

TIKTOK OPERATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES: UNVEILING STRATEGIC MOVES, SCIENTIFIC INSIGHTS AND WHAT LIES AHEAD

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On 24 April 2024 US President Biden signed a Bill to force the divestment of ByteDance in TikTok's American legal entity, citing national security concerns and accusations that TikTok is effectively an influence operations capability of the Chinese government. Current analysis on the nature of TikTok operations in the United States (and elsewhere) compares content that is pushed to American users with content that is pushed to Chinese users on domestic platforms such as *Douyan* (抖音). While comparative content analysis methods do have merit, there remains a substantial degree of subjectivity and a lack of consistent analytical techniques. The analysis covers multiple recent scientific studies conducted in China that are relevant to TikTok, including at the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and relevant People's Liberation Army doctrinal publications. These primary sources provide a rare direct view into the fundamental strategic and technical underpinnings of a platform such as TikTok that are used in the United States to influence public opinion. The analysis rounds up with a section on implications and likely new approaches by Beijing to attempt to maintain its presence within the United States in the information operations domain.

(Click on the link to read the above in [Chinese](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#))

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Chinese:

在美国的抖音运营：揭示战略举措、科学见解及未来展望

2024 年 4 月 24 日，美国总统拜登签署了一项法案，要求字节跳动剥离其在美国的 TikTok 业务，理由是国家安全关切，并指控 TikTok 实际上是中国政府的舆论操控工具。目前对 TikTok 在美国（及其他地区）运营性质的分析，比较了推送给美国用户的内容与推送给中国国内平台抖音用户的内容。尽管比较内容分析方法确有其价值，但仍存在相当程度的主观性和缺乏一致的分析技术。本研究涵盖了中国最近进行的多项与抖音相关的科学研究，包括中共中央党校和解放军相关出版物。这些原始资料提供了罕见的直接视角，有助于理解 TikTok 等平台在美国影响公众舆论的基本战略和技术基础。本分析最后讨论了北京可能采取的新方法，以维持其在美国信息操作领域的存在。

French:

LES OPERATIONS DE TIKTOK AUX ÉTATS-UNIS : MISE EN LUMIERE DES STRATEGIES, DES CONNAISSANCES SCIENTIFIQUES ET DES PERSPECTIVES FUTURES

Le 24 avril 2024, le président américain Biden a signé une loi obligeant ByteDance à céder son entité juridique américaine de TikTok, invoquant des préoccupations de sécurité nationale et des accusations selon lesquelles TikTok serait en réalité une plateforme d'opérations d'influence du gouvernement chinois. Les analyses actuelles sur la nature des opérations de TikTok aux États-Unis (et ailleurs) comparent le contenu proposé aux utilisateurs américains avec celui proposé aux utilisateurs chinois sur des plateformes domestiques telles que Douyin (抖音). Bien que les méthodes d'analyse comparative de contenu aient une certaine valeur, elles présentent encore un degré substantiel de subjectivité et un manque d'uniformité dans les outils analytiques mobilisés. Cette analyse couvre plusieurs études scientifiques récentes menées en Chine qui sont pertinentes pour TikTok, notamment à l'École du Parti du Comité central du Parti communiste chinois et dans des publications doctrinales pertinentes de l'Armée populaire de libération. Ces sources primaires offrent un précieux aperçu direct sur les bases stratégiques et techniques fondamentales d'une plateforme telle que TikTok et utilisée aux États-Unis pour influencer l'opinion publique. L'analyse se termine par une section sur les implications ainsi que sur les probables nouvelles approches que mobilisera Pékin pour tenter de maintenir sa présence aux États-Unis dans le domaine des opérations d'information.

Spanish:

OPERACIONES DE TIKTOK EN LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS: REVELANDO MOVIMIENTOS ESTRATÉGICOS, PERSPECTIVAS CIENTÍFICAS Y LO QUE VIENE A CONTINUACIÓN

El 24 de abril de 2024, el presidente de los Estados Unidos, Biden, firmó un proyecto de ley para obligar a ByteDance a desinvertir en la entidad legal estadounidense de TikTok, citando preocupaciones de seguridad nacional y acusaciones de que TikTok es efectivamente una capacidad de operaciones de influencia del gobierno chino. El análisis actual sobre la naturaleza de las operaciones de TikTok en los Estados Unidos (y en otros lugares) compara el contenido que se impulsa a los usuarios estadounidenses con el contenido que se impulsa a los usuarios chinos en plataformas nacionales como Douyin (抖音). Si bien los métodos comparativos de análisis de contenido tienen mérito, existe un grado sustancial de subjetividad y una falta de técnicas analíticas consistentes. El análisis abarca múltiples estudios científicos recientes realizados en China que son relevantes para TikTok, incluidos en la Escuela del Partido del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de China y en publicaciones doctrinales relevantes del Ejército Popular de Liberación. Estas fuentes primarias proporcionan una rara visión directa de los fundamentos estratégicos y técnicos de una plataforma como TikTok que se utiliza en los Estados Unidos para influir en la opinión pública. El análisis concluye con una sección sobre las implicaciones y los probables nuevos enfoques de Pekín para intentar mantener su presencia dentro de los Estados Unidos en el ámbito de las operaciones de información.

Executive Summary

1. **Presidential Action on TikTok:** On 24 April 2024, US President Biden signed a Bill mandating the divestment of ByteDance from TikTok's US operations. ByteDance has vowed to challenge the bill in the American legal system.
2. **Bipartisan Support and Public Opinion:** The bill received broad bipartisan support in the United States Congress. However, American public opinion, especially amongst the 18–34-year-old demographic, remains split.
3. **Chinese Government Linkages:** The action followed extensive investigations and intelligence briefings, which claimed that TikTok was acting as an extension of Beijing's influence operations and could serve strategic Chinese interests within the United States.
4. **Influence Operations Concerns:** There is a growing concern about China's potential use of TikTok for information and psychological operations within the United States to sway public opinion on key issues like Taiwan and the perceived shortfalls of the American form of democracy.
5. **Strategic Communication Tactics:** The utilisation of America's own cultural constructs and communication preferences is emphasised as a method for effectively disseminating Chinese narratives via platforms like TikTok.
6. **Legal and Civil Rights Challenges:** The Bill faces opposition from several US groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union, highlighting the complexities and legal challenges associated with enforcing such a divestment.
7. **Beijing's Response:** In a retaliatory move, Beijing appears to be targeting American platforms such as YouTube and other American news and social media sites. This pivot is indicative of a broader, more embedded approach aimed at influencing American narratives and strengthening China's communication capabilities within the United States.

8. **Three Warfares Strategy:** In 2014, China's National Defence University published the 'Three Warfares' strategy, which emphasises psychological, media and legal warfare to achieve strategic objectives traditionally pursued through conventional military means.
9. **Potential Civil-Military Fusion:** There appears to be considerable convergence between overt People's Liberation Army doctrine on information warfare that was published in 2015, 2014, 2013 and 1995, the founding of TikTok in 2016 and subsequent Chinese scientific advances in the strategic types of influence operations used by TikTok in 2023.
10. **American Case Study:** The overlap between the Three Warfares doctrine and TikTok's observed operations and techniques in the United States is perhaps the most noteworthy.