

On Tik Tok, users mock looming US ban.

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Over the last week, the videos started appearing on TikTok from users across the United States.

They all made fun of the same thing: how the app's ties to China made it a national security threat. Many implied that their TikTok accounts had each been assigned an agent of the Chinese government to spy on them through the app — and that the users would miss their personal spies. “May we meet again in another life,” one user wrote in a video goodbye set to Whitney Houston's cover of Dolly Parton's “I Will Always Love You.” The video included an A.I.-generated image of a Chinese military officer. The videos were just one way that some of TikTok's 170 million monthly U.S. users were reacting as they prepared for the app to disappear from the country as soon as Sunday.

The Supreme Court is set to rule on a federal law that required TikTok's Chinese owner, ByteDance, to sell the app by Jan. 19 or face a ban in the United States. U.S. officials have said China could use TikTok to harvest Americans' private data and spread covert disinformation. TikTok, which has said a sale is impossible and challenged the law, is now awaiting the Supreme Court's response.

The possibility that the justices will uphold the law has set off a palpable sense of grief and dark humor across the app. Some users have posted videos suggesting ways to circumvent a ban with technological workarounds. Others have downloaded another Chinese app, Xiaohongshu, also known as “Red Note,” to thumb their noses at the U.S. government's concerns about TikTok's ties to China.

The videos highlight the collision taking place online between the law, which Congress passed with wide support last year, and everyday users of TikTok, who are dismayed that the app may soon disappear.

Hundreds of TikTok videos over the last week have cataloged how teenagers could keep using the app in the United States, according to a review by The New York Times. One of the most popular methods described is the use of a VPN, or a virtual private network, which can mask a user's location and make it appear that the person is elsewhere.

A professor of law and technology at Georgetown University and an expert on the global regulation of new technologies, Mr. Changer anticipates that the Supreme Court will uphold the ban law this week, though he believes that TikTok has the winning case. He said the downloads of Red Note and the Chinese spy memes showed that many Americans did not agree with their government's security concerns, particularly at the expense of free speech.

“When the United States shuts a massive free expression service, which our democratic allies have not shuttered, it will make us the censor and put us in the unusual position of silencing expression,” Mr. Chander said. “It will make Americans who use TikTok really distrustful of the U.S. government as carrying their best interests.” (514 words)