

Canada gives go-ahead for Huawei executive's extradition to US

Nick Beams
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Canadian authorities have given the go ahead for the extradition of Huawei's chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou to face charges brought by US authorities that the Chinese firm breached unilateral American-imposed sanctions against Iran and that it stole trade secrets from the telecom firm T-Mobile.

The charges have been filed by the US departments of Justice, Commerce and Homeland Security and are set down for hearing in New York and Washington state.

The Huawei executive was seized by Canadian authorities at the request of the US at the beginning of December at the same time as US President Trump was meeting with China's President Xi Jinping in Buenos Aires in trade talks.

The US filed a formal request for the extradition in late January and the Canadian Justice Department complied with the request yesterday evening.

A statement from Meng's defence lawyers expressed its disappointment with the Canadian decision in the face of what it called "the political nature of the US charges."

"Our client maintains that she is innocent of any wrongdoing and that the US prosecution and extradition constitute an abuse of the processes of law."

Meng's next court appearance in Vancouver will take place on March 6 at which the Justice Department is expected to proceed with the extradition hearing which could involve lengthy legal processes.

The decision by Canada to give the go ahead for the extradition comes as the US is waging a global campaign to have the Chinese telecommunications giant excluded from the establishment of 5G mobile phone networks and other forms of communications on security grounds.

The US campaign centres on the assertion that China could use Huawei to conduct cyber spying operations.

In an email this week, Democrat Senator Mark Warner, who serves on the US Select Committee on Intelligence, said that "the United States and its allies need to maintain a common front against the supply chain risk of equipment from countries that do not respect the rule of law and routinely place extrajudicial demands on domestic firms."

But in fact the country that most closely fits this description is the US.

In an opinion piece published in the *Financial Times* this week, Huawei top executive Guo Ping outlined the motivations for the US campaign. Huawei, he noted, had long been the subject of aspersions cast by US intelligence agencies but until recently these attacks had been relatively muted. Now it was bringing out the "heavy artillery" and portraying Huawei as a "threat to Western civilisation."

He said the reasons were to be found in the documents released by whistle blower Edward Snowden in 2013 which showed the US National Security Agency had a policy of "collect it all," that is, to gather data on all phone calls and electronic communications made by anyone in the world.

The Snowden documents showed that the NSA maintained "corporate partnerships" with major US technology and telecommunications companies that allowed it to "gain access to high-capacity international fibre-optic cables, switches and/or routers throughout the world."

In 2010, the NSA conducted a hacking operation into Huawei servers on the grounds that many of its targets "communicate over Huawei-produced products" and we "want to make sure that we know how to exploit those products."

In the period since the hacking operation was carried out, almost nine years ago, the situation has changed

markedly with Huawei providing a growing proportion of the world's networks.

“Clearly, the more Huawei gear is installed in the world's telecommunications networks, the harder it is for the NSA to ‘collect it all.’ Huawei, in other words, hampers US efforts to spy on whomever it wants,” Guo wrote.

This was the first reason for the US campaign. The second, he maintained, had to do with 5G mobile phone technology which will not only increase data transmission speeds but will play a vital role in providing communications for factories and vital infrastructure.

Huawei had invested heavily in 5G technology over the past decade and was, according to Guo, “roughly a year ahead of our competitors.”

“If the US can keep Huawei out of the world's 5G networks by portraying us as a security threat, it can retain its ability to spy on whomever it wants” and “America benefits if it can quash a company that curtails its digital dominance.”

One of the main assertions made by the US in its campaign is that Chinese law requires that technology companies collaborate with the government upon request. But the same law applies in the US so long as any order is made on the basis of an investigation involving counter-intelligence or counter-terrorism.

Guo concluded that the US global campaign had little to do with national security and “everything to do with America's desire to suppress a rising technological competitor.”

And that campaign has suffered some significant blows in the recent period. The UK has not swung directly behind the US with significant sections of the intelligence apparatus maintaining that any security risks can be mitigated while others insist that it would be naïve to ignore the danger.

Germany has not ruled out using Huawei technology and regards its cheaper and high quality equipment as a means of overcoming its relative backwardness in the development of internet communications.

India is also considering Huawei and this week, the United Arab Emirates, a major US ally in the Middle East, announced that it would use a 5G network developed by Huawei. The decision was particularly galling because it was announced at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, to which the US had sent a

delegation to lobby against the use of Huawei technology.

But these blows will not see any cessation of the US campaign. Rather, the more the tides move against it, the more it will double down with increased threats not only against China and Chinese firms but against those who use their technology.

The seizure of Meng Wanzhou and the attempts to extradite her to face criminal charges are only a foretaste of the methods to be employed in the future.



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