The US DOC gives Huawei a 90-day window to support existing devices

reader comments

98 with 69 posters participating

Share this story

Trade War! USA v. China

View more stories

The Trump administration is working to ban Huawei products from the US market and ban US companies from supplying the Chinese company with software and components. The move will have wide-ranging consequences for Huawei's smartphone, laptop, and telecom-equipment businesses. For the next 90 days, though, Huawei will be allowed to support those products. The US Department of Commerce (DOC) has granted temporary general export license for 90 days, so while the company is still banned from doing business with most US companies, it is allowed to continue critical product support.

Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross explains the new exemption, saying, "The Temporary General License authorizes certain activities necessary to the continued operations of existing networks and to support existing mobile services, including cybersecurity research critical to maintaining the integrity and reliability of existing and fully operational networks and

equipment.”

The United States’ blocking of Huawei was swift and sudden, and companies and people who rely on a Huawei product were no doubt scrambling in the aftermath. Ross says this 90-day exemption “grants operators time to make other arrangements and the Department space to determine the appropriate long-term measures for Americans and foreign telecommunications providers that currently rely on Huawei equipment for critical services.”

The DOC’s focus with this announcement seems to be cell-carrier operators. Huawei doesn’t have a large presence in US telecom, but some carriers in rural states like Wyoming and Oregon have adopted Huawei equipment. The Department’s recommendation to “make other arrangements” seems to mean it expects carriers to replace their Huawei equipment over the next 90 days.

Google and Huawei can work on security updates again

The 90-day license means Google can work with Huawei again on smartphone updates. A Google spokesperson told CNBC, “Keeping phones up to date and secure is in everyone’s best interests, and this temporary license allows us to continue to provide software updates and security patches to existing models for the next 90 days.”

Google doesn’t directly develop OS security updates for other companies’ phones, but Google and manufacturers do work together to report and fix any security bugs in Android, which can then be rolled out to everyone. Google grants manufacturers access to security fixes one month ahead of time, giving them time to develop security updates for their devices before bug disclosures go public.

After 90 days, the companies will need to stop working together, and everyone seems to be preparing for this future. Huawei phones have been removed from the Android Q Beta page, so the company presumably has been kicked out of the Android Q early-access program for manufacturers.

Life after Google

As far as life after Google for Huawei, the company is apparently working on its own operating system. Huawei consumer electronics chief Richard Yu spoke to The Information recently and said the company would be "forced to launch our own OS and ecosystem" after the US export ban. The Information says the codename is "Project Z," but we've also seen reports calling it "HongMeng OS," and years ago it was "Kirin OS."

Regardless of what Huawei's OS gets called, the report says it's "far from ready." The Information claims the OS was always focused on China and wasn't meant as a general-purpose, worldwide Android replacement. The Chinese media is painting a different story, though. A report from the Chinese site Caijing says Yu claimed the OS will be out this fall or next spring and would launch with some Android compatibility. The translated report concludes with a wild claim that Android apps that are "recompiled" for this operating system will be 60 percent faster than they are on Android. We'll believe this when we see it.

The whole situation sounds like a nightmare, with Yu admitting the company is facing "really a very tough time." The report says Huawei is not even sure if US citizens are allowed to work at the company, saying, "The legal department is still figuring out whether those employees' knowledge and expertise could be considered US technology subject to the sanctions."

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1508851