

Biden targets China in executive order for review of foreign-based apps

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On June 9, President Biden signed a directive calling for foreign-based apps to be reviewed for the “unacceptable national security risks” they pose to US interests. The “Executive Order on Protecting American’s Sensitive Data from Foreign Adversaries” specifically targets apps developed in the People’s Republic of China as among those from countries that continue “to threaten the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States.”

Biden’s order further states that the US government should evaluate the threats “through rigorous, evidence-based analysis” because the apps operating on personal electronic devices “can access and capture vast swaths of information from users, including United States persons’ personal information and proprietary business information.” The directive claims that such data collection includes the efforts of “foreign adversaries to steal or otherwise obtain United States persons’ data” and also warns about “advancing authoritarian controls and interests.”

The Biden administration is making assertions about the “unusual and extraordinary threat” posed by foreign adversaries without providing any specific evidence of said data collection or even naming the apps in question.

However, the foreign policy objective of making threats against China is so transparently the motive that the executive order includes the absurd claim that the US “seeks to promote accountability for persons who engage in serious human rights abuse” and goes on to claim the right to “impose consequences on those persons in action separate from this order.” This from an American government that is responsible for three decades of bloody imperialist wars, countless human rights atrocities around the globe and the mass surveillance of the world’s electronic communications.

The corporate media has focused in on the fact that Biden revoked and replaced the three executive orders from the Trump administration that aimed to shut down and ban the popular Chinese-based TikTok, WeChat and eight other applications. Aside from the fact that TikTok and WeChat are mentioned in the titles of two of the revoked Trump executive orders, the names of these apps would not even have been mentioned in Biden’s order.

The lead for the media reporting was provided in a separate Biden press release that goes into the fact that Trump’s orders attempted to shut down the apps by making business transactions of any kind with the developers a crime. The release mentions in passing that “two of these E.O.s are subject to litigation.”

The anti-Chinese operation by the Trump White House to steal the valuable TikTok from the Beijing-based ByteDance and hand it over to American investors and corporate management fell apart last year when a US judge agreed with the company that the President’s emergency economic powers did not grant him the authority to impose an arbitrary ban. TikTok is currently valued at \$50 billion and the app has nearly 100 million US users, nearly 700 million worldwide users and has been downloaded to electronic devices more than 2 billion times.

The truth is that the Biden White House is deepening the national security-based attack on China that was initiated during the Trump administration. This is proven by the fact that the basis for Biden’s authority to impose his executive orders is the national emergency declaration issued by Trump on May 15, 2019, called, “Securing the Information and Communications Technology and Services Supply Chain.”

Trump’s Executive Order 13873 is referenced five

times in Biden's June 9 order and is itself based upon two US laws—the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (1977) and the National Emergencies Act (1976)—that grant the President extraordinary authority in times of crisis such as a national emergency or declaration of war by Congress.

In his Executive Order 13873 Trump declared a national emergency and gave the US Commerce Secretary authority to prohibit business transactions that involve information technology, “controlled by, or subject to the jurisdiction or direction of a foreign adversary” or are deemed by members of the President's cabinet to pose “an unacceptable risk to the national security of the United States or the security and safety of United States persons.”

That Biden did not revoke Executive Order 13873 shows that the Democrats are determined to utilize the adoption of the most right-wing and xenophobic elements of the Trump and Republican Party agenda to conduct their foreign policy, especially in relation to China.

This fact was acknowledged by the *New York Times* in its report on a call with Biden administration officials on the day the executive orders were signed. The *Times* report said, “The Trump order had not been carried out ‘in the soundest fashion,’ Biden administration officials said in a call with reporters, adding that the new directive would establish ‘clear intelligible criteria’ to evaluate national security risks posed by software applications connected to foreign governments, particularly China.”

The *Times* report went on to say that Biden's order reflects “a growing urgency among American officials, both Republican and Democrat, to aggressively counter what they see as a growing threat posed by China's military and technology sectors.”

Recognizing that Trump's approach to TikTok and WeChat failed in the US courts, the *Times* reported, “Analysts said the new executive order was meant to create a process that could withstand such a challenge if the Biden administration chose to ratchet up pressure on individual apps.”

James Lewis, a senior vice president of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, told the *Times*, “They are taking the same direction as the Trump administration but in some ways tougher, in a more orderly fashion and implemented in a good way.” By

“in a good way” Lewis means that Biden hopes to be more effective and successful than Trump in blocking the global expansion of Chinese information technology.

Although the Biden White House did not give details about the future of TikTok in the US, administration officials did say the review of the app by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States that was initiated under Trump was continuing and separate from the order.



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