulations, or practices that may unduly hinder freedom of expression, and/or interfere unlawfully or arbitrarily with privacy, as feasible;
- Review laws, regulations, or practices concerning government interception of private communications, and government access to stored private communications, as feasible;
- Review the extent to which the government implements its laws on surveillance and the oversight mechanisms in place, as feasible;
- Review the IT infrastructure of the export destination country to determine level of government access and/or control, as feasible.

Red Flags:

- Laws (pending or otherwise) or practices that provide for government access to information and communications technology company data without reasonable safeguards and appropriate oversight;
- Laws, regulations, particularly counterterrorism or national security-related laws or regulations, or practices that appear to unduly restrict freedom of expression or interfere unlawfully or arbitrarily with privacy;
- Government's engagement in malicious cyber activities against individuals or dissident groups;
- Lack of independent judicial oversight/rule of law;
- Data-sharing with governments with poor human rights records or data localization requirements;

• Total or significant government control or ownership of IT infrastructure and/or Internet Service Providers or telecommunication networks beyond that used for its own systems and communications (e.g., partially state-owned enterprise). See Appendix 2 for examples.

5. Review stakeholder entities involved in the transaction (including end-user and intermediaries such as distributors and resellers). Refer to BIS "Know Your Customer Guidance".

Due Diligence Considerations:

- Review how the intermediaries and/or end-users intend to use the item, before and during any transaction;
- Review or seek to ascertain whether the end-user is intending to or likely to contract the work involving the item in question to non-governmental entities or individuals, including possible foreign nationals, inside or outside the receiving country;
- If the end-user is not the government but has a close relationship with a government, review the level of control the government has over the entity in question, to the extent possible. [Note: State Department should clarify exactly how a business should determine this level of control.] If the government has strong ties to the entity in question and the government has a record of committing human rights violations or abuses, considerations 3-4 above may still be relevant;
- Review risks that the item will be transferred or diverted to a different end-user from the one listed on the license application;
- Review, to the extent possible, the end-user government's history, if any, of use of the type of item associated with the export.

Red Flags:

- The end-user is not a government, but has a close relationship with a government that has a reputation for committing human rights abuses or violations, and in particular the kinds of human rights violations or abuses the exported item could help facilitate;
- The stated end-user in the export transaction is likely not the only end-user.

6. Strive to mitigate human rights risks through contractual and procedural safeguards, and strong grievance mechanisms.

Contractual and Procedural Safeguards

- Include human rights safeguards language in contracts where applicable. The language should be specific to human rights risks identified and/or associated with the item;
- Include protections for the exporter in the contract: export compliance clauses requiring end-users to agree to comply with applicable U.S. export control laws and regulations; limitations on how the item

can/cannot be used; how and by whom collected data is to be analyzed, stored, protected, and shared; and reserve the exporter's right to terminate access to technology, deny software updates, training, and other services and/or unilaterally terminate the contract if the exporter uncovers (in its sole discretion) evidence that the technology is being misused;

- Adopt access and distribution mechanisms and contractual provisions that authorize the exporter to maintain full control and custody of the item and terminate access if necessary to minimize risk of diversion (e.g., Application Program Interface (API) access rather than on-premises installations; license keys requiring periodic renewal rather than permanent activation) where practicable; [Note this provision would not make sense to apply to certain technologies that could be covered by these recommendations, such as drones, where the customer would not expect the seller to retain control of the product.]
- Establish a preventative framework to address possible cases of license revocation. (e.g., the exporter may stop providing support, updates, and training or cut off the licensees' access to any cloud-based portion of the service at any time);
- Provide routine human rights due diligence training to all employees involved in the transaction.

Grievance Mechanisms

- Develop secure, accessible, and responsive communications channels for both internal and external actors to report possible misuse of an export (e.g. reporting mechanism through company website);
- Develop procedure to ensure those reporting a misuse of an export are protected from retaliation;
- Exporter should have a formal follow-up mechanism, including an investigation and feedback loop to the actor reporting misuse;
- Exporter should regularly review and update communication channel to make sure it is effective

7. After export, strive to mitigate human rights risks through contractual and procedural safeguards, and strong grievance mechanisms

Contractual and Procedural Safeguards

- Invoke contractual protections that permit the exporter to immediately stop providing upgrades, direct support, and other assistance in the event of breaches of contractual terms and conditions;
- Reassess human rights due diligence considerations prior to license renewal; new activities, provision of services to, or relationships with the customer; major changes in the business relationships; and social and political changes in the country where the customer resides;
- Stay aware of news developments and shifts in a customer's home country in order to stay abreast of how the item could be used by the government to restrict civic space and/or target journalists,

vulnerable groups or minority groups (e.g., reach out to civil society groups on the ground and locally, carry out on-going due diligence after sale).

