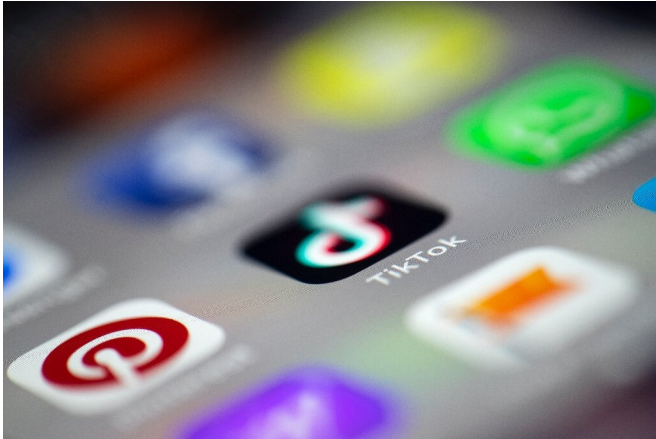


US senators call for security probe of TikTok

24 October 2019



US lawmakers called for a probe of Chinese-owned video app TikTok, saying it had the potential to be used for spying by the Chinese government

Two senior US senators called for the government to study national security risks possibly posed by Chinese-owned video app TikTok, saying it could leave American users vulnerable to Beijing's spying.

With 500 million users worldwide, TikTok has exploded in popularity in the past two years, offering a platform to produce and publish music-synced videos up to 60 seconds long.

In a letter to acting Director of National Intelligence Joseph Maguire, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer and Republican Senator Tom Cotton suggested that TikTok's owner ByteDance could be forced to share user information with Chinese intelligence.

It could also conceivably offer Beijing's spies a backdoor into users' smartphones and computers, similar to allegations against Chinese telecoms giant Huawei.

"With over 110 million downloads in the US alone, TikTok is a potential counterintelligence threat we cannot ignore," they wrote, urging the intelligence community to "conduct an assessment of the national security risks" posed by the app.

Chinese laws could compel the company "to support and cooperate with intelligence work controlled by the Chinese Communist Party," the senators said.

They noted that TikTok collects substantial personal data from users, making it a security risk.

In a statement posted on its website, TikTok sought to distance itself from China, saying "we are not influenced by any foreign government, including the Chinese government."

The company's data centers are located outside China and "none of our data is subject to Chinese law," it said.

The social media firm denied that it removes content "based on sensitivities related to China."

"We have never been asked by the Chinese government to remove any content and we would not do so if asked. Period," it said, adding that it had no intention of operating in China.

The senators also warned that TikTok could potentially be used to influence voters in next year's election in the same way Russians manipulated US social media in the 2016 campaign.

"Questions have also been raised regarding the potential for censorship or manipulation of certain content," they said.

"TikTok reportedly censors materials deemed politically sensitive to the Chinese Communist Party, including content related to the recent Hong Kong protests, as well as references to Tiananmen

Square, Tibetan and Taiwanese independence, and the treatment of Uighurs."

They acknowledged that the app does not operate in China, where ByteDance offers the similar but separate DouYin app, and that TikTok's user data is stored inside the United States.

However, they said, "ByteDance is still required to adhere to the laws of China."

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