

Trump says he will ban TikTok through executive action as soon as Saturday

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President Donald Trump on Friday told reporters he will act as soon as Saturday to ban Chinese-owned video app TikTok from the United States, NBC News reported.

Trump made the comments while chatting with reporters on Air Force One during the flight back to Washington from Florida.

“As far as TikTok is concerned we’re banning them from the United States,” Trump said, calling the action a “severance.”

Trump did not specify whether he will act through an executive order, or another method, such as a designation, according to NBC News.

“Well, I have that authority. I can do it with an executive order or that,” Trump said.

A TikTok spokesperson told NBC News that the app helped to create jobs across the U.S. and was committed to user privacy.

“We’ve hired nearly 1,000 people to our US team this year alone, and are proud to be hiring another 10,000 employees into great paying jobs across the US.,” the spokesperson said in a statement. “Our \$1 billion creator fund supports US creators who are building livelihoods from our platform.

“TikTok US user data is stored in the US, with strict controls on employee access,” the statement said. “TikTok’s biggest investors come from the US. We are committed to protecting our users’ privacy and safety as we continue working to bring joy to families and meaningful careers to those who create on our platform.”

Trump’s comments come as it was reported Friday that Microsoft has held talks to buy the TikTok video-sharing mobile app from Chinese owner ByteDance, one person close to the situation told CNBC. This person characterized the talks as having been underway for some time, rather than being brand new.

Trump told reporters that he didn’t support the reported spinoff deal involving Microsoft buying TikTok, NBC News reported.

A TikTok acquisition could make Microsoft, a major provider of business software, more concentrated on consumer technology, which Microsoft has moved away from somewhat in recent years, by exiting the smartphone hardware, fitness hardware and e-book markets.

Amy Hood, Microsoft’s chief financial officer, said in 2018 that in recent years the company had been consistent in its strategy on acquiring “networked assets” with many

users, including LinkedIn.

Chinese company ByteDance launched TikTok in 2017. The app has grown more popular during the coronavirus pandemic, with 2 billion downloads in April, according to Sensor Tower. Competitors include Facebook and Snap.

ByteDance investors seeking to take over TikTok have valued it at \$50 billion, Reuters reported earlier this week.

Microsoft declined to comment on the talks, which were first reported by Fox Business Network.

“While we do not comment on rumors or speculation, we are confident in the long-term success of TikTok,” TikTok said in a statement Friday.

The rise of TikTok in the U.S. has prompted the Trump Administration to scrutinize the app.

Trump said earlier on Friday that the administration was looking at various options for what to do with TikTok, including banning the app.

Earlier this month, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the U.S. was looking at banning TikTok as well as other Chinese social media apps, citing national security concerns. Pompeo added that the Trump administration was evaluating TikTok akin to Chinese state-backed tech companies Huawei and ZTE, which he has previously described as “Trojan horses for Chinese intelligence.”

In 2018, the Pentagon halted sales of Huawei and ZTE mobile phones and modems on military bases around the world, again citing national security concerns.

U.S. officials have long complained that Chinese intellectual property theft has cost the economy billions of dollars in revenue and thousands of jobs and threatens national security. Beijing maintains it does not engage in intellectual property theft.

The move by the Trump administration represents another step in the deteriorating relations between Washington and Beijing and comes a week after the U.S. closed the Chinese consulate in Houston, prompting China to shutter the U.S. consulate in Chengdu.

The Pentagon has taken concrete steps to discourage U.S. service members and their families from using Chinese-backed tech.

In December, the Defense Information Systems Agency advised that all Department of Defense personnel should not use the Chinese-owned social media platform, citing a “potential risk associated with using the TikTok app.”