

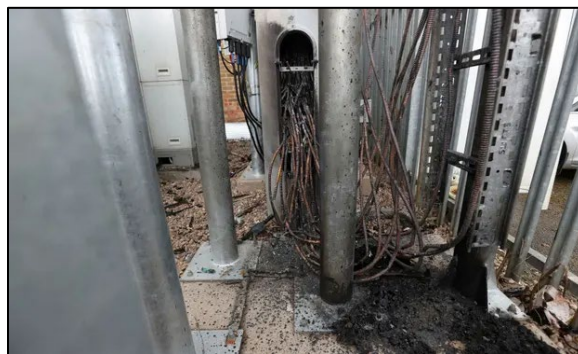


INTELLIGENCE NOTE

April 14, 2020

(U//FOUO) EARLY APRIL VANDALISM OF UK 5G INFRASTRUCTURE LIKELY LINKED TO COVID-19 CONSPIRACY THEORIES

(U) At least 20 communications towers in the United Kingdom believed to contain 5G cellular equipment were vandalized between 2-3 April, according to multiple UK media sources.^{1,2} The same media reports are linking the tower attacks, in addition to verbal confrontations with communications workers, to Internet conspiracy theories attributing elements of this COVID-19 pandemic to the towers.



(U) Damage at the base of a cell tower in Birmingham, England. Source: *theguardian.com*

- (U) As well as one attack in Northern Ireland, the attacks have been characterized as being clustered around Liverpool and the Western Midlands, an area West and North of London, according to a UK media report.³
- (U//FOUO) Thus far, the only reported attack method used against the UK towers has been arson, though we only know limited targeting details for one attack where a published photograph shows extensive damage to cabling at the base of the tower.⁴
- (U) One UK media report indicates at least some of the cell towers did not yet contain any 5G related equipment, and the attacks only damaged existing 3G and 4G equipment.⁵
- (U) In addition to the arson attacks on the cell phone towers, several UK media reports have discussed multiple incidents of telecommunications field workers being confronted and threatened with violence over the perception that the workers' activities were contributing to the spread of COVID-19.^{6,7}

(U//FOUO) The recent communications tower attacks in the UK and confrontations with field personnel likely are related to one or more conspiracy theories, according to multiple UK media reports.^{8,9,10}

(U//FOUO) Scope: This intelligence note provides timely notification of an event or current intelligence item impacting critical infrastructure in the United States or other DHS priority.

- (U) Theory one suggests that 5G suppresses the immune system such that persons are more easily infected by the COVID-19 virus.
- (U) The second theory claims the virus spreads via the millimeter radio spectrum allocated to 5G devices.
- (U) The third theory simply links the pandemic to the origination of COVID in Wuhan, China and attributes the subsequent spread to 5G equipment deployed in the area at the same time.

(U) There have been conspiracy theories associated with 5G technology and infrastructure prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, typically associating illness with radiation from the sites or equipment, according to a UK media report.¹¹

(U) Conspiracy theories linking COVID-19 to 5G technology have been associated with inauthentic social media accounts, according to a news source citing multiple disinformation researchers.¹² Though the same report comments that this would be a tactic associated with a nation-state disinformation campaign, we have only limited information corroborating this theory as of the publication of this note.

- (U) On 28 January 2020, RT America, a media outlet backed by the Government of Russia, posted a YouTube^{USPER} video of a news report discussing the purported health risks associated with 5G technology and questionable medical practices associated with a major US philanthropic organization's efforts to mitigate the coronavirus pandemic.¹³

(U) Source Summary and Confidence Statement

(U//FOUO) This intelligence note is based on a large body of media reporting from the United Kingdom. Those reports are based on multiple official statements from UK government officials and first and secondhand accounts from the public. Though we cannot discount the possibility that a portion of this reporting is circular, we have moderate to high confidence in the fact of the attacks and confrontations with telecom workers. Additionally, though specific instances of arson were described, we were unable to determine the total number of attacks or the precise locations.

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ENDNOTES

¹ (U) | The Guardian | <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/apr/06/at-least-20-uk-phone-masts-vandalised-over-false-5g-coronavirus-claims> | “At least 20 UK phone masts vandalised over false 5G coronavirus claims” | 6 April 2020 | Extracted information is UNCLASSIFIED | Source document is UNCLASSIFIED | The Guardian is a reputable news source in the United Kingdom.

² (U) | The Times | <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/coronavirus-more-phone-masts-attacked-as-arsonists-blame-5g-7xpblc9nd> | “More phone masts attacked as arsonists blame 5G for coronavirus” | 5 April 2020 | Extracted information is UNCLASSIFIED | Source document is UNCLASSIFIED | The Times is a reputable news source in the United Kingdom.

³ (U) | The Guardian | “At least 20 UK phone masts vandalised over false 5G coronavirus claims” | 6 April 2020.

⁴ (U) | BBC News | <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-52164358> | “Mast fire probe amid 5G coronavirus claims” | 4 April 2020 | Extracted information is UNCLASSIFIED | Source document is UNCLASSIFIED | The British Broadcasting Corporation is a publicly owned reputable news source in the United Kingdom.

⁵ (U) | The Guardian | “At least 20 UK phone masts vandalised over false 5G coronavirus claims” | 6 April 2020.

⁶ (U) | Wales Online | <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/uk-news/people-attacking-5g-towers-18058106/> | “Why are people attacking 5G towers?” | 7 April 2020 | Extracted information is UNCLASSIFIED | Source document is UNCLASSIFIED | Wales Online is a reputable online news source covering the country of Wales within the United Kingdom.

⁷ (U) | The Guardian | “At least 20 UK phone masts vandalised over false 5G coronavirus claims” | 6 April 2020.

⁸ (U) | BBC News | “Mast fire probe amid 5G coronavirus claims” | 4 April 2020.

⁹ (U) | Wales Online | “Why are people attacking 5G towers?” | 7 April 2020.

¹⁰ (U) | Forbes | <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucelee/2020/04/09/5g-networks-and-covid-19-coronavirus-here-are-the-latest-conspiracy-theories/#1214590d6d41> | “5G Networks And COVID-19 Coronavirus: Here Are The Latest Conspiracy Theories” | 9 April 2020 | Extracted information is UNCLASSIFIED | Source document is UNCLASSIFIED | Forbes is an American business magazine. Published bi-weekly, it features original articles on finance, industry, investing, and marketing topics. Forbes also reports on related subjects such as technology, communications, science, politics, and law.

¹¹ (U) | NPR | <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/04/827343675/u-k-cellphone-towers-ablaze-as-conspiracy-theories-link-5g-networks-to-covid-19> | “U.K. Cellphone Towers Ablaze As Conspiracy Theories Link 5G Networks To COVID-19” | 4 April 2020 | Extracted information is UNCLASSIFIED | Source document is UNCLASSIFIED | National Public Radio is a privately and publicly funded American non-profit membership media organization.

¹² (U) | Bloomberg News | <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-09/covid-19-link-to-5g-technology-fueled-by-coordinated-effort> | “5G Virus Conspiracy Theory Fueled by Coordinated Effort” | 9 April 2020 | Extracted information is UNCLASSIFIED | Source document is UNCLASSIFIED | Bloomberg L.P. is a privately held financial, software, data, and media company.

¹³ (U) | RT America | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqtJlmz-Wqw> | 28 January 2020 | Extracted information is UNCLASSIFIED | Source material is UNCLASSIFIED | RT America is an Internet based news channel funded by the Government of Russia.