

TikTok dismisses calls for Chinese owners to sell stakes

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The icon for the video sharing TikTok app is seen on a smartphone, Tuesday, Feb. 28, 2023, in Marple Township, Pa. TikTok was dismissive Wednesday, March 15, of reports that the Biden administration was calling for its Chinese owners to sell their stakes in the popular video-sharing app, saying such a move wouldn't help protect national security. Credit: AP Photo/Matt Slocum, File

TikTok was dismissive Wednesday of reports that the Biden administration was calling for its Chinese owners to sell their stakes in the popular video-sharing app, saying such a move wouldn't help protect national security.

The company was responding to a report in [The Wall Street Journal](#) that said the Committee on Foreign Investment in the U.S., part of the Treasury Department, was threatening a U.S. ban on the app unless its owners, Beijing-based ByteDance Ltd., divested.

"If protecting [national security](#) is the objective, divestment doesn't solve the problem: a change in ownership would not impose any new restrictions on data flows or access," TikTok spokesperson Maureen Shanahan said. "The best way to address concerns about national security is with the transparent, U.S.-based protection of U.S. user data and systems, with robust third-party monitoring, vetting, and verification, which we are already implementing."

The Journal report cited anonymous "people familiar with the matter." The Treasury Department and the White House's National Security Council declined to comment.

Late last month, the White House gave all [federal agencies](#) 30 days to [wipe TikTok off all government devices](#).

The Office of Management and Budget called the guidance a "critical step forward in addressing the risks presented by the app to sensitive government data." Some agencies, including the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security and State, already have restrictions in place. The White House already does not allow TikTok on its devices.

Congress passed the "No TikTok on Government Devices Act" in December as part of a sweeping government funding package. The

legislation does allow for TikTok use in certain cases, including for national security, law enforcement and research purposes.

Meanwhile, lawmakers in both the House and Senate have been moving forward with legislation that would give the Biden administration more power to clamp down on TikTok.

Rep. Mike McCaul, the chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee, has been a vocal critic of the app, saying the Chinese Communist Party is using it to "manipulate and monitor its users while it gobbles up Americans' data to be used for their malign activities."

"Anyone with TikTok downloaded on their device has given the CCP a backdoor to all their personal information. It's a spy balloon into your phone," the Texas Republican said.

TikTok remains extremely popular and is used by two-thirds of teens in the U.S. But there is increasing concern that Beijing could obtain control of American user data that the app has obtained.

The [company has been dismissive of the ban](#) for federal devices and has noted that it is developing security and data privacy plans as part of the Biden administration's ongoing national security review.

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