

## UK government to rip out its Hikvision cameras

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Security cameras made by Chinese company Hikvision can no longer be installed in or on government buildings after cabinet minister Oliver Dowden declared them “current and future possible security risks”. This came after calls for a nationwide ban by a group of MPs and peers, but doesn't go far enough, according to the UK's outgoing biometrics and surveillance cameras commissioner.



Hikvision cameras are installed across government and public buildings in the UK despite security risks. (Photo by Stefano Carnevali/Shutterstock)

Hikvision is partly owned by the Chinese government and is the largest CCTV provider in the world, serving schools, public institutions and secret laboratories in the UK. It supplies up to 60% of UK public bodies with CCTV cameras according to a report by Big Brother Watch, which found that the cameras from Hikvision and



Dahua, another partly Chinese government-owned manufacturer, were used by 73% of local authorities, 35% of police forces and 63% of schools in the UK.

There have been growing calls for a ban on their use, particularly in sensitive and high-security areas, in part due to Hikvision's alleged role in aiding Chinese oppression in the Xinjiang province and Tibet. Big Brother Watch's report alleged that Hikvision and Dahua have participated in China's oppression of the Uyghur community in Xinjiang.

The new decision by the UK government includes a ban on the future installation of any security cameras made by companies subject to Chinese security laws and came after a review of the security risks linked to surveillance systems on the government estate.

"The 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," Dowden wrote in a statement to parliament.

Over a million of these cameras are thought to be on buildings across the UK, including on government and publicly owned property, watching every aspect of our lives.

Professor Fraser Sampson, the outgoing UK Biometrics and Surveillance Cameras Commissioner, told *Tech Monitor* banning the cameras from government buildings is "the easy bit", and now the hard work begins. "We need a risk-based timeline to address all the issues, some of which can be done now but others take years," Professor Sampson says. "We are no longer asking whether certain security companies can be trusted, we now accept they can't, but we need to work out how to verify those we can trust."

Professor Sampson asks: "Do you want untrusted companies screening at airports, watching school playgrounds or on hospital wards?" He gave the example of one such company that has won



awards for work monitoring children on school buses in Scotland that is now on the new ban list.

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Beyond schools, the issue of policing was raised by Professor Sampson. This has been a thorny issue in recent months, with guidelines for officers using CCTV set to be scrapped under new UK data laws. He said: "Policing is about trust and confidence. Once you lose trust in a company, as we have declared is the case with the Chinese CCTV companies, there is no place for them in any police surveillance role. In which case now we've established some companies can't be trusted we shouldn't be using them either."

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He adds that the issue extends into all areas of public life covered by these cameras. "This isn't a policing problem, it's a democratic one and it is international," he says.

The directive issued by Dowden also includes guidance for departments to disconnect cameras from core computer networks and urges them to remove them altogether where possible.

Some departments have already taken action to remove the cameras before the review was completed. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) removed Hikvision from its building and the



Department for Health and Social Care cancelled its contract with the company.

A group of 67 MPs and Lords called for a nationwide ban on the installation of Hikvision technology, going further than the ban on government buildings. The group calling for a ban includes Lib Dem leader Sir Ed Davey, four former Conservative ministers, Labour MPs and human rights campaigners, and Green MP Caroline Lucas.

“We call for a ban on the sale and operation of Hikvision and Dahua surveillance equipment in the UK and condemn their involvement in technology-enabled human rights abuses in China,” the group said in a statement.

The MPs raised issues of privacy and security, which Hikvision denied in a statement to *Reuters*. It said it would seek to engage the government to better understand the ban, adding that: "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."

Dowden said departments need to cease any further deployment onto sensitive sites where it is "produced by companies subject to the National Intelligence Law of the People's Republic of China". He added that "since security considerations are always paramount around these sites, we are taking action now to prevent any security risks materialising."

**[Read more: MPs call for UK ban on Chinese surveillance cameras used by 73% of local councils](#)**

