

Specialized Committee Topic: The Tiktok Ban - Cybersecurity and Digital Sovereignty



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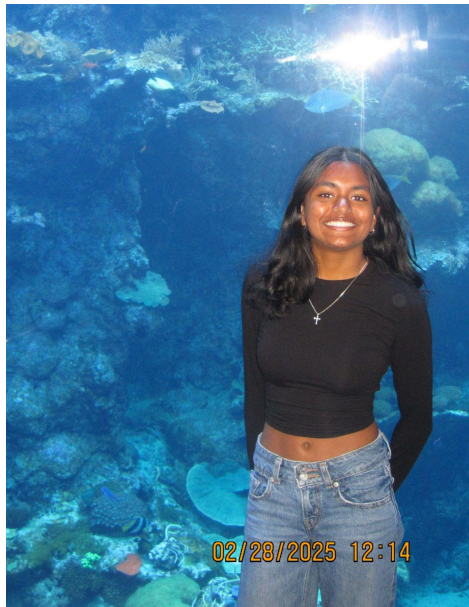
Hello SPEC delegates! My name is Nivi Pedaballi and I'm a junior at Folsom High School. A little bit about my MUN journey, I've attended around 10 conferences throughout highschool and I have chaired before in the past. As a prior public forum debate kid, I've always loved the comparably lowkey environment and resolutions that Model UN reaches by the end of committee. Outside of Model UN, I'm also an attorney for our school's Mock Trial team, an Indian classical dancer, and I love painting or playing soccer in my free-time. Regarding the committee topic, January 19th was the worst day of my life. If this is your first MUN conference or first SPEC committee, I'd definitely recommend reading this background guide first before researching your character so you clearly understand which areas to address in your research and speeches. Other than that, I look forward to hearing various resolutions and different approaches to this issue. Although the purpose of MUN is to maintain peace, I hope to see delegates navigate to the best resolution through much debate and fruitful discussion. If you have any further questions feel free to email me: nivratisai@gmail.com and I'll try to respond as soon as possible!



Co-Chair: Nikita Nishanth

Hey Delegates I'm Nikita Nishanth and I'm a sophomore at Dougherty Valley High School in San Ramon. In regard to my MUN years this is my 3rd year with around 10 conferences all over the bay. EBMUN was my first in person conference and I remember being so scared but having so much fun. I love the endless possibilities that MUN offers and how creative you can be.

Outside of Model UN I love to run. I'm my school's sprints captain running mainly the 400 and



200. If I'm not running I'm sleeping, eating or listening to the neighborhood. I have no social media, including tiktok, so I'm excited to hear your compelling cases and debates on the topic. If this is your first conference or first SPEC I would recommend knowing your character and the topic very well to be able to move with the committee smoothly. Be prepared, be creative and make sure you have fun! If you have any questions or inquiries please reach out and I will get back to you as soon as I

can! nikita.nishanth@gmail.com +1 (510)-359-0299

Specialized Committee Introduction

The Tiktok Ban - Cybersecurity and Digital Sovereignty will be a specialized committee. These are committees that are neither Crisis nor GA but a mix of the two. They do not need to be under the standard UN committees such as WHO or UNDP and have more creative liberty. They tend to be fast similar to a Crisis committee with crisis updates but without crisis notes. Rather than submitting a resolution, as a committee delegates will work together to pass resolutions consistently throughout debate. In this committee delegates will need to research current, up to date facts and stances based on their character. They will need to research plenty of stances that other delegates may have in order to utilize their portfolio powers and achieve their characters goals. This committee may not necessarily follow the same timeline as real life and may be altered with crisis updates. Delegates will need to adapt and be able to change strategies to pass resolutions based on the current situation. Please ensure that you do your research and come prepared in terms of how the committee may go and the topic in general. If you have any questions feel free to reach out.

