

Trump administration delays enforcement of TikTok ban

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The Trump administration gave an 11th-hour 15-day extension to the deadline for TikTok to be sold to US owners before the China-based short-form video sharing app was to be shut down on November 12.

The extension, granted by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS), which oversees the acquisition of US companies by foreign entities, was confirmed by the Treasury Department on Friday. A department statement said, “This extension will provide the parties and the Committee additional time to resolve this case in a manner that complies with the Order.”

The order referred to is the executive declaration issued by President Trump on August 6 that identified TikTok as an example of how “the spread in the United States of mobile applications developed and owned by companies in the People’s Republic of China (China) continues to threaten the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States.” None of these assertions have been substantiated by any facts, much less proven.

TikTok now has 850 million worldwide users and 100 million users in the US. The app has continued to be downloaded by mobile device users in record numbers despite the anti-Chinese propaganda campaign of the White House that has been supported by both the Democrats and Republicans in Congress.

TikTok, with more than 60 percent of its US users between the of ages 10 and 29, is owned by Beijing-based ByteDance. The company launched TikTok in 2017 as a worldwide version of its popular Chinese app called Douyin, which had been created a year earlier. When ByteDance acquired a Chinese competitor called musical.ly—which had an office in Santa Monica, California—and merged it with TikTok in August 2018, the combined product took off.

According to a study performed by iPrice Group, “The USA recorded the highest download index of TikTok videos despite its recent controversy with the app. For now, TikTok reigns as the USA’s #1 entertainment app as it wins reprieve from Trump’s ban orders.”

The establishment of the new deadline of November 27 by the White House is a de facto acknowledgement that its imperialist bullying of the successful and financially valuable Chinese-owned social media platform had become entangled in a web of political and economic contradictions, not the least of which was the electoral defeat of Donald Trump on November 3.

It is ironic that one of the bogus assertions from the White House about TikTok has been that the “mobile application may also be used for disinformation campaigns that benefit the Chinese Communist Party,” and President Trump himself is engaged in one of the biggest lies in American history—declaring that he won the 2020 presidential election with the support of leading figures in the Republican Party, despite losing the popular vote by nearly 6 million votes as well as the electoral college.

Another of the problems faced by the White House has been the court decisions that Trump’s TikTok executive orders were unconstitutional violations of first (speech) and fifth (due process) amendment rights and that a shutdown of the platform would cause harm to users.

The terms of the executive order, which were subsequently spelled out by the President’s commerce secretary, Wilbur Ross, said that TikTok must be acquired by a US firm by November 12 or all financial transactions with the company, such as revenue generated in advertising sales, or all technology platforms hosting the app, such as Apple’s iOS and the

Android operating systems, would be declared illegal.

While there are conflicting messages coming from the White House about what will happen next, TikTok said it was committed to engaging with CFIUS to address the security concerns, “even as we disagree with them.”

There is symbolic significance to the new deadline established for the sale of TikTok. November 27 is known in the US as the post-Thanksgiving Day retail event called Black Friday, where massive price markdowns are offered on consumer tech products to Christmas shoppers. Since the beginning of the anti-Chinese campaign against TikTok, an effort has been mounted by the billionaire Trump and his ultra-wealthy cohorts in the tech and retail industries to get their hands on the prized video-sharing platform at a steep discount.

An operative proposal for the acquisition of the assets of TikTok between the US-based enterprise software giant Oracle and global retail monopoly Walmart was given preliminary approval by the Trump administration on September 19. The deal would create a new entity called TikTok Global jointly with 20 percent owned by Oracle and Walmart and the rest split between a group of US venture capitalists and the current Chinese shareholders.

Since this deal would make Oracle merely a “trusted tech partner” of TikTok, leaving a majority ownership with the ByteDance investors, the plan has run up against opposition from the extreme nationalist and virulent anti-Chinese political figures in the US, including Trump. It is unclear whether an agreement can be worked out before the new deadline on November 27.

Although the media has reported that there is “uncertainty” about the future of the TikTok divestiture by ByteDance because of the victory of President-elect Joseph Biden, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on November 11 that the former vice president’s office said “it didn’t have anything to share on its TikTok plans.” The *Journal* also wrote that it was unclear whether Biden “would expend political capital to overturn the orders” issued by the Trump administration.

What is clear is that the incoming Biden administration will use whatever tactics are necessary—including an outright theft of the TikTok platform from the Chinese owners—as part of the drive

to preserve US domination of the global tech markets. Keeping the Trump administration’s executive orders in place will also keep the cinders of anti-Chinese hatred burning while preparations are being made for the larger trade and military conflicts with China.



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