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From Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP, Chair

Rt Hon Jeremy Wright MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
100 Parliament Street
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14 January 2019

Dear Jeremy,

Security of the UK's communications infrastructure

As you will know, many of the UK's 'Five Eyes' allies have recently acted to reduce the role that certain foreign telecommunications providers can play in supplying components to their telecommunications network operators.[1] Concerns have also been raised regarding the implications of Chinese legislation, such as the National Intelligence Law passed in 2017, and the requirement it might place on Chinese companies to assist in intelligence work.[2]

In the UK, the National Cyber Security Centre has written to telecommunications operators to provide technical advice regarding national security concerns over the use of a Chinese company's equipment, and stated its assessment that "the national security risks arising from the use of ZTE equipment or services within the context of the existing UK telecommunications infrastructure cannot be mitigated".[3]

UK communications service providers can currently ask the Huawei Cyber Security Evaluation Centre (HCSEC) to test hardware and software updates supplied by Huawei, another Chinese company.[4] However, use of the HCSEC is voluntary. Furthermore, the latest annual report of the HCSEC Oversight Board concluded that "due to areas of concern exposed through the proper functioning of the mitigation strategy and associated oversight mechanisms, the Oversight Board can provide only limited assurance that all risks to UK national security from Huawei's involvement in the UK's critical networks have been sufficiently mitigated".[5]

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[1] See, for example: US Congress, 'John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019' (2018); Australian Ministers for Communications and the Arts, 'Government Provides 5G Security Guidance To Australian Carriers', 23 August 2018; New Zealand Government Communications Security Bureau, 'GCSB statement', 28 November 2018

[2] Chinese National People's Congress, 'National Intelligence Law of the People's Republic' (2017); Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 'Huawei and the ambiguity of China's intelligence and counter-espionage laws', 13 September 2018

[3] National Cyber Security Centre, 'ZTE: NCSC advice to select telecommunications operators with national security concerns',

[4] Intelligence and Security Committee, 'Foreign Involvement in the Critical National Infrastructure' (2013)

[5] Huawei Cyber Security Evaluation Centre Oversight Board, 'Annual Report 2018' (2018)

The importance of the UK being able to be confident in the security of its telecommunications infrastructure is clear. In this context, I would be grateful if you could provide assurances regarding the UK's national security, and answer the following questions:

- How does the Government assess and manage the potential national security risk posed by foreign suppliers of telecommunications infrastructure products or services?
- How reliant are UK communications networks on foreign-supplied products and services currently?
- What assessment has the Government made of the UK's allies' actions regarding foreign involvement in their communications networks, and why has the Government not pursued similar actions in the UK?
- To what extent can the Government assure the security of the UK's critical communications networks where they are owned and run by private companies? Is the Government considering making the use of the HCSEC mandatory?
- How is the Government responding to the HCSEC Oversight Board's latest annual report?
- Does the Government intend to expand the model of the HCSEC to other foreign communications product or service suppliers?
- What assessment has the Government made of the extent to which Chinese legislation could compel Chinese companies active in the UK to assist with Chinese national intelligence work?

I have written in similar terms to the Secretary of State for Defence, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and Huawei Technologies Co., Ltd.

Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP
Chair