

## *Power-Wire America Insights - Chapter 3*



### **PWA - 5G and National Security**

**“Vulnerability”** - It doesn’t look like a four-letter word but, as with all things in the realm of cyberspace and security, looks can be deceiving. The pandemic has exploded the domestic and international use of cyberspace to perform the vital functions of daily living. “Work From Home” (WFH), food delivery, online retail, telehealth, and distance learning are only examples of a myriad of daily life functions that have suddenly been transformed from in-person to an increasingly digitally accessed world. **While empowering, each digital transformation also creates new digital vulnerabilities.**

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### **5G is coming...and so are the Cyber Threats**

**The primary function of our National Security agencies is to protect the American way of life.** Increasingly the traditional “analog” threats that have challenged our armed forces and intelligence agencies have been increased, or even replaced, by cyber threats that have the capacity to inflict both tactical and strategic damage as bad or worse than conventional weapons. Indeed, as more vital functions move from analog to digital, the proportionate risk in the country’s threat profile reflects that shift – particularly since the asymmetric nature of cyber threats makes their potential impacts more devastating and the challenge of providing for their defense more daunting.



### **Securing 5G in Practice**

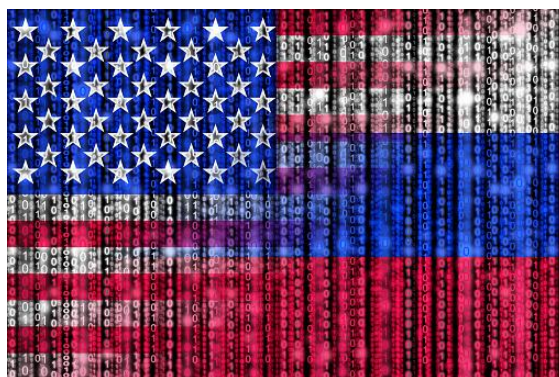
The pandemic has accelerated the pace of the private network build out of 5G in the U.S. as the big providers have rushed to secure for themselves as much of the broadband grid as they can get in a chaotic, “land rush” environment. **The reality is that this dramatic expansion is occurring despite the fact that the security agencies, regulatory entities and standards bodies who should be guiding this process have not yet framed, let alone finalized, how the 5G infrastructure being put in place is going to be secured or maintained in the future.** Despite the release of The National Strategy To Secure 5G in March 2020 and recent notable success in halting the Huawei juggernaut, the actual implementation of the next generation security protocols and equipment necessary to secure our 5G infrastructure are still aspirational – neither formalized or reduced to practice. With the unfettered buildout of 5G underway, we’re in danger of finding ourselves entering the era of broadband with a system that is inherently insecure with few good options to retroactively fix it.

## 5G Cybersecurity and Core of Power-Wire America

**The primary imperative of private enterprise is to make money while increasing the equity value for shareholders.**

While acknowledged, “security” is generally perceived as a cost of doing business rather than a direct contribution to profit.

Consequently, the tendency of most private companies is to default to the minimum – particularly if more comprehensive/effective solutions cost more or open their proprietary systems to delay, unwanted scrutiny, competition or oversight.



The prospect of the massive investment that the United States is contemplating in supporting the build out of 5G infrastructure offers a strategic security opportunity to address this national vulnerability. In the spirit of “who pays the piper picks the tune,” a well-funded PWA initiative would give the government (and especially the security agencies) the economic leverage to insure that the 5G build out incorporates necessary security systems from the start (in the same way the build out of the National Highway System in the 1950’s and 60’s required the use of national defense standards). Hardware, software and network specifications could be mandated and paid for in a way that would insure the uniformity of their implementation – without disadvantaging any of the legitimate private enterprises that might wish to participate in the build out.

It is well known in many kinds of engineering development that the cost of building security in early is orders of magnitude less expensive than attempting to add it at the end. **“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is the defining principle in cybersecurity.** Using the availability of public funding to promote the build out of secure 5G is a win for commerce, consumers and the government.

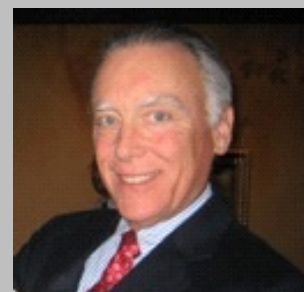


## Putting Cybersecurity Teeth in 5G

The sobering realization that a poorly secured 5G network in the United States could constitute a profound threat to our national security offers justification for concerted action to ensure that appropriate actions are taken now to make sure that doesn't happen. **We have the opportunity to make cybersecurity a “hardened” part of our national infrastructure as we build out our economy for the post-COVID era. We should take it.**

**Matt Walton and Art Deacon are partners of McCreightPartners.**

5G and National Security is part of Power-Wire America, a series that explores the specific ways the Power-Wiring of America will create both challenges and opportunities for the power, communications, healthcare, transportation, public safety and national security sectors of the U.S. economy.



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### ***Power-Wire America Insights Series***

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