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Ambassador Duke Buchan III Op-Ed: Spain and the 5G Cyber Threat

Spain and the 5G Cyber Threat

Ambassador Duke Buchan III

The Spanish version of this article appeared in *La Vanguardia* on December 2, 2019.

The fifth generation of mobile technology, or 5G, will have great advantages for Spain if handled properly. While 5G brings 100-times-faster Internet speeds and networks capable to handle millions of new devices, it could also open our vital systems -banks, hospitals and even our appliances- to malign actors, companies, and regimes. Therefore, it is vital for Spain to be cautious in the acquisition and management of new 5G technologies.

We already rely on networks for our daily lives. The fourth-generation technology -4G- allowed a myriad of innovations enabled by faster speeds and more data (Uber, Netflix, Instagram, Google Maps, to name just a few). Today, we cannot even imagine the revolutionary applications that are yet to come. The leap from 4G to 5G can be compared to the leap from the typewriter to the personal computer. The global economic potential of 5G is amazing, and Spain, the same as all others, can and should take advantage of it. The United States believes this can be attained while safeguarding personal, economic and national security.

It will be necessary to make sure that 5G equipment providers and surrounding networks are handled safely, respecting privacy and according to a system that protects us against the risks of this technological leap. We do not want this renewed cyber ecosystem to be a threat to national security, privacy, intellectual property, or human rights.

It should be highlighted that cheap things turn out to be expensive, in 5G and in everything. Chinese companies such as Huawei and ZTE are under the control of the People's Republic of China by law. That is, your data and my data flowing through those devices –no matter how cheap they are- would come into the hands of the Chinese State, which at the same time would have the ability to manipulate, stop, and control the systems and equipment in our homes, businesses and governments.

We cannot either entrust our personal privacy to the People's Republic of China. In a future 5G, that means that Huawei and ZTE networks could be forced to turn over to the People's Republic of China intelligence authorities what we say and do online, images of our faces or fingerprints, the destinations to which we drive our cars, and the conversation with our doctor, as well as to monitor our activities by using the internet of things, all without our knowledge or consent.

Do we really want China to have the ability to control our airplanes, cars, banks and hospitals? Wouldn't it be better in the future for those capabilities to be under the control of companies from democratic countries?

Reliable options are the solution. Ericsson, Nokia and Samsung offer the same quality, if not better, and are not accountable to authoritarian regimes that can ask them to steal data or turn off critical systems by clicking a button. Unlike Chinese companies, they have open and transparent corporate structures. They do not get millions of dollars in government subsidies. And they are ruled according to privacy and security laws established by the European Union.

Spain must decide the best way to protect its network, to safeguard Spanish citizens' data, and to guarantee its companies competitiveness. 5G will affect all Spaniards and all the companies in the future. Now is the time to make sure that it is safe and free from the influence of authoritarian regimes.

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