**TikTok Saga and Washington**

**The geopolitical competition in the new era makes everything as clear as daylight.**

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The recent passage of a bill by the U.S. House of Representa­tives targeting TikTok on April 20 has reignited discussions over the platform’s future in the American market. This legislation follows a similar bill passed just over a month ago, which imposed a six-month ultimatum for Tik­Tok to either sell or face mar­ket restrictions. However, the latest bill extends this timeframe to 270 days, with a potential 90-day extension at President Joe Biden’s dis­cretion if progress is made towards a sale. As the bill awaits Senate approv­al and President Biden’s signature, an­ticipation looms over potential legal challenges to the proposed ban. Mi­chael Beckerman, TikTok’s head of pub­lic policy, underscored the gravity of the situation in a memo to the company’s American staff, emphasizing plans for a legal challenge once the bill is enact­ed. The outcome of this legislative ma­neuvering will undoubtedly shape the future of TikTok’s presence in the U.S. market. The move has prompted specu­lation about the underlying motivations driving such legislative measures, rais­ing questions about the broader impli­cations for tech regulation and interna­tional relations.

The fate of TikTok, used by about 170 million Americans, has become a major issue in Washington. But why does the sought-after app need to face such a di­lemma? It is hard to deny that the United States’ hype of the China data threat the­ory without evidence is a Sword of Da­mocles in the trade war. Create a threat even if there is no threat. Even though as an app that creates joy and brings ben­efits in the U.S., as long as it is linked to China, everything must be a threat. Per­haps it is more appropriately described as McCarthyism in the digital era. Shou Zi Chew said in a video posted after the vote the legislation if signed into law “will lead to a ban on TikTok in the Unit­ed States. It would take billions of dol­lars out of the pockets of creators and small businesses, and put more than 300,000 U.S. jobs at risk.” By now, one in three U.S. adults have used TikTok in 2023, up 10 percentage points from 2021, according to the Pew Research Center. Small business owners, educa­tors, activists, and youngsters who use TikTok believe that the app has played an increasingly indispensable role in the U.S. national economy and public life.

Francis P. Crawley, Chairman of the Committee on Data of the Internation­al Science Council (ISC), pointed out that the United States’ suppression of TikTok is a “Game of Throne” relat­ed to the control of data and the econ­omy in the competition between China and the United States. Just like the sanc­tions against Japan’s semiconductor in­dustry in the 1980s and the dismem­berment of French energy giant Alstom through long-arm jurisdiction in 2013. Apparently, no conclusive evidence was ever given for each accusation- No mat­ter how many greenbacks are earned or jobs are created for this country, every­thing about China must be trampled into the dirt - either mine or dead, no ifs and buts. Faced with the fact that TikTok’s downloads often exceed those of Me­ta’s Facebook and Instagram, Facebook, which once triggered the sensational “Cambridge Analytica” scandal, couldn’t wait to add fuel to the fire in this all-round campaign launched by the White House. In that incident, the information of as many as 87 million Facebook us­ers was leaked to the political consult­ing firm Cambridge Analytica, which was used to encourage voters to vote for Trump in the 2016 election. However, Facebook still remains the number one social media platform in the globe.

On March 30, 2022, the Washington Post published an article revealing that Meta hired Targeted Victory, one of the major pro-Republican consulting firms in the U.S., to try to launch a movement against TikTok. Facebook had experi­enced negative user growth for the first time in its 18-year history. CEO Mark Zuckerberg once talked straight, “TikTok is a huge obstacle.” The geopolitical com­petition in the new era makes everything as clear as daylight. In the digital age, governments around the world regard the digital economy and cyberspace as new highlands on the silent battlefield. The popularity of TikTok as a global so­cial media in the U.S. has made the White House feel a bundle of nerves. Therefore, the “witch-hunt” could not be avoided. Beyond the battle at the business table, to be sure, the political climate in Wash­ington is increasingly favorable to the bill, as many politicians don’t want to be seen as soft on China in an election year. Still, there are concerns about the impact of the strict but subtle ban on young vot­ers. Clearly, the wrath of the youngsters who bombarded the White House hot­line cannot be ignored easily.

When it comes to the original inten­tion of the legislation, U.S. officials have said that TikTok may have the poten­tial to manipulate elections, sway public opinion, and collect U.S. user data, thus TikTok must be separated from Byte­Dance for the sake of national securi­ty. However, in a recent live broadcast, Wisconsin Republican Rep. Mike Galla­gher, one of the bill’s authors and main promoters, revealed the real reason for the ban, “TikTok is becoming the main news platform for young Americans un­der the age of 30,” and “our government does not have full binding force on this platform.” In addition, the differences in attitudes towards the bill between the two Houses have caused TikTok to face more unpredictable results. A report­er from CBS expressed this more blunt­ly, “In U.S. political circles, any initiative or investigation against China can gain cross-party support.” However, oth­er politicians including New York State Representative Jamal Bowman believe that this bill goes too far, which will in­fringe on the First Amendment rights (of the U.S. Constitution), and “this bill appears to be very hypocritical due to many members of Congress use TikTok, so does the White House.”

Is the Republicans setting up a per­fect dead end for its opponents? It is undeniable that the two parties hope to jointly knock TikTok away, but if Biden approves the bill, he will offend a huge number of young voters; if not, it means “showing weakness towards Chi­na”, which also gets him into big trou­ble. The bill is among a series of moves Washington has taken to address na­tional security concerns about China, from electric cars to artificial intelli­gence to cranes at U.S. ports. So far, so-called national security threat issues have become universal “Post-it notes” for abuse by the White House. Obvious­ly, Biden has not learned from the failed experience of the Trump administra­tion in banning TikTok, and the pub­lic opinion crisis caused by the bill trap has become rampant. The antagonism and division in American society and the hysterical anti-China sentiments of politicians could not be whitewashed yet. When facing Beijing, guns are unan­imous; when dealing with internal af­fairs, “one United States opposes the other” has become the mainstream.

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