

UK excluding Huawei from 5G network

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16 July 2020

The UK government has banned mobile providers from purchasing new 5G equipment from Chinese company Huawei after December 31. Existing Huawei equipment must be removed by 2027.

The announcement is a major reversal of Britain's decision just six months ago to allow the company to provide up to 35 percent of the kit in the UK's 5G network periphery. It follows a concerted international campaign waged by the United States to pressure its allies into refusing any Huawei involvement in the development of new telecommunications infrastructure.

President Donald Trump reportedly subjected Prime Minister Boris Johnson to an "apoplectic" phone call after he informed him of the UK's initial decision. A few days later, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo held a two-day meeting with Johnson and Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab. A series of veiled threats were made to cancel or restrict US intelligence sharing with the UK security services, and to put the brakes on a post-Brexit trade deal. The final push came with the implementation of sanctions barring the use of American-patented technology in Huawei equipment, forcing Britain to use other suppliers if it continued to work with the Chinese company.

Trump was quick to boast of his administration's responsibility for the UK's volte face, responding to the announcement in a White House press conference: "We convinced many countries, many countries—and I did this myself for the most part—not to use Huawei because we think it's an unsafe security risk, it's a big security risk. ... If they want to do business with us, they can't use it."

This left UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock to make a pathetic denial in an interview with Sky News, saying Trump was wrong to "claim credit" for the move. "We all know Donald Trump don't we. But I think this is a sensible decision. All sorts of people can try to claim credit for the decision, but this was based on a technical

assessment by the National Cyber Security Centre about how we can have the highest quality 5G systems in the future."

In reality, Britain's ban on Huawei marks another lurch towards the trade and military war camp of US imperialism, aggressively advocated by a group of Tory hardliners. It will have major political and economic repercussions.

Speaking for the concerns of large sections of the British ruling class, the *Financial Times* drew attention to the shift from the so-called "golden decade" of Anglo-Chinese relations begun by former Prime Minister David Cameron, to the "deep freeze" of today. While it endorses the government's decision, based on "the changed security assessment and commercial constraints," the paper's editorial warned that it would come with "substantial cost." In the immediate term, "it could delay the rollout of 5G networks in Britain by two years, as well as add up to £2bn to its cost. Operators may well demand compensation..."

Shutting the door on Huawei threatens to provoke economic reprisals. Economic ties between China and the UK have grown substantially in recent years, with China investing \$79.5 billion between 2010 and 2019—twice as much as in the next European recipient—and Britain's exports to China tripling between 2008 and 2018.

Chinese state-aligned newspaper the *Global Times* responded to the ban on Huawei with an editorial stating, "It is necessary for China to retaliate against the UK, otherwise would we not be seen as easy to bully. Such retaliation should be public and painful for the UK."

Zhao Lijian, foreign ministry spokesman in Beijing, said, "It's a litmus test for the direction where the UK market would go after Brexit, and whether the UK businesses in China will be provided with an open, fair, and non-discriminate environment."

The FT cautions, “As the world fractures, and Britain charts its own course after Brexit, it would be damaging to be drawn into President Donald Trump’s new cold war with China. Realistic, constructive engagement with Beijing is the priority.” It quotes former Labour government cabinet member and now head of the Great Britain-China Centre, Peter Mandelson, saying, “If we are going to cut ourselves off from our privileged access to the European market and if we recognise that the US economy operates in quite a protectionist way, are we going also to isolate ourselves from China, the biggest source of growth in the world? Where are we going to make a living?”

But these are little more than words on a page. Political power is in the hands of hardline Brexiteers, seeking to use the UK’s break with the European Union to secure a closer economic and geostrategic alignment with US imperialism. Johnson may yet face a rebellion of up to 60 Tory MPs, led by former Tory party leader Iain Duncan Smith, demanding even faster and more extensive moves against Huawei. Smith asked in the House of Commons why its removal from the 5G network could not be accomplished by 2025 and “if they’re a risk to us in 5G, why are they not a risk to us generally [in 4G and 3G networks]?”

With these forces dominant in the Tory party and the Labour Party in a catatonic state—Shadow Foreign Secretary Lisa Nandy applauded the government’s “welcome, long-overdue step”—sections of the ruling class in favour of a balancing act between America and China based on Europe are left writing ineffectual press commentaries as a US-led war drive proceeds.

The same day the new decision on Huawei was announced, military chiefs revealed the UK’s new £3 billion aircraft carrier, the HMS Queen Elizabeth, would be making its maiden voyage to the Far East next year. According to the *Times*, the carrier will lead a strike group including four frigates, 24 F-35B Lightning II jets, and a nuclear submarine. It will participate in US-Japanese military exercises in the region to “counter the emerging threat of China,” according to one government source.

This all takes place just one month after the British government used Beijing’s crackdown on protests in Hong Kong and the imposition of an authoritarian National Security Law as a platform to support Washington’s economic assault on China—via sanctions

on the Chinese-controlled territory. In this case, too, the UK is acting against the interests of many major British companies, more than 300 of which have regional headquarters or offices serving Hong Kong’s domestic market and the region.

These actions have a relentless logic. British imperialism is in a state of immense crisis following the Brexit vote of 2016, with the final pullout due to be effected at the end of this year. That the government is prepared to sacrifice the UK’s short and medium-term economic interests in its recent dealings with China is an indication of how closely it perceives the solution of that crisis to be tied to the fate of the US. The ban on Huawei demonstrates its strengthening commitment to a Washington-led reshaping of the world economy through protectionism and military aggression.



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