Topic Overview

The rise of Tiktok once again has started debate all over the world on its safety regarding foreign influence and digital sovereignty. The app continues to grow all over the world with many companies and individuals using it to promote themselves and make a living. However, ByteDance, the Chinese tech company that owns Tiktok has been faced with allegations of digital security and specifically data usage. Concerns with the algorithm and how it can be manipulated to change people's thoughts and how they can be so accurate. Some argue that these allegations come from serious issues and need to be addressed in order to protect the security of the users and keep them away from propaganda while others say the complaints come from other politics. Currently, the main issues stem around data harvesting, algorithmic manipulation, and the potential for foreign influence on public opinion. Many argue that China having this kind of data from users around the world can lead to manipulation and impacts in politics and other global affairs. In response to these issues, many countries have threatened to regulate or even ban usage of the app, like the United States and India. These actions have sparked debate as the ban of Tiktok could lead to harsh economic impacts considering the lives of individuals that make a living off Tiktok and companies that have relied on the TikTok for brand promotions etc. The ban of Tiktok is also seen as an invasion of privacy, as it limits free speech and freedom of expression if governments choose to ban the app.

Historical Context

Beginning with Zhang Yiming the founder of ByteDance, a technology company that manages a range of content platforms in Beijing China, launched the company's first app, Toutiao, the world's first app to implement Artificial Intelligence(AI) to generate a personalized news feed designed uniquely based on the user's interests. In 2016, Yiming launched another app: Douyin, which was only accessible in China. Douyin was such a huge success in China that founder Yiming decided to create a similar app to be used globally, TikTok. TikTok wasn't initially popular in the first two years of release, prompting the ByteDance team to buy out Musical.ly for 900 million dollars(Ceschan). ByteDance strategically combines Musical.ly and Tiktok to produce an app that caters to self creation and entertainment. By Tiktok's second launch in 2018, the app gained thirty million new users just within the first three months. In short, Tiktok gained immense success from Gen Z users due to the unique personalized catered content that was only a few seconds long aligning with Gen Z's widespread eight second attention span. Furthermore, in 2019, the U.S. Department of Defense bans TikTok under national security concerns on government devices. Along with the far success, came along in the August of 2020, rumors of TikTok facing several class action lawsuits for stealing user data and collecting information through facial recognition without the user's consent. TikTok eventually settles the lawsuits by paying 92 Million Dollars in compensation(Ceschan). In the same time period, the Trump Administration signs an unsuccessful executive order to ban TikTok in the U.S. or force a sale to a U.S. company. In response to the national security concerns, in December of 2020, ByteDance implemented "Project Texas" which agrees to store US user data in the Oracle Cloud. More globally, the Indian Governemnt also banned TikTok along with over 200 Chinese apps in

response to the data security concerns, highlighting further geopolitical rivalry between the nations. After Biden's election in 2021, the Biden Administration reverses Trump's ban on TikTok but orders an investigation into the app's security risks. By September of 2021, TikTok's user activity grew to 1 billion. TikTok refined their algorithm by adding features related to video editing and AR filters, and by September of 2023 TikTok Shop was launched across the United States. After thorough investigation, the US Senate finally passes a bill to ban TikTok unless sold to a US entity(Schwartz). More recently in 2025, TikTok goes dark in the US for 14 hours on the nineteenth of January and by the twentieth of January, President Trump signs an executive order to pause the TikTok ban and extends the deadline by 75 days to April 5. Notably, in February of 2025, 170 million American users returned back to the app regardless of the blackout(Schwartz).

Current Situation

(Important note: This committee is one of a kind because delegates will have to stay on track with current events. While the chairs write this guide, we don't know what is to occur in the days prior to the conference, like the upcoming re-ban on April 5th. Please keep track of these details as they occur. The chairs will consider them in committee sessions.) Ever since U.S.'s attempts to regulate TikTok in 2020 for national security concerns, 32 other countries have taken similar interests in regulatory measures.

