

Senate passes TikTok ban, putting it on track for Biden's signature

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The Senate voted Tuesday night to approve a \$95 billion foreign military aid package passed by the House of Representatives over the weekend that also includes a reactionary bill that would ban the Chinese-owned social media app TikTok.

In a vote of 80 to 19, the Senate moved earlier in the day to limit debate on the bill package before moving to a final vote, and it is moving on to President Biden, who has indicated he will sign it.

The military aid package is made up of four bills. One is for \$61 billion to support the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, one is for \$26 billion in support of Israel's ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in Gaza, one is for \$8 billion to Taiwan for war preparations against China and one is for banning TikTok and includes some other reactionary national security measures.

The TikTok ban legislation was enthusiastically accepted as part of the military aid package by the Democratic Party leadership in the House and the White House in order to win support from fascistic Republicans who have opposed, based on their own reactionary nationalism, sending more aid to Ukraine.

The legislation, titled the "21st Century Peace through Strength Act," is a demonstration of how far the entire US political establishment has shifted to the right under conditions of intensifying imperialist war and threat of third world war. The bill was passed in the House by a vote of 360-58.

The language of the TikTok ban states that the Chinese-based ByteDance, owner of the TikTok platform, must sell the short-form video streaming app to a US-owned entity or be shut down. The law gives ByteDance nine months to sell TikTok, with a three-month extension if a sale is already in process.

The bill also requires ByteDance to relinquish

ownership of the core technology of TikTok, the algorithm that recommends videos for users to watch. The main body of the TikTok ban language is essentially identical to what was adopted by the House in March, including references to "foreign adversary controlled applications" which could be used to impose similar measures on any popular smartphone app that is developed in a country considered an enemy of the United States.

The other elements in the 184-page bill include a grab bag of new sanctions against Russia, Iran and China and other law-and-order repressive measures. One of the sections is entitled, "Repurposing of Russian Sovereign Assets."

The passage of a TikTok ban will mark the first time that Congress has passed legislation aimed at shutting down a social media platform, a measure that the US politicians from both capitalist parties have criticized other nations for doing.

The US government's argument for forcing ByteDance to divest itself of TikTok is that it is a national security matter because the Chinese government could be gaining access to data of millions of Americans who use the app. Additionally, as with all social media platforms, the US political establishment want to gain control of and suppress content on TikTok under the guise that it is amplifying disinformation in the lead up to the November election.

Despite repeated assurances from the managers of the US offices of TikTok that the Chinese government does not have access to and has never asked for Americans' data, the US media and politicians continue to spread misinformation about this issue.

Meanwhile, as both houses of Congress and the White House are seeking to transfer the Chinese-based app into the hands of a US corporation, it is a fact that

the latest rules of Section 702 of FISA signed into law by President Biden on Saturday would compel companies like TikTok to hand over the electronic communications of US citizens to the CIA and NSA without a warrant.

TikTok responded to the new bill in a statement that said, “It is unfortunate that the House of Representatives is using the cover of important foreign and humanitarian assistance to once again jam through a ban bill that would trample the free speech rights of 170 million Americans.”

Jenna Leventoff, senior policy counsel at ACLU, issued a statement after the House vote on April 20, which said, “Make no mistake: the House’s TikTok bill is a ban, and it’s blatant censorship. Today, the House of Representatives voted to violate the First Amendment rights of more than half of the country. The Senate must reject this unconstitutional and reckless bill.”

Meanwhile, corporate vultures in the US are circling around awaiting the passage of the ban and seeing it as a massive profit-making opportunity. According to a report by NBC News, Steve Mnuchin, former Treasury secretary during the Trump administration, is planning to make a bid, “telling CNBC in March that he was putting together an investor group.”

The *Wall Street Journal* also reported that former Activision Blizzard CEO Bobby Kotick was seeking potential buying partners. ByteDance, which owns many companies, is worth hundreds of billions of dollars, while TikTok would fetch less than that, according to experts, especially if it is sold without its powerful recommendation algorithm.

It is more likely, according to tech experts, that ByteDance is unlikely to agree to any kind of sale. Previously, the Chinese government has said it will not part with the TikTok algorithm and considers it a national security asset. Without it, TikTok is far less valuable and appealing to investors.

Whatever the contradictions contained in the potential sale of TikTok, the overriding purpose of the effort to ban the app is to drum up anti-Chinese sentiment within the US population and condition it for war with the regime in Beijing. It is the insatiable drive of US imperialism toward world war that is the objective force behind the inclusion of the TikTok ban with the other bills to fund the proxy war with Russia in

Ukraine, the Israeli genocide in Gaza and, ultimately, war with China.



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