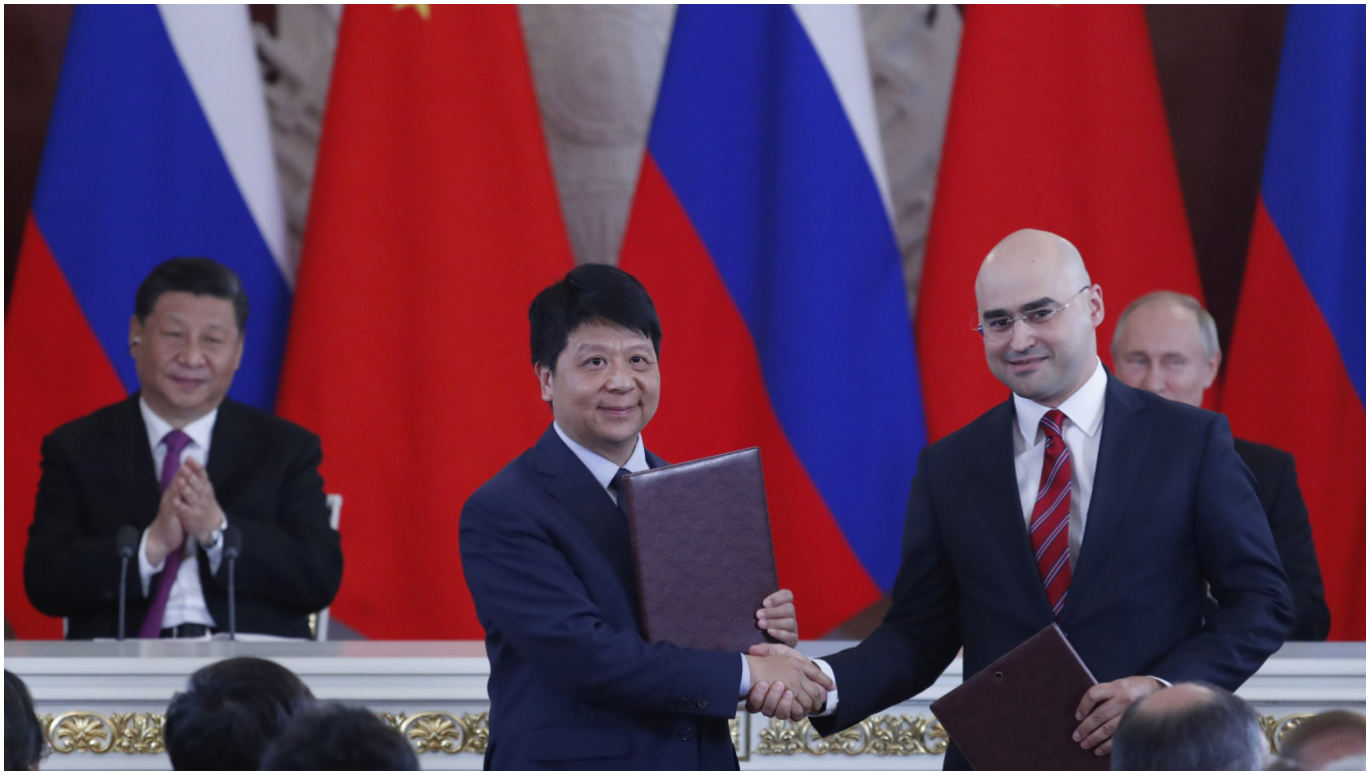
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Russia's MTS Signs 5G Deal With Chinese Telecom Giant Huawei, Reports Say

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Maxim Shipenkov / TASS

Russia's top cellphone operator MTS has signed an agreement with Huawei to develop 5G technology as the Chinese telecom giant faces escalating pressure from the United States, news agencies reported.

The 5G deal was one of several cooperation agreements signed after talks on Wednesday between President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Moscow. The Kremlin website lists the deal as a "memorandum of understanding."

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Pilot launches of the advanced cellular network technology will be held in 2019 and next year, according to Agence France Presse.

The United States, which has blacklisted Huawei, has discouraged its European allies from using the Chinese company's technology, citing concerns about a "backdoor" that could enable spying by the Chinese state.

Europe — where Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands, Lithuania and Portugal are preparing to auction 5G licenses this year — has emerged as a battleground over Huawei's next-generation technology.

The security issue is crucial because of 5G's leading role in internet-connected products ranging from self-driving cars and smart cities to augmented reality and artificial intelligence. If underlying technology is vulnerable, it could allow hackers to exploit such products to spy or disrupt them.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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