

# Biden drops plan to ban Chinese-owned apps TikTok, WeChat

June 9 2021, by Rob Lever

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US President Joe Biden has revoked the plan by the Trump administration to ban the popular apps TikTok and WeChat, but will order a national security review of all foreign-operated computer applications.

President Joe Biden has revoked executive orders from his predecessor Donald Trump seeking to ban Chinese-owned apps TikTok and WeChat from US markets on national security concerns, a move which received a

cautious welcome from Beijing.

Trump had claimed the apps posed national security risks and had sought to force the sale to US investors of TikTok, which is owned by China-based ByteDance and remains one of the world's most popular social media apps.

A statement Wednesday said that instead of banning WeChat and TikTok, the Biden administration would carry out a "criteria-based decision framework and rigorous, evidence-based analysis to address the risks" from internet applications controlled by foreign entities.

WeChat, part of Chinese tech giant Tencent, is a "super app" which includes social networking, messaging, e-commerce and more.

Biden issued a new executive order calling for a four-month review of "the continuing effort of foreign adversaries to steal or otherwise obtain United States persons' data."

Trump's claims had prompted a series of legal challenges which delayed the efforts to ban or force the sale of the applications—further heightening tensions between Washington and Beijing.

The two companies did not respond to a request for comment.

University of Texas law professor Bobby Chesney called the Biden order "a good middle path."

"They affirmed the nature of the threat and the propriety of using sanctions to address it, and they have held the door open for reimposing some version of these sanctions... but likely with a far stronger and more defensible record," Chesney tweeted.

China's commerce ministry spokesman Gao Feng on Thursday called Biden's decision a "positive step in the right direction."

Gao said he hoped Washington would "treat Chinese companies in a fair and just manner, and avoid politicising economic and trade issues."



This file photo shows the logo of mobile messaging service WeChat, the China-based super app for social networking, e-commerce and more.

### **Finding 'unacceptable risks'**

Biden's order seeks to identify any apps that "may pose an unacceptable risk to US national security and the American people" including

"applications that are owned, controlled, or managed by persons that support foreign adversary military or intelligence activities, or are involved in malicious cyber activities, or involve applications that collect sensitive personal data."

The new order calls for the Commerce Department and other federal agencies to develop guidelines "to protect sensitive personal data... including personally identifiable information and genetic information" from misuse.

TikTok is believed to have one billion users worldwide including more than 100 million in the United States, and is especially popular with young smartphone users.

Last September, US District Judge Carl Nichols issued a temporary injunction at the request of TikTok blocking the effort to ban downloads of the app in the United States.

Trump had given his blessing to a plan that would have given TikTok to US tech giant Oracle with investments from retail powerhouse Walmart, but that deal failed to win approval in Beijing.

The ban on WeChat was also delayed by a lawsuit from users based in the United States claiming the ban infringed on their rights.

The Biden move comes a day after the US Senate passed a sweeping industrial policy bill aimed at countering the surging economic threat from China and pumping more than \$170 billion into research and development.

The package, a key provision of which addresses a shortage of semiconductors that has slowed US auto production this year, will help American industry bolster its capacity and improve technology, in an

effort to avoid being outmaneuvered by Beijing as the adversaries compete for tech leadership.

It prompted a furious response from Beijing, which accused the United States of "paranoid delusion."

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