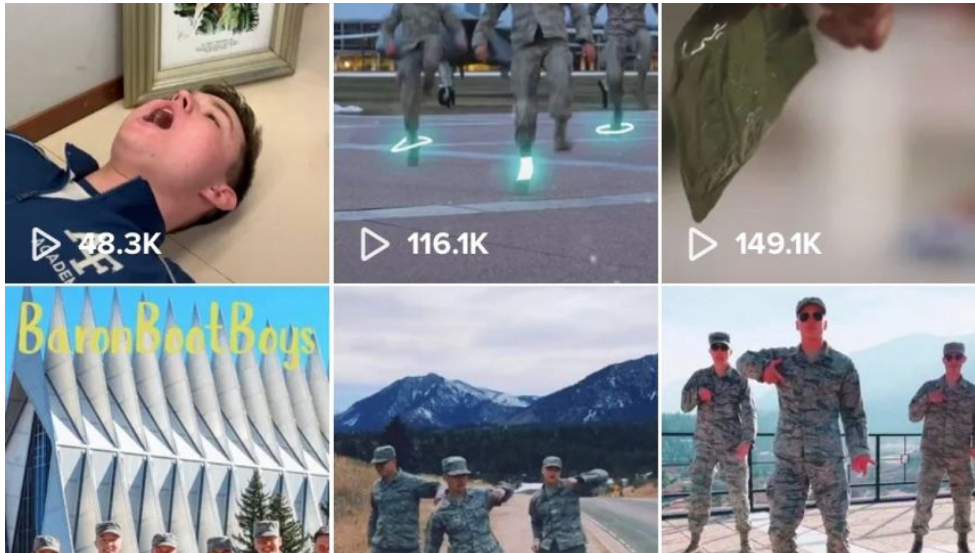


SCIENCE

TikTok not approved for use on Australia's Defence devices

ABC Science / By technology reporter [Ariel Bogle](#)

Posted Thu 16 Jan 2020 at 8:00am, updated Thu 16 Jan 2020 at 9:36am



Many members of the US military have popular TikTok accounts. (ABC News: [@Baronbootboys Screenshot](#))

The #army hashtag on TikTok may have over 11 billion views, but the Australian Defence Department is still not a fan.

The popular Chinese smartphone app is not allowed on Australian Defence devices, following a similar ban by US military forces.

TikTok is not used nor has it been whitelisted, according to a Department of Defence spokesperson.

The Pentagon also now [discourages personnel](#) from having the app, even on their personal smartphones.

Owned by the Chinese technology giant ByteDance, TikTok allows users to make short video clips, often set to music.

For example, in 2019 a quartet of Finnish Navy sailors [got millions of views](#) for their video impersonating Mickey Mouse onboard a vessel, and compilation videos of the best military TikTok continue to appear on YouTube.

But while its cultural influence is on the rise globally, the app's content policies and Chinese ties have raised national security concerns in the US.


Key points:

- The Chinese app TikTok is not approved on Defence devices
- This follows a similar military ban in the United States
- Politicians are concerned about the app's data security, among other issues

In 2018, then-university student Nathan Ruser found maps associated with the run tracking app Strava [revealed the location](#) of bases and troop routines in Iraq, among other military sites.

At that time, a spokesperson said Australian defence personnel "are advised to actively use and manage privacy controls to limit the amount of information they make publicly available".

It comes back to "good cyber hygiene", according to Edward Farrell, a cyber security expert.

 A screenshot of a TikTok account with images showing men in military uniform.

Location information, computers or hardware, personnel demeanour — this type of information could be inadvertently shared in a video and be used by groups ranging from nation states to terrorists or issue motivated groups.

"Any information disclosed will always build out a piece of the puzzle," he said.

It can "paint a quite vivid picture of what these military personnel are up to", suggested ASPI's Mr Ryan.

The military crackdown on TikTok comes at a time of rising anxiety about the influence of Chinese-owned technology on Australia's security.

In 2018, the Australian government [barred the telecommunication company Huawei](#) from taking part in the rollout of 5G mobile infrastructure over national security concerns.

In general, the Defence Department is known to review the security of apps used by personnel.

A 2018 certification report by the Chief Information Officer Group, obtained under freedom of information laws, states that the implementation of the messaging software WhatsApp has "significant" risk.

However, this risk could be reduced with "relatively little effort".

For example, the potential for an attacker to become a member of a personnel WhatsApp group without interaction from the other users could be mitigated by creating a "pre-shared list of members", the document said.

TikTok was approached for comment.

While there are security risks, some think TikTok could be a powerful military recruiting tool. (ABC News: @Angrycops)

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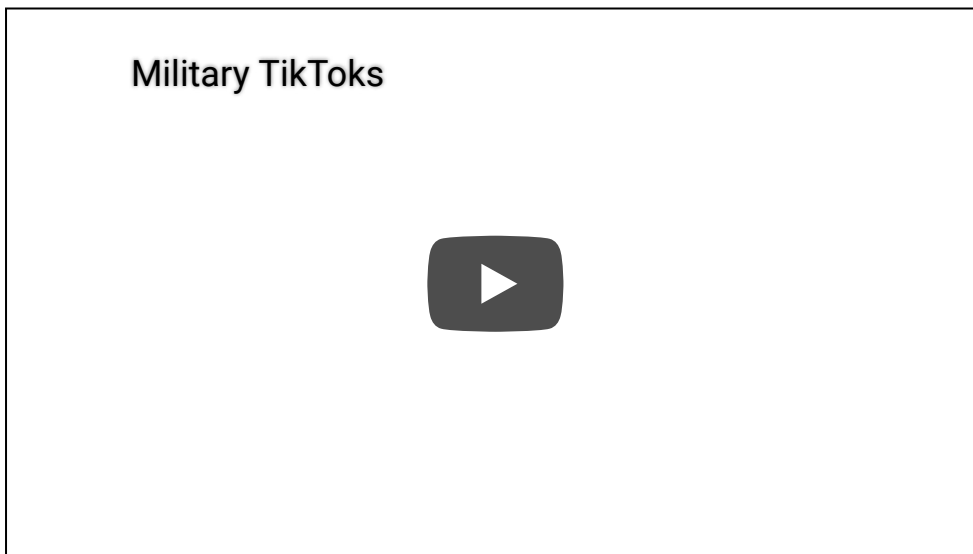
Last year, US politicians [pushed for a review](#) over the potential for Chinese government access to local TikTok data.

The [company claims](#) TikTok data is stored in the US and Singapore.

In December, the Pentagon advised there was a "potential risk" associated with using the TikTok app.

The Marine Corps Forces Cyberspace Command also blocks TikTok from government-issued mobile devices, Christopher Harrison, a United States Marine Corps spokesman, [told the New York Times](#) last week.

"This decision is consistent with our efforts to proactively address existing and emerging threats as we secure and defend our network."



YOUTUBE: A compilation of TikToks from military members.

Despite the crackdown, people who appear to be in military uniform — largely Americans, and to a lesser extent Australians — can still be found on the platform.

Australia's Department of Defence declined to explain its reasoning for barring TikTok from use on work devices, but the move is not unprecedented.

The department previously banned personnel from using WeChat, another popular Chinese social media and messaging app, on work phones.

Fergus Ryan, Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) analyst, said the decision was "prudent" in both cases.

In his view, we do not yet know enough about how ByteDance protects or manages the data of TikTok users, many of them teenagers.

"It's unclear to what extent information that those apps are gathering is being sent back to Beijing," he said.

Security concerns over Chinese technology

The use of popular social apps can bring new challenges for the security of the armed forces, and it can be difficult to manage all the new ways data can be leaked.