

Trump team weighs plan to nationalize high-speed networks (Update)

January 29 2018, by Rob Lever



A proposal being floated by US officials to nationalize 5G—the fifth generation of wireless internet—drew sharp rebukes from across the political spectrum

President Donald Trump's national security team is mulling a plan to nationalize the newest generation of high-speed wireless internet

networks, sparking sharp criticism Monday from across industry and the political spectrum.

One official familiar with the draft proposal but not authorized to speak publicly told AFP the idea "has been discussed over the past couple of weeks" at the request of US national security officials.

The plan was first reported by the news website Axios, citing a memo proposing government control of the newest and fastest part of the nation's mobile network—the fifth generation, or 5G—to guard against China's growing online capabilities.

Axios cited a memo by a senior official as contending that the US needs to quickly deploy 5G because China is in a top position with the technology and "is the dominant malicious actor" online.

But the proposal—which would run counter to the longstanding US policy of relying on private telecom networks—drew immediate rebukes from the industry and even from US regulatory officials.

The official familiar with the proposal noted that "it's not hard to find people who think it's a dumb idea."

Asked for comment, White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders confirmed that the administration had "discussed the need for a secure network."

"Right now, we're in the very earliest stages of the conversation. There are absolutely no decisions made," Sanders said.

Industry leaders pointed out that the private sector is already in the process of building and deploying 5G systems, which will be important for a range of connected devices from appliances to self-driving cars.

The federal government stepping in would "slam the brakes" on momentum to deploy 5G, argued Jonathan Spalter, chief of USTelecom trade association.

"The best way to future-proof the nation's communications networks is to continue to encourage and incentivize America's broadband companies... in partnership with government, to continue do what we do best: invest, innovate, and lead," Spalter said in a statement.

Meredith Attwell Baker, president of the wireless industry group CTIA, added that while 5G is important, "the government should pursue the free market policies that enabled the US wireless industry to win the race to 4G."

FCC opposed

Federal Communications Commission chairman Ajit Pai, whose agency regulates the telecom sector, also voiced strong opposition.

"Any federal effort to construct a nationalized 5G network would be a costly and counterproductive distraction," Pai, a Republican, said.

Pai's Democratic colleague on the FCC, Mignon Clyburn, agreed, saying a network built by the federal government "does not leverage the best approach needed for our nation to win the 5G race."

Conservative advocacy group FreedomWorks also came out against the idea, arguing that it would put the US on a par with China in terms of controlling online access.

Upgrading to new 5G networks capable of handling massive amounts of digital data wirelessly and instantly is seen as essential for the success of innovations from virtual reality and self-driving cabs to "smart" cities.

Eye on China

Trump recently began making good on his aggressive "America First" trade agenda, with China as a primary target by imposing steep tariffs on imported washing machines and solar panels.

Trump rose to office on a nationalist economic agenda, vowing to revive the American manufacturing base by punishing unfair trading practices—pointing the finger squarely at China and Mexico—and reducing bilateral trade deficits.

China early this month warned that American protectionism was on the rise after congressional documents showed that Chinese tech giant Huawei's designs on the US market were causing national security concerns in Washington.

Huawei, which appeared to lose a deal with AT&T that would have given it an improved foothold in the US handset market, faced criticism from US lawmakers over its intellectual property protection and its ties to Chinese intelligence, according to a letter seen by AFP.

However, foreign businesses operating in China routinely complain of an array of market-protecting barriers, a trend that Western trade lobbies say has worsened since President Xi Jinping took office in 2012.

© 2018 AFP

Citation: Trump team weighs plan to nationalize high-speed networks (Update) (2018, January 29) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-01-idea-nationalizing-high-speed-networks-rebukes.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is

provided for information purposes only.