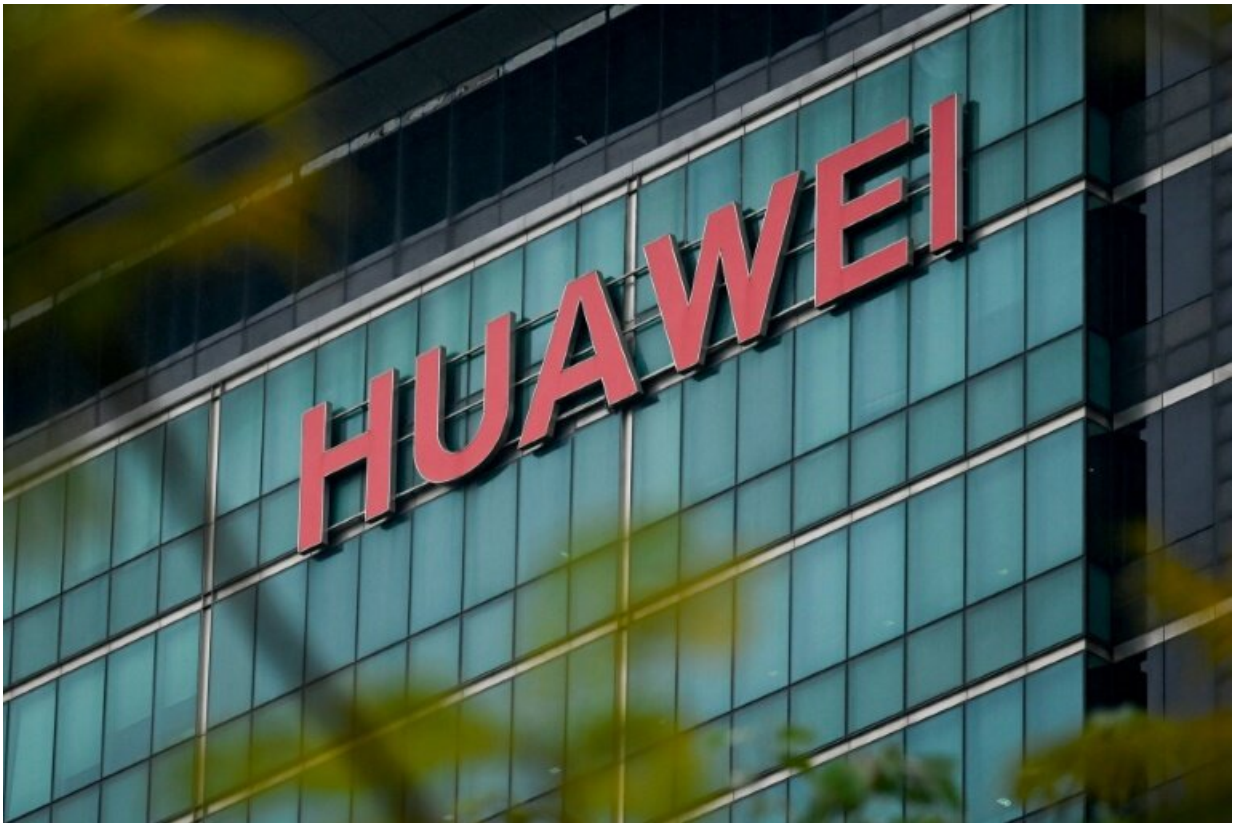


US ups pressure on Europe over 5G infrastructure from China's Huawei

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Chinese telecom giant Huawei has strenuously denied allegations its equipment could be used for espionage

The US upped pressure on Europe Wednesday to avoid turning to Huawei for 5G telecom infrastructure, with a top commander saying

NATO forces would cease communicating with their German colleagues if Berlin teams up with the Chinese firm.

The US and several other Western nations, fearful of the security risks posed by a company closely tied to the Chinese government, have shut Huawei out of tenders for the development of super-fast fifth-generation, or 5G, networks.

"We're concerned about their telecommunications backbone being compromised in the sense that, particularly with 5G, the bandwidth capability and ability to pull data is incredible," US General Curtis Scaparrotti, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, told US lawmakers.

"If it also is inside of their defense communications, then we're not going to communicate with them" across those systems, the general said before the House Armed Services Committee.

"And for the military, that would be a problem."

Scaparrotti's comments came during questioning about trade talks in Europe, and Germany in particular, with Chinese telecom groups such as Huawei.

The company has been charged by the US justice department of stealing trade secrets, obstructing a criminal investigation and evading economic sanctions on Iran.

Its 5G equipment is reputed to be much further advanced than those of rivals Ericsson and Nokia, which has made it attractive for mobile operators looking to quickly roll out new networks.

The next-generation systems will bring near-instantaneous connectivity

that can enable futuristic technologies such as self-driving cars.

Chinese law obliges companies headquartered in the country to provide technical assistance to intelligence services, but Huawei has strenuously denied allegations its equipment could be used for espionage.

Kathryn Wheelbarger, acting US assistant secretary of defense for international affairs, told the committee Huawei represents a "threat" to Europe.

Private and military concerns

"I can assure you that in all our conversations with all our European partners, we make very clear the threat of Chinese investment or development of the telecommunications infrastructure in Europe," Wheelbarger said.

These concerns relate to the "security of our communications, both private... as well as military," she said.

The two Pentagon officials refused to give further details in public about their concerns, telling elected officials they would discuss the subject in depth during a later closed session.

Germany is due to launch auctions in mid-March for future mobile telecommunications infrastructure.

On Monday, The Wall Street Journal reported the US had warned Berlin about future "information sharing" if it uses "untrusted vendors" in its 5G infrastructure.

The newspaper said the US Ambassador to Berlin, Richard Grenell, had sent a letter to German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier warning that

in such a case, the US could scale down intelligence and other information exchanges.

On Tuesday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Berlin would consult Washington over using technology made by Huawei, although "we will define our standards for ourselves."

Asked about the security standards that Europe could adopt to protect against Chinese espionage, Wheelbarger said there were none.

"Having looked into Huawei quite a bit a few years ago, I realized the challenges of even having a mitigation plan or strategy for the 4G infrastructure," she said.

"Given this sort of generational shift that is between 4G and 5G, I am not aware of something that would give us the kind of security we would need to mitigate the challenges it would impose on us."

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