

UK government says it hasn't decided yet on Huawei 5G role

April 25 2019, by Jill Lawless



In this March 29, 2019, file photo, Huawei's mobile phones are displayed at a telecoms service shop in Hong Kong. Chinese tech giant Huawei said Monday, April 22, 2019, its revenue rose 39 percent over a year earlier in the latest quarter despite U.S. pressure on allies to shun its telecom and network technology as a security risk. (AP Photo/Kin Cheung, File)

The British government has not yet decided whether to allow China's Huawei to supply parts for the U.K.'s new 5G wireless network, Digital Secretary Jeremy Wright said Thursday, as he condemned leaks from private government discussions on the sensitive issue.

Wright said government officials and U.K. intelligence agencies are still carrying out a review on how best to strike the "difficult balance between security and prosperity."

He told lawmakers in the House of Commons that "there has not been a final decision made on this subject."

The United States has been lobbying allies to exclude Huawei from all 5G networks, noting that the Chinese government can force the company to give it backdoor access to data on its networks.

Huawei officials have denied that the company is a security risk, saying that they have no links to the Chinese government and operate like any other international company.

Wright said it was unrealistic to try to eliminate all Chinese equipment from U.K. telecoms systems.

"Huawei is a significant player in this market; there are very few others," he said.

Wright also warned lawmakers against leaking details of meetings of the National Security Council, after the Daily Telegraph newspaper reported Wednesday that the council had approved Huawei's involvement in "non-core" parts of the 5G network.

The security council includes senior ministers, who receive briefings from top military and intelligence officials.

"Officials, including the security and intelligence agencies, need to feel that they can give advice to ministers which ministers will treat seriously and keep private," Wright said. "If they do not feel that, they will not give us that advice and government will be worse as a result."

Conservative lawmaker Tom Tugendhat, who chairs the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, urged National Security Adviser Mark Sedwill to start an inquiry "urgently."

"Such leaks not only potentially threaten our national security, but they also damage our relationships with key allies and undermine their trust in us," Tugendhat wrote in a letter to Sedwill.

The leak comes amid a Brexit-fueled breakdown in government discipline. With Prime Minister Theresa May weakened by her failure to take Britain out of the European Union, multiple ministers are positioning themselves to try to replace her, partly by cultivating positive press coverage.

The Telegraph reported that several ministers, including Defense Secretary Gavin Williamson and Defense Secretary Sajid Javid, had opposed letting Huawei work on the 5G network.

Labour Party lawmaker Jo Platt said suggestions that a minister leaked the information as part of Conservative leadership jockeying were "truly shocking. "

"Critical issues of national security should be handled with utmost care, not used as political ammunition in a Tory Party civil war," she said.

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