Grievance Mechanisms

- Quickly and thoroughly investigate all complaints of misuse. Remotely disable the item, and limit upgrades and customer support when a credible complaint of misuse is received, until investigation is complete;
- Where misuse is found, follow-up with actor filing report to provide remedy where possible.

8. Publicly report on the export transaction (e.g., in annual reports or on websites).

- At least annually, publicly report on human rights due diligence (e.g. steps taken to prevent human rights violations and abuses; data requests; evidence of misuse and steps taken to redress the harm);
- At least annually, publicly report on how credible complaints raised through communication channels were resolved (e.g., high-level summary).
- Publish a human rights policy;
- Publicly reporting on a website, in a public annual report, or an otherwise accessible location.

APPENDIX 2 – GOVERNMENT LAWS, REGULATIONS, AND PRACTICES THAT COULD RAISE CONCERNS

The below list is illustrative of the kinds of laws, regulations, and government practices that place the item at a higher risk of misuse. The form of misuse will vary based on the kind of item deployed by the government. Examples of risks include: arbitrarily or unlawfully tracking movements, behaviors, and relationships among vulnerable groups, minority groups, activists, and journalists.

Concern

Example of Laws, Regulations, and Government Practices

Allows governments to access domestic computer data and networks, copy information, and/or seize computers or any devices without appropriate safeguards (e.g., subject to review by a transparent and independent judiciary) against unreasonable or abusive government searches and seizures. [Suggest clarifying or narrowing this example. This example suggests that companies should not be selling products to countries like China where there is not judicial independence.]

Implements domestically city or nation-wide surveillance that tracks most or all individuals or data collection technologies without appropriate safeguards (e.g., subject to review by a transparent and independent judiciary) against unreasonable or abusive government searches and seizures.

Allows governments to arbitrarily or unlawfully inappropriately intercept and collect personal information of platform users on broad grounds such as terrorism and "extremism".["Unlawful" does not seem like the right word, as it suggests that if a country were to legalize a certain behavior then it would be acceptable.]

Requires all cyber/internet cafes to install software that tracks and stores information about their clients' online activities.

Privacy

Prohibits anonymous profiles on online messenger applications, social media accounts, and other technology driven platforms.

Implements national or regional facial recognition programs to target or intimidate individuals because they are activists, journalists, or members of vulnerable groups.

Requires Internet users to install software that enables government officials to monitor communications of all Internet users sent and block individual webpages.

Requires extraordinary access to encrypted systems, such as through installing surveillance equipment or requiring businesses to implement back doors into their systems, so collect user communications.

Criminal punishment for speech online (e.g., mobile apps) on the basis that it is blasphemy/apostasy, political/antigovernment, disinformation, defamation, anti-national, or toxic content.

Freedom of Expression

Review and blocking of content published online found objectionable for political reasons, without effective means to request review.

No or severely restricted independent press, including targeting, harassment, threats, or physical attacks of journalists for their work.

Unduly burdensome procedures or requirements for NGOs to register with the government.

Requires NGOs to notify local and national governments about all activities, and gain permission to travel between cities or host fundraisers and protests.

Restricting Civic Space/Targeting Individuals or Members of Groups on the Basis of their Race, Sex, Language, Religion, Political Opinion, National Origin, or any other grounds

Imposes restrictions, limits, or bans on foreign funding of NGOs.

Requires all domestic and international donor funding to NGOs to be funneled through a government office before reaching the NGO recipient.

Uses spyware to monitor websites, apps, and other digital platforms that cater to a specific minority to target dissidents.

Prosecutes civil society activists and journalists for exercising their human rights and for advocating on certain issues, under the guise of counterterrorism, national security, national identity, or morality.

Requires companies to provide access to customers' data and Internet activities without appropriate safeguards against unreasonable or abusive government searches and seizures.

Requires data to be stored on servers within the country, especially without appropriate safeguards against unreasonable or abusive government searches and seizures.

Total or Significant Control over Internet Service Providers or Telecommunications Networks

Requires all telecommunications operators to install surveillance equipment or comply with laws that allow governments access to all transmitted information and other related data, without judicial or other oversight.

Requires provider to modify service or product to facilitate government access to data without appropriate safeguards against unreasonable or abusive government searches and seizures.