

The greatest threat to 5G is not security but politics

The fifth generation of mobile technology, known as 5G, will bring new innovations to our lives. From driverless cars to holographic calls, 5G will provide the data connections on which these systems run.

Unlike previous innovations in network technology, 5G is coloured by politics. In particular, Huawei, a Chinese company, faces unprecedented scrutiny, and even legal challenges, ostensibly related to network security.

But the real threat isn't Huawei, it's politics. Where the international market once prized innovation it is unfortunately now being defined in some countries by a narrow and paranoid nationalism.

This approach will hurt the countries that indulge in it. Excluding tech innovative companies from a market simply keeps businesses and households in that market from getting the best technology available and forcing them to accept whatever is available – most likely inferior service at higher prices.

Moreover, keeping out individual companies does not improve security. Blocking Huawei may help politicians score points on social media, but it does nothing to secure telecommunications networks. Vulnerabilities in the global supply chain mean that any technology vendor can be hacked, from location in the world, regardless of nationality. Sometimes derided as “cyber security by logo,” blocking individual companies is an approach advocated by politicians and others who appeal to emotion. Real security experts advocate a rigorous program of testing for all vendors, regardless of where their headquarters may be located.

Huawei's detractors say that the company cannot be trusted because it is Chinese; and pressure from the United States has led some countries to state that they are considering the security implications of having Huawei equipment in their networks.

While some governments will bow to this pressure – particularly those that, like Poland, rely on US military aid to guarantee their security – many other countries have decided that Huawei's technology delivers good value for money, and poses

no security threat.

Consider Huawei's business in 4G, the current generation of wireless technology. We have supplied 4G equipment to more than 170 countries and have built roughly 1500 networks for 500 telecom operators. We do business with more than 200 of the Fortune 500 companies. We could never have established such a track record without earning our customers' trust.

Politicians say we are not to be trusted. But is it really possible that a handful of US politicians knows more about how to secure telecommunications networks than the companies that actually build and run those networks?

What about 5G? Since 5G standards were finalized in mid-2018, we have signed more than 30 contracts and agreements with more than 50 customers, and shipped more than 25,000 5G base stations to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. This year, we will launch smartphones powered by 5G chips. These customers would not buy 5G equipment from Huawei if they did not trust us.

Why, then, does Huawei find itself potentially excluded from participating from 5G networks in some geographic markets? The answer has less to do with technology than it does with geopolitics.

It's ironic that as digital systems are becoming more closely connected, the world risks being divided by the politics of mistrust.

To be clear: Huawei is not saying that cyber security isn't important – it most definitely is. But it's also very complicated, and to have any chance of managing cyber risk effectively, you have to address it in a sophisticated way.

Again, 5G is not just a faster Internet connection for your smartphone. It is the foundation of tomorrow's digital economy, powering everything from banks to hospitals to civil aviation and the management of cities. If 5G is going to support tomorrow's complex digital systems, those systems must be made secure. That can be done only through collaboration among governments, regulators, and technology companies around the world.

Cyber security is of paramount importance. No one disputes this central fact – least of all Huawei, which has spent millions of dollars to make its network equipment more secure. We just believe that in order to realize 5G's potential, policymakers

should let the market reward companies that provide the best solutions.

If you want to talk about cyber security, fine. But let's stick to the facts and talk about real issues related to technology. Leave politics to the politicians. Otherwise, some countries may find themselves left behind as the world moves toward the 5G future.