



Report: China's Huawei Helping African Dictators Spy on Opposition

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China's technologies giant Huawei, the largest telecommunications company in the world, is enabling digital authoritarianism in Africa by helping dictators spy on their opposition, the *Wall Street Journal (WSJ)* reported Thursday.

WSJ found that Uganda and Zambia, in particular, have benefited from high-tech surveillance capabilities provided by the Chinese telecom giant. Both countries are considered dictatorships to some degree.

Huawei has sold high-tech security tools to African governments that are using them for digital surveillance, censorship, and persecution.

WSJ reported:

Technicians from the Chinese powerhouse have, in at least two cases, personally helped African governments spy on their political opponents, including intercepting their encrypted communications and social media, and using cell data to track their whereabouts, according to senior security officials working directly with the Huawei employees in these countries.

Incidents in Zambia and Uganda documented by *WSJ* "show how Huawei employees have used the company's technology and other companies' products to support the domestic spying of those governments."

The *WSJ* acknowledged that it did not find any evidence Beijing was directly behind the selling of Huawei technology to the African countries. However, the vast majority, if not all companies, in communist countries are owned by the state to some degree.

In China, the situation is murky, given that some companies claim to be private. *Fortune* noted in 2015 that all of China's top 12 companies at the time were owned by the state.

The *New York Times* reported in April:

[Huawei] says that it is entirely owned by its employees, and that no outside organizations, including any affiliated with the Chinese government, own shares. But these assurances have

never quite dispelled American officials' suspicions that Beijing and the Communist Party are somehow pulling the strings.

In May, President Donald Trump signed an executive order that allows the United States to ban telecommunications devices and services from "foreign adversaries," likely referring to Huawei.

Furthermore, the U.S. Commerce Department, citing national security concerns, now prevents U.S. companies from supplying technology to Huawei.

The *Journal* acknowledged:

Since 2012 the U.S. government has accused Huawei—the world's largest maker of telecom equipment and second-largest manufacturer of smartphones—of being a potential tool for the Chinese government to spy abroad, after decades of alleged corporate espionage by state-backed Chinese actors. Huawei has forcefully denied those charges.

The *Journal* investigation didn't turn up evidence of spying by or on behalf of Beijing in Africa. Nor did it find that Huawei executives in China knew of, directed or approved the activities described. It also didn't find that there was something particular about the technology in Huawei's network that made such activities possible.

Details of the operations, however, offer evidence that Huawei employees played a direct role in government efforts to intercept the private communications of opponents.

Huawei disputed the *Journal's* findings, denying accusations of facilitating African government spying and its "hacking" activities" in a written statement.

The telecom giant claimed that it does not have the capabilities to carry out the operations *WSJ* accused it of conduction.

As Africa's dominant telecom company, Huawei has reportedly provided some state surveillance to Tunisia, Egypt, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Zambia, Mozambique, Madagascar, South Africa.

Not all of those recipient countries are considered dictatorships, but nearly half of them are wholly or partly authoritarian.

Echoing other assessments, the libertarian Cato Institute revealed in late 2018 that China is exporting "totalitarian technology" tested on Muslim Uighurs in Xinjiang.

Enabling digital authoritarianism in Africa has made the long goal of dictatorships to control their societies through surveillance, policing, and fear a reality.

China has been perfecting its oppressive technologies in Muslim Uighur-majority Xinjiang, home to concentration camps for Islam adherents.

Beijing maintains significant economic clout in Africa that it is reportedly using to promote its communist authoritarian ideology.