

Apple pulls WhatsApp and Threads from App Store on Beijing's orders

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China is a key market for Apple, which last year topped the country's smartphone market for the first time.

Apple said it had removed Meta's WhatsApp messaging app and its Threads social media app from the App Store in China to comply with

orders from Chinese authorities.

The apps were removed from the store on Friday after Chinese officials cited unspecified national security concerns.

Their removal comes amid elevated tensions between the U.S. and China over trade, technology and national security.

The U.S. has threatened to ban TikTok over national security concerns. But while TikTok, owned by Chinese technology firm ByteDance, is used by millions in the U.S., apps like WhatsApp and Threads are not commonly used in China.

Instead, the messaging app WeChat, owned by Chinese company Tencent, reigns supreme.

Other Meta apps, including Facebook, Instagram and Messenger remained available for download, although use of such foreign apps is blocked in China due to its "Great Firewall" network of filters that restrict use of foreign websites such as Google and Facebook.

"The Cyberspace Administration of China ordered the removal of these apps from the China storefront based on their national security concerns," Apple said in a statement.

"We are obligated to follow the laws in the countries where we operate, even when we disagree," Apple said.

A spokesman for Meta referred to "Apple for comment."

Apple, previously the world's top smartphone maker, recently lost the top spot to Korean rival Samsung Electronics. The U.S. firm has run into headwinds in China, one of its top three markets, with sales slumping

after Chinese government agencies and employees of state-owned companies were ordered not to bring Apple devices to work.

Apple has been diversifying its manufacturing bases outside China.

Its CEO Tim Cook has been visiting Southeast Asia this week, traveling to Hanoi and Jakarta before wrapping up his travels in Singapore. On Friday he met with Singapore's deputy prime minister, Lawrence Wong, where they "discussed the partnership between Singapore and Apple, and Apple's continued commitment to doing business in Singapore."

Apple pledged to invest over \$250 million to expand its campus in the city-state.

Earlier this week, Cook met with Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh in Hanoi, pledging to increase spending on Vietnamese suppliers.

He also met with Indonesian President Joko Widodo. Cook later told reporters that they talked about Widodo's desire to promote manufacturing in Indonesia, and said that this was something that Apple would "look at".

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