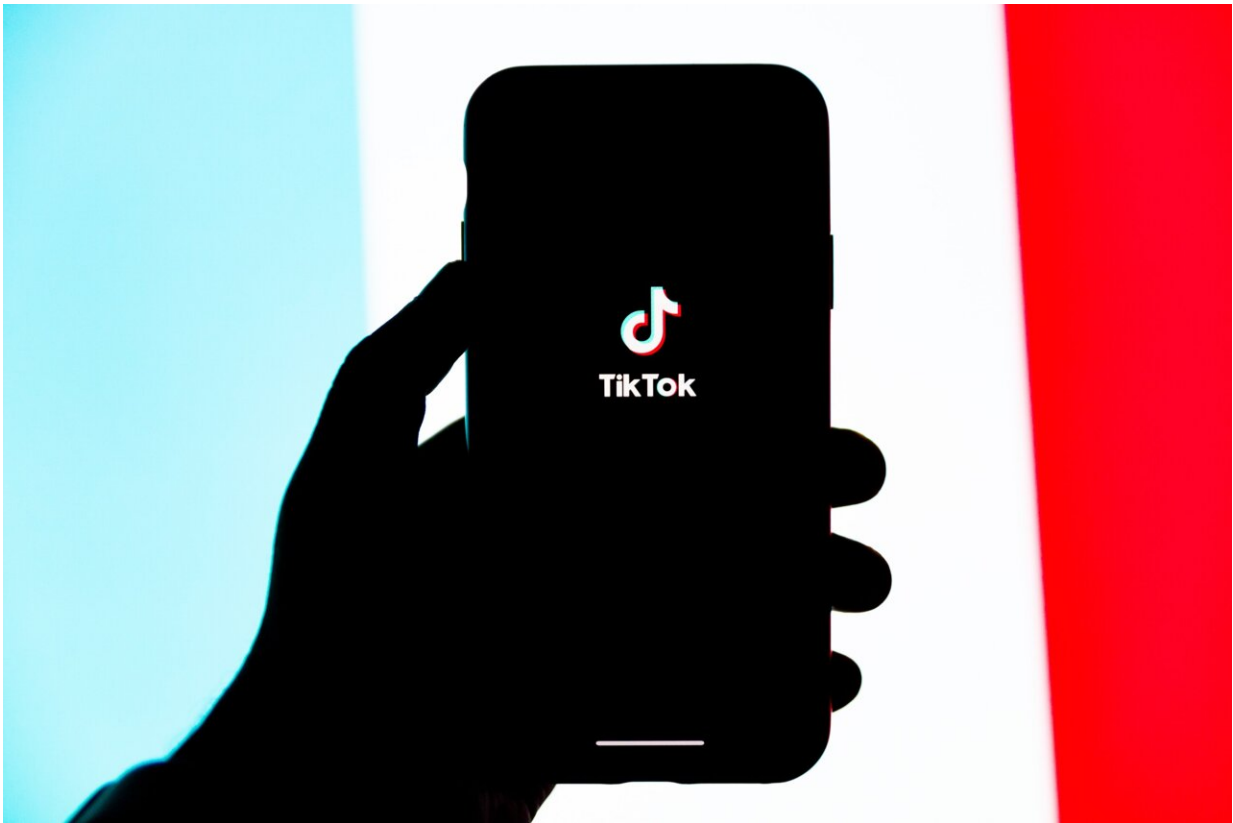


China blasts US TikTok vote as buyout plan emerges

March 14 2024



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China blasted Washington's "bandit" mentality Thursday after the US House passed a bill that would ban TikTok unless it splits from its Chinese owner, as former Trump treasury secretary Steve Mnuchin said

he is preparing a buyout plan.

The short-video app has soared in popularity worldwide but its ownership by Chinese technology giant ByteDance—and alleged subservience to Beijing's ruling Communist Party—has fueled concern in Western capitals.

On Wednesday, the US House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved a bill that would force TikTok to divest from its parent company or face a nationwide ban.

The bill is yet to pass the Senate, where it is expected to face a tougher test in order to become law.

"The US should truly respect the principles of a market economy and fair competition (and) stop unjustly suppressing foreign companies," Beijing's commerce ministry spokesperson He Yadong said at a press conference.

Washington should also "provide an open, fair, just, and non-discriminatory environment for foreign companies to invest and operate in the US", He added.

"China will take all necessary measures to resolutely safeguard its legitimate rights and interests," he said.

'Should be sold'

At a separate press briefing, foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said the vote "runs contrary to the principles of fair competition and international economic and trade rules".

"If so-called reasons of national security can be used to arbitrarily

suppress excellent companies from other countries, then there is no fairness and justice at all," Wang said.

"When someone sees a good thing another person has and tries to take it for themselves, this is entirely the logic of a bandit."

Mnuchin on Thursday said he is putting together a team of investors to buy TikTok from its Chinese owners, once the bill passed.

"I think the legislation should pass and I think (TikTok) should be sold," Mnuchin told CNBC.

Mnuchin, who served for four years as former president Donald Trump's treasury secretary, said that TikTok was "a great business and I'm going to put together a group to buy" the embattled app.

"This should be owned by US businesses. There's no way that the Chinese would ever let a US company own something like this in China," Mnuchin said.

China has blocked Western online platforms such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) for years on its heavily-censored internet.

US lawmakers voted 352 in favor of the proposed law and 65 against, striking a rare note of unity in politically divided Washington.

The White House has said President Joe Biden will sign the bill—known officially as the Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act—into law if it reaches his desk.

But it faces a tricky path through the more cautious Senate, where some are wary of taking dramatic measures against an app with 170 million US users.

TikTok has consistently denied that it is under the control of China's Communist Party.

Its CEO Shou Zi Chew has urged users to speak out against the vote, and several TikTok creators interviewed by AFP voiced opposition to the proposed ban.

The app is at the center of long-running tensions between China and the United States, which have butted heads in recent years over technology, trade and human rights issues.

Washington has cited national security concerns to limit the activities of some Chinese companies in the United States, as well as the export of certain technologies to China that it deems sensitive.

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Citation: China blasts US TikTok vote as buyout plan emerges (2024, March 14) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2024-03-china-tiktok-vote-logic-bandit.html>

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