



Huawei and 5G: Update on the Tech Cold War

OE Watch Commentary: As the first accompanying passage from the UK-based *The Times* reports, the UK recently floated an important new plan to forge a 5G alliance of 10 democracies: The G7 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, and the United States) plus Australia, South Korea, and India. According to the article, the goal is to explore 5G alternatives to Huawei, after new concerns about the Chinese telecommunications company surfaced when “security officials began a review into its involvement in the mobile network upgrade.” The idea is to explore investing in technology companies based within its member states. Currently, the only European suppliers of 5G are Nokia and Ericsson, which the passage notes, “cannot provide 5G... as quickly or as cheaply as Huawei.” Two weeks later, the UK banned Huawei from its 5G network.

This is a departure for the UK, which had declared in January that it would allow a role (albeit a restricted one) for Huawei in shaping the 5G network, over concerns that banning the company may add years of delays and billions in costs to their 5G network

launch. As the second passage notes, this was based on a European Commission (EC) recommendation that states should allow Huawei to operate within the bloc, under the condition that Huawei tech would be blocked from “critical and sensitive” parts of the network, including the core, which keeps track of data. As the article notes, this comprise was meant to provide “cover for European capitals to resist Washington’s demands.”

The shift may be due in part to China’s approach to information surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. As the third passage discusses, following the emergence of the pandemic, members of the UK parliament raised concerns about China’s approach to data. In early May, the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee set up the China Research Group (CRG) to “hold China accountable for the misinformation around COVID-19.” The article notes “they are concerned about the transparency of China’s strategic investments in UK, amongst other issues,” and are calling for a “rethinking [of] Britain’s engagement with China.” (See: “China’s COVID-19 Information Campaign is Backfiring in Europe,” *OE Watch*, June 2020).

The issue of 5G has been cited as causing a resurgence of Cold War reflexes between the US and China, with Europe’s position in this Cold War being unclear (see: “Huawei in Europe: Debating Europe’s Position in a New Technological Cold War,” *OE Watch*, March 2020). The recent UK call for a new club of 5G democracies-- even if it doesn’t materialize-- suggests that the UK may be shifting to a clearer position. As the final passage from the *Global Times*, a Chinese government-affiliated newspaper makes clear, China is taking note and warning that “if the UK allies with the US against Huawei, that means taking sides between the two biggest economies and blindly following the US in a technological Cold War with China. In that case, the UK cannot expect China to treat it the same as before in terms of economy and trade. Britain should avoid being manipulated by the US...” **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**



Kevin Tao, President of Huawei, Western Europe, talking about 5G; “Digitising Europe Summit”; Gasometer, Berlin; December 2014.

Source: Vodafone Institut via Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/vodafone-institute/15368562844>, CC BY-ND 2.0

“If the UK allies with the US against Huawei, that means taking sides between the two biggest economies and blindly following the US in a technological Cold War with China. In that case, the UK cannot expect China to treat it the same as before in terms of economy and trade. Britain should avoid being manipulated by the US...”



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Source: “Downing Street plans new 5G club of democracies,” *The Times (UK)*, 29 May 2020. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/downing-street-plans-new-5g-club-of-democracies-bfnd5wj57>

Britain is seeking to forge an alliance of ten democracies to create alternative suppliers of 5G equipment and other technologies to avoid relying on China... New concerns about Huawei, the Chinese telecoms giant, have increased the urgency of the plan after security officials began a review into its involvement in the mobile network upgrade.

The government has approached Washington about a “D10” club of democratic partners, based on the G7 plus Australia, South Korea and India... One option would see the club channel investment to technology companies based within its member states. Nokia and Ericsson are the only European suppliers of 5G infrastructure and experts say that they cannot provide 5G kit as quickly or as cheaply as Huawei.

Source: “EU rules out Huawei ban- but maps out strict rules on 5G,” *Deutsche Welle*, 29 January 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-rules-outhuawei-ban-but-maps-out-strict-rules-on-5g/a-52184309>

The EU has said member states should allow Chinese telecoms giant Huawei to operate within the bloc — but with strict regulations to protect national security. The US has urged allies not to use the technology. The European Union on Wednesday unveiled security guidelines for “high-risk” suppliers in the opening up of fifth-generation, or 5G, telecoms network across the bloc.

... Recommendations include blocking high-risk equipment suppliers from “critical and sensitive” parts of the network, including the core, which keeps track of data and authenticates smartphones on the network.

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Any ban on Huawei would ultimately be left for individual member states to impose, but the commission’s compromise recommendation provides cover for European capitals to resist Washington’s demands. On Tuesday, the UK’s government said it would also allow a restricted role for Huawei in shaping the 5G network in Britain.

Source: “UK Parliament goes from Eurosceptic to China-sceptic,” *The Sunday Guardian Live*, 2 May 2020. <https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/world/uk-parliament-goes-eurosceptic-china-sceptic>

China is now centre stage. Instead of Eurosceptics, Parliament is now full of PRC-sceptics.

...Tom Tugendhat, MP, is actively challenging the government’s and especially the Foreign Office’s approach to relations with China. As Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, on April 6, the Committee published a report entitled, “The FCO’s role in building a coalition against COVID-19”, which is critical of the Chinese authorities’ approach to data and WHO’s procrastination. ...

Tugendhat has also set up the China Research Group (CRG), likely comprising many of the powerful ERG members. This is a collection of MPs who seek to inform the debate on Beijing’s economic and diplomatic policies. It seems they are concerned about the transparency of China’s strategic investments in UK, amongst other issues. Tugendhat is focusing on rethinking Britain’s engagement with China. ... In a published letter to First Minister Raab, Tugendhat outlines an idea to hold China accountable for the misinformation around Covid-19 that has resulted in the pandemic, demanding investigations into China’s interference in the Hong Kong judiciary and the recent sea/air military activity around Taiwan, and to know how UK will support Taiwan in the future. And regarding China’s military activities in the South China Sea, Tugendhat is encouraging a G7 representation, outreach to Japan and ASEAN for security co-operation.

Source: Yu Ning, “‘D10’ 5G club an outdated idea with Cold War mind-set,” *The Global Times*, 31 May 2020. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1190107.shtml>

It was less than six months ago that the Boris Johnson government granted Chinese tech company Huawei a limited role in the country’s 5G networks, but recently it’s widely believed that the UK is signaling an about-face.

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Many of these countries, which used to be advanced technology leaders, cannot accept and adapt themselves to the fact that China is leading the world in 5G technology. Some Western politicians and media outlets are hyping up the “threats” China’s 5G technology may bring. China has adopted technologies from the West in its development, but China has never narrowly believed they are security threats.

China’s 5G technology has aroused suspicion and anxieties in some Western countries. They are upset that the West is losing its technological superiority and because of their deep-rooted ideological prejudice against the Chinese political system.

With the US ratcheting up its crackdown on Huawei and intensifying confrontation with China, the Huawei 5G issue has wide ramifications. If the UK allies with the US against Huawei, that means taking sides between the two biggest economies and blindly following the US in a technological Cold War with China. In that case, the UK cannot expect China to treat it the same as before in terms of economy and trade. Britain should avoid being manipulated by the US and serving the latter’s interests as foolishly as Australia.