

A top US think tank has listed Taiwan's telecommunications companies among other trusted networks in a US State Department initiative to develop safe 5G communications.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on April 29 announced the US' requirement for a "5G clean path ... that does not use any transmission, control, computing or storage equipment from untrusted IT vendors, such as Huawei and ZTE, which are required to comply with directives of the Chinese Communist Party."

Pompeo also said that only systems and networks accredited as "5G Clean Networks" by US think tank the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) would be allowed to interface with US government computer systems.

Distrust of China is growing in Washington. Most recent examples, including the US' closure of China's Houston consulate — followed by China's retaliatory closure of the US consulate in Chengdu — and the exclusion of Chinese firms from the US' trusted networks list, signal that the relationship will not improve in the short term. However, the inclusion of Taiwanese companies indicates improving Taiwan-US ties and the trust that the US places in Taiwanese technology. Taiwan must seize this opportunity to provide 5G network software and equipment to the US and other trusted nations.

A closed network of trusted nations would offer Taiwan the opportunity to participate in intelligence sharing. For example, the "Five Eyes" nations — an intelligence alliance comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US — have all banned Chinese technology from their 5G infrastructure and are on the US' clean networks list.

The "Five Eyes" group has worked with other nations on specific intelligence-gathering projects, and has since 2018 been working with France, Germany and Japan to counter threats from China and Russia. Inviting Taiwan to join might prove invaluable, given its history in defending against threats from China.

With 5G military applications, the strategic importance of Taiwan and the US' interest in working more closely with the Taiwanese military — the new US National Defense

Benefiting from 'trusted 5G' status

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Authorization Act includes provisions for supporting Taiwan's armed forces and US Representative Ted Yoho has written a draft Taiwan Invasion Prevention Act — Taiwan's 5G network is of even greater importance.

Venezuela's Telesur network on Dec. 21 last year reported that 5G would play a key role in future military conflicts.

"Military experts foresee that the 5G system will play an essential role for the use of hypersonic weapons... In order to guide them on variable trajectories, changing direction in a fraction of a second to avoid interceptor missiles, it is necessary to gather, elaborate and transmit enormous quantities of data in a very short time," an article published on the network's English-language Web site said.

Taiwan could hold annual symposiums on 5G technology, allowing industry professionals to share ideas for network improvements, as well as work out trade relationships and partnerships. Military and intelligence officials from trusted nations could take advantage of networking with their Taiwanese counterparts. The symposium could be in conjunction with the nation's annual computer and technology trade show, Computex Taipei.

Since Taiwan is a small but technologically advanced nation, it is easier to deploy and test a new network here than it is, for example, in an expansive and sparsely populated nation like Canada. International companies could partner with local telecoms to test network upgrades in Taiwan.

Taiwan will be an increasingly important partner for like-minded democracies, in terms of both technology and strategical interests. The CSIS' trusted networks list shows Taiwan is a welcome partner, so the government must act on this.

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