

US threatens Europe over Huawei at Munich Security Conference

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Amid a sharp deterioration in US-European Union relations, Washington sent a bipartisan delegation of White House officials and members of Congress to the Munich Security Conference to pressure and threaten European countries not to do business with the Chinese telecommunications firm Huawei.

US Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo were joined by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff, who had just concluded a failed impeachment of the president, in support of the White House's anti-China campaign.

The conference followed announcements by Germany, France and, most recently, the UK that they would not ban Huawei from their telecommunications networks.

While the US argues that infrastructure supplied by Huawei would allow China to spy on the communications of its allies, Beijing counters that Washington wants to keep control of global communications infrastructure to carry out its own wiretapping.

Just days before the Munich Security Conference, the *Washington Post* reported that US intelligence had been spying on the encrypted communications of governments all over the world for the past five decades, through the CIA's secret ownership of a global security firm based in Switzerland.

Huawei's 5G telecommunications infrastructure is far more advanced than that of its European rivals Nokia and Ericsson, and a decision by any country not to use Huawei's technology would put it at a significant disadvantage.

In this context, Pelosi framed the conflict as a moral question, arguing that the dispute "is about choosing autocracy over democracy on the information

highway."

But the American officials, with their combination of threats, demagoguery and empty promises, got a chilly reception from the European representatives. This was summed up in an extraordinary exchange between Pelosi and Fu Ying, a Chinese diplomat, who asked the speaker of the House why, given that US companies had operated in China for decades without changing China's political system, a Chinese company would threaten Western "democracy."

"Do you really think the democratic system is so fragile that it could be threatened by this single hi-tech company, Huawei?" she asked.

To Pelosi's dismay, the diplomat's remarks were met with loud applause. "Let me just say to you that are applauding back there, that Huawei was created by reverse technology of American initiatives," she said.

In a separate speech Pelosi threatened, "There's a big price to pay."

On Sunday, Richard Grenell, the US ambassador to Germany, indicated that the White House is considering ending intelligence sharing with its European allies. He posted on Twitter, "@realDonaldTrump just called me from AF1 and instructed me to make clear that any nation who chooses to use an untrustworthy 5G vendor will jeopardize our ability to share Intelligence and information at the highest level."

Such a move would mark a reversal from an earlier statement by a White House advisor that "there will be no erosion in our overall intelligence sharing" regardless of countries' decisions over Huawei.

After the UK announced late last month that it would not ban Huawei from its telecommunications networks, Trump was reportedly "apoplectic" in a phone call with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who responded

by canceling a planned trip to the United States.

The most explicit threat came from Defense Secretary Esper, who declared that “we are now in an era of Great Power Competition, with our principal challengers being China, then Russia, and we must move away from low intensity conflict and prepare once again for high-intensity warfare.”

Esper called on US allies to “wake up” to the “nefarious strategy” being carried out by China in seeking to sell 5G technology to Europe. He said, “If we don’t understand the threat and we don’t do something about it, at the end of the day it could compromise what is the most successful military alliance in history—NATO.”

He then reiterated the US position, stating, “I want to focus on the Pentagon’s top concern: the People’s Republic of China.”

While China was at the center of the conflict, the summit was riven by a range of divisions between the United States and Europe. Last week, the White House announced it would raise tariffs on European aircraft, in an attack on Airbus, the rival of Boeing.

Meanwhile, US Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette gloated over the success of the United States in forcing Germany to abandon the Nord Stream II pipeline, raising doubts whether Russia would be able to finish construction of the pipeline after US sanctions forced the European company building it to back out. “It’s going to be a very long delay, because Russia doesn’t have the technology,” Brouillette said.

French President Emmanuel Macron, for his part, sharply criticized US policy toward Russia, which he said was too aggressive. “It is not a policy, it’s a completely inefficient system,” he said.

Macron added, “There is a second choice, which is to be demanding and restarting a strategic dialogue, because today we talk less and less, conflicts multiply and we aren’t able to resolve them.”

The theme of the conference, embodied in its official report, was the crisis of the “West,” with its introduction concluding that “the West is indeed in serious trouble.” The report added that “there was no common understanding of what the West represents.”

In his speech, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier declared, “And our closest ally, the United States of America, under the present administration itself, rejects the idea of an international community.”

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s speech was framed as an inane response to this reality, in which he declared, “Those statements don’t reflect reality... I’m happy to report that the death of the transatlantic alliance is grossly exaggerated. The West is winning.”

Commenting on Pompeo’s speech, the *New York Times* published an article with the headline: “‘The West Is Winning,’ Pompeo Said. The West Wasn’t Buying It.”



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