

UK clamps down on Chinese surveillance cameras

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UK government departments were ordered Thursday to stop installing Chinese-made surveillance cameras at "sensitive sites", drawing a strong rebuke from one of the companies targeted.

The move comes with the government moving more forcefully against China and its companies on security grounds. Last week it ordered a Chinese-owned firm to divest most of Newport Wafer Fab, Britain's biggest semiconductor maker.

According to the campaign group Big Brother Watch, most public organisations in Britain use CCTV cameras made either by Hikvision or Dahua.

In July, a group of 67 MPs and lords urged London to ban the sale and use of surveillance equipment made by the two companies, whose products have allegedly been implicated in rights abuses against the Uyghur minority in Xinjiang.

The government's new order stopped short of an outright ban on the companies.

But it discouraged the use in Britain of "visual surveillance systems" made by firms required by Chinese law to share intelligence with Beijing's security services.

No such cameras should be connected to "core networks" at government departments, and ministries should consider replacing them rather than waiting for scheduled upgrades, it said.

A government review has concluded that, "in light of the threat to the UK and the increasing capability and connectivity of these systems, additional controls are required", senior minister Oliver Dowden told parliament.

"Departments have therefore been instructed to cease deployment of such equipment on to sensitive sites, where it is produced by companies subject to the national intelligence law of the People's Republic of

China."

Some individual UK ministries have already been removing Hikvision gear, after one of the company's cameras in June 2021 caught then health secretary Matt Hancock kissing an aide in violation of COVID rules. He was forced to resign.

In response to Dowden's statement, a spokesman for the company said it was "categorically false to represent Hikvision as a threat to national security".

He claimed Hikvision "cannot transmit data from end-users to third parties, we do not manage end-user databases, nor do we sell cloud storage in the UK".

"We have always been fully transparent about our operations in the UK and have been engaging with the UK government to clarify misunderstandings about the company, our business, and address their concerns," the spokesman added.

"We will seek to urgently engage further with ministers to understand this decision."

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