Table 1 Different National Restrictions to TikTok (Until December 2023)

Restriction Status	Type	Description	Country	Number	Sum
Officially Restricted	Completely ban	National block	India,Azerbaijan,Kyrgyz,Afghanistan,Nepal,Somalia, Senegal	7	32
	No Tiktok on official devices	Prohibit install on government devices	America,Britain,Canada,France,Australia,Netherland,New Zealand,Denmark,Norway,Belgium,Estonia,Ireland,Japan,Korea,Latvian,Malta	16	
	Content Regulation	Improve content moderation	Vietnam,Kenya,Malaysia,Italy	4	
		Ban due to content violation and lift	Bangladesh,Jordan,Pakistan	3	
		Cooperate with content moderation	Thailand	1	

	Privacy Regulation	Fine for user data violation	America, Britain, Netherland, Turkey, Ireland	5	
		Improve user data protection	Vietnam	1	
		Participate in data localization	France	1	
Discussion without restriction	Completely ban	National block	Egypt, Philippines	2	3
	No Tiktok on official devices	Prohibit install on government devices	Philippines	1	
	Privacy Regulation	Investigate the use of user data	Colombia	1	
Others	TikTok cannot be used on German government devices from News sources, but no official announcement, and the German health minister still runs a TikTok account with 144k followers.			Germany	3
	After Russia made it a crime to spread fake news about its invasion of Ukraine, TikTok shut down it's video uploading and live streaming functions in Russia.			Russia	
	Indonesia shut down TikTok Shop for protecting local businesses, but later reinstated it.			Indonesia	

(Clausius)

National governments begin to question whether or not the Chinese Government has the potential access to user data, which would underscore a national security threat globally. More globally, the Indian government has taken restrictive action since June of 2020, as they banned TikTok plus 200 other chinese apps under concerns in digital and national security. While nations restrictively control the role TikTok has in civilian lives, ByteDance consistently denied the allegations of data misuse. In a short period of time, an app for simple entertainment has transformed into a threat in geopolitics among the strongest nations, specifically: China, United States, India, and other country representatives in committee sessions. In this committee,

delegates will strive to determine the future of TikTok in the United States, as other nations' representatives will also hold a role to influence the U.S. government's future choices in determining TikTok's future in America. The controversy about TikTok reflects a much broader pattern towards digital nationalism globally: the utilization of digital media and communication technology to boost nationalistic sentiments, identities, and pride(Heang). As the debates surrounding debate persist, it is up to the U.S. government and other national governments to determine the role TikTok will play in the United States.

Characters:

1. Shou Zi Chew: CEO of TikTok
2. Liang Rubo: CEO of ByteDance (Succeeds Zhang Yiming)
3. Vanessa Pappas: Chief Operating Officer at TikTok
4. Christopher Wray: Director of FBI
5. Mark Warner: Virginia U.S. Senator, Chair of Senate Intelligence Committee
6. Josh Hawley: Missouri U.S. Senator
7. Ted Cruz: Texas U.S. Senator
8. Mr.Beast: Youtube and Tikok Influencer
9. Charli D'Amelio: Influencer
10. Jake Sullivan: National Security Advisor
11. Donald Trump: President of the United States
12. Narendra Modi: Prime Minister of India
13. J.D. Vance: Vice President of the United States
14. Joe Biden: 46th President of the United States

15. Mark Zuckerberg: CEO of Meta (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp)
16. Gina Raimondo: U.S. Secretary of Commerce
17. Xi Jinping: President of the People's Republic of China
18. Anwar Ibrahim: Prime Minister of Malaysia
19. Thierry Breton: EU Commissioner for the Internal Market
20. Kirsten Gillibrand: New York U.S. Senator

Questions to Consider:

1. What impact would a global TikTok ban have on the digital economy, and the livelihood of influencers, content creators, and businesses that rely on the platform?
2. What role should tech companies like ByteDance have in addressing the concerns about privacy, data security, and algorithmic transparency? What responsibilities should they have in ensuring that their platforms are not used to manipulate public opinion or interfere in political processes?
3. What are the potential risks of not taking action against TikTok or taking action against Tikok?
4. How can you as your character work towards achieving your goal in relation to the current Tiktok situation while working with other delegates in this committee?

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