UK cybersecurity center looking into risks posed by TikTok

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Britain's security minister said Tuesday he has asked the country's National Cyber Security Center to review threats posed by TikTok amid calls for the U.K. to impose a ban on the Chinese-owned social media

app.

Security Minister Tom Tugendhat said he was waiting for a review from the government's cybersecurity experts before deciding on the "hugely important question."

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak hinted a day earlier that the U.K. could follow the U.S. and the European Union in banning the app from government-issued mobile phones and devices.

"We take security of devices seriously ... and we look also at what our allies are doing," Sunak said during his visit to the U.S. on Monday.

"We want to make sure that we protect the integrity and security of sensitive information," Sunak told ITV News. "And we will always do that and take whatever steps are necessary to make sure that happens."

The U.S. government said last month that employees of federal agencies have to delete TikTok from all government-issued mobile devices. Congress, the White House, U.S. armed forces and more than half of U.S. states had already banned TikTok, while the European Commission also temporarily banned the app from employee phones.

The moves were prompted by growing concerns that TikTok's parent company, ByteDance, would give user data such as browsing history and location to the Chinese government, or push propaganda and misinformation on its behalf.

Last year, Britain's Parliament shut down its TikTok account—meant to reach younger audiences with Parliament content—just days after its launch following concerns from lawmakers.

"What certainly is clear is for many young people TikTok is now a news

source and, just as it's quite right we know who owns the news sources in the UK … it's important we know who owns the news sources that are feeding into our phones," Tugendhat told Sky News on Tuesday.

In a statement, TikTok said bans by other governments were "based on misplaced fears and seemingly driven by wider geopolitics." It said it would be "disappointed" if the U.K. imposes a ban, and that it was committed to working with British authorities to address any concerns.

"We have begun implementing a comprehensive plan to further protect our European user data, which includes storing UK user data in our European data centres and tightening data access controls, including third-party independent oversight of our approach," its statement said.

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