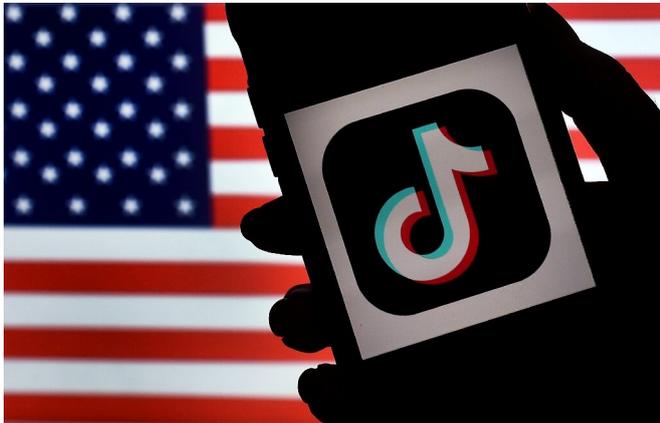


Trump moves on China apps may create new internet 'firewall'

7 August 2020, by Rob Lever



US moves to ban Chinese-owned mobile app TikTok could set a precedent for moves by other countries to limit American internet companies, analysts say

A ban by President Donald Trump's administration on Chinese mobile apps such as TikTok and WeChat risks fragmenting an already fragile global internet and creating an American version of China's "Great Firewall."

Fears about the global internet ecosystem intensified this week with Trump's executive orders banning the popular video app TikTok and Chinese social network WeChat, following a US government directive to prohibit the use of other "untrusted" applications and services from China.

The restrictions announced on the basis of what Trump called national security threats move further away from the long-promoted American ideal of a global, open internet and could invite other countries to follow suit, analysts said.

"It's really an attempt to fragment the internet and the global information society along US and Chinese lines, and shut China out of the information economy," said Milton Mueller, a

Georgia Tech University professor and founder of the Internet Governance Project.

Mueller said this represents a move "to create a Western firewall" similar to the Chinese barrier, which would be enforced with US economic sanctions globally.

This could backfire on Silicon Valley giants which dominate the online world outside China because "there are lots of nationalistic governments around the world which could make the same claims about Apple and Google and Facebook and Twitter, that they are sucking up data," Mueller said.

"It will be open season on nationalistic blockages and regulations on these social media apps."



One of the most popular apps in China, WeChat is a social network which includes digital payments and is used by people who travel from China to communicate with friends and family back home

'Clean Network' plan

Trump made good this week on his threats against WeChat and TikTok—two apps with major

audiences.

Using executive order authority, Trump gave Americans 45 days to stop doing business with the Chinese platforms, effectively setting a deadline for a potential, under-pressure sale of TikTok by its parent firm ByteDance to Microsoft.

His actions follow a "Clean Network" directive from the State Department that would bar "untrusted" apps and services from China from being used by American carriers and installed on devices in the US.

This could lead to a competitive and confusing situation in parts of the world forced to choose between the US and Chinese ecosystems, said independent technology analyst Richard Windsor.

"The digital divide between China and the West is coming down and countries caught in the middle (Africa and parts of Asia) will have to decide on which side they wish to remain," Windsor said on his Radio Free Mobile blog.

'Cyber sovereignty' move

Adam Segal, director of the digital and cyberspace policy program at the Council on Foreign Relations, said the US actions point to a notion of "cyber sovereignty" long promoted by China and opposed by the United States.

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