



Design a Digital Marshall Plan

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NATO allies, led by the United States, must cooperate in securing national 5G communications systems in Europe and beyond against malign Chinese influence.

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The hard power of the United States and its NATO allies is a deterrent of last resort against very real military threats in Europe and well beyond it. But a growing concern is the creeping, quiet influence of China on democratic societies, especially with respect to critical 5G infrastructure under development across the world.

The transatlantic community is rightly concerned about the threat that Chinese investment in critical infrastructure poses to our nations. At NATO's London Summit in December 2019, allied leaders for the first time recognized the challenges posed by China and the need for secure and resilient 5G communications systems.

As Representatives on the House Armed Services Committee, we have warned for years that Chinese investment leads to undue influence in democracies around the world, whether through political and economic leverage and subversion or technological espionage and trade secret theft. In other words, China isn't selling—it's buying. In response, the transatlantic community, led by the United States, needs to create a Digital Marshall Plan to secure its communications in a modern, free ecosystem.

NATO allies are increasingly presented with a stark choice: embrace the economic benefits of Chinese investment while accepting risk to national security and sovereignty, or cut out Chinese firms in key industries, ensuring security but at a much higher cost. Simply put, democracies must pay that cost. To not do so would erode the very things that make them free societies. In accepting these costs, we must take steps to guarantee that these expenditures are used efficiently and result in immediate benefits for the populations shouldering them.

We and the entire United States government have been emphatic in pushing for European nations

to bar Huawei and other firms that systematically shunt information and data to Beijing. This effort has seen some success, with the recent decision by the United Kingdom to reverse itself and ban Huawei, a de facto ban by France and other nations in favor of a European option, and laudable efforts by allies like the Czech Republic and Slovenia to maintain digital independence. These are important steps on a path to next-generation communications systems free from the spies of the People's Liberation Army, but they must be supported with coordinated leadership from technologically advanced nations.

We propose that starting in 2021, the United States lead a Digital Marshall Plan for NATO allies to secure national 5G communications systems. Borrowing the successful framework nations concept employed in NATO operations, allies with vulnerable networks will be grouped with those on the cutting edge to determine the risks of existing or planned Chinese 5G infrastructure and to find innovative ways to finance alternatives. While NATO must address the military dimensions of 5G, it is not the right institution to drive the replacement of national telecommunication infrastructure which encompasses commercial enterprises. Nevertheless, habits of cooperation born at NATO can be applied to building secure telecommunication networks, even as work on the military aspects of the problem is conducted in parallel inside the Alliance.

A Digital Marshall Plan is not a program in which the United States subsidizes the telecommunication firms of allies and partners to remove and replace dangerous infrastructure. Instead, the United States and other leading nations will help countries analyze the risks of Chinese or other "strongman state" control over critical communication networks and build requirements for a secure network. In the case of the United States, the Intelligence Community, as well as the State, Commerce, and Defense Departments, could

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5G telecommunications systems will offer unprecedented benefits for commercial and government sectors. (Source: Defense Visual Information Database System)



then collaborate with allied counterpart institutions to improve existing network security and develop plans to replace or find alternatives for vulnerable infrastructure.

While allies must pay for their own infrastructure, framework groupings can seek out additional investments from national governments, institutions like the European Union (EU), and private industry. Used collectively, these investments can advance adoption of a secure 5G regime while ensuring allied and partner sovereignty. As with any novel technology, as more countries buy in and economies of scale develop, costs will go down for all involved.

For its part, the United States could support investment through the modernization of its own Europe-based infrastructure and installations via the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), through security assistance funding to allies, or through development assistance and loan tools, such as those supplied by the Export-Import Bank of the United States and the US International Development Finance Corporation, made possible with congressional authorization and appropriations.

Unlike the original, a Digital Marshall Plan cannot begin and end with the United States. If a successful US-led

pilot program were to be effective in one grouping within NATO, it could provide a blueprint for other NATO allies to copy until all allies adopted a comprehensive and vendor-neutral approach to 5G network security. Though perspectives on Huawei among allies are varied at present, right-minded nations such as the UK, Denmark, Estonia, Norway, Poland, and Romania could be immediate contributors, and in some cases serve as a bridge to the EU's work on 5G.

Close coordination with EU regulators will be important for securing buy-in from nations like France and Germany and to the overall success of the effort—as will complementarity with the strategic and technical measures contained in the EU's toolbox for 5G security. On the funding side, the European Investment Bank and other joint investment projects have already seen significant success on infrastructure development, while efforts like the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund can unlock other sources of financing.

This type of approach would lay the groundwork for the United States and likeminded nations to unlock the benefits of the 5G regime, bilaterally and multilaterally, while pushing back on predatory Chinese investment and involvement in critical areas of our economies and national infrastructures. It would additionally prove to responsible telecommunication companies

like Ericsson, Nokia, Samsung, and AT&T that there is money to be made in an environment previously dominated by a state-owned entity too risky to trust. Even other innovative options that don't prioritize any one company could be prospects for investment, such as the vendor-neutral and disaggregated Open Radio Access Network.

NATO allies are well-placed to assure the security and readiness of the Alliance against joint threats. It is a

NATO specialty for freely associating democracies to wield their immense joint power to overcome challenges which might seem insurmountable alone. We will advance the concept of a Digital Marshall Plan in the next Congress while seeking out able and willing partners in allied and partner capitals, the EU, NATO, and within the administration. In this way, we can build on the rich history of collaboration and cooperation across the Atlantic, reinvigorate the Alliance, and ensure a transatlantic community, whole and free.

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