

# [***China hits back at US, UK for sanctions on espionage hacks as coordinated pressure on Beijing grows***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BMY-04F1-DY7V-G000-00000-00&context=1516831)

CNN Wire

March 26, 2024 Tuesday 5:43 AM GMT

Copyright 2024 Cable News Network All Rights Reserved

**Length:** 922 words

**Byline:** By Nectar Gan, CNN

**Dateline:** (CNN)

**Body**

Hong Kong (CNN) &#8212; Beijing has lashed out at the United States and the United Kingdom for imposing sanctions over alleged Chinese government-backed cyberattacks, calling the Western allies' move an act of "political manipulation."

The US and the UK [*announced*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/25/politics/chinese-hackers-accusations-espionage-campaign/index.html) Monday a set of criminal charges and sanctions against seven Chinese hackers for allegedly conducting sweeping attacks on behalf of China's civilian intelligence agency.

The yearslong campaign allegedly targeted American officials, senators, journalists and companies - including Pentagon contractors - as well as British parliamentarians, the UK's election watchdog and members of the European Parliament, affecting millions of people.

New Zealand also weighed in on Tuesday, [*accusing*](https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/parliamentary-network-breached-prc) state-sponsored Chinese hackers of launching "malicious cyber activity" against the country's parliament in 2021.

Accusations of cyber espionage have long been a major point of friction between Beijing and Washington, with the US indicting a series of Chinese hackers in recent years.

The public accusations from three members of the so-called Five Eyes intelligence alliance show key Western democracies are now taking a more concerted - and coordinated - stand against what they view as unacceptable levels of hacking and espionage by Beijing.

At a news conference Tuesday, China's Foreign Ministry lashed out at the US and the UK, accusing them of "hyping up the so-called cyberattacks by China."

"This is purely political manipulation. China is strongly dissatisfied with this and firmly opposes it," ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said, adding China has made solemn representations to both sides.

"We urge the United States and the United Kingdom to stop politicizing cyber security issues, stop slandering and smearing China, impose unilateral sanctions, and stop cyberattacks on China."

The spokesperson did not mention New Zealand.

[*Australia*](https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/media-release/cyber-targeting-uk-democratic-institutions) and the [*European Union*](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/uk-statement-spokesperson-recent-malicious-cyber-activities_en#:~:text=The%20European%20Union%20expresses%20its,take%20further%20action%20when%20necessary.) also expressed solidarity with the UK and voiced concerns over China's alleged malicious cyber activities, as Beijing comes under growing scrutiny in a big election year for democracies around the world.

The accusations and sanctions come as China is trying to manage tensions and repair frayed relations with major Western powers, as it grapples with a host of economic challenges including an exodus of foreign investment.

Beijing's frustration was evident on Tuesday, when Lin, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson, blamed the US for encouraging the Five Eyes alliance "to spread all kinds of disinformation about the threats posted by Chinese hackers for geopolitical purpose."

Liu Dongshu, an assistant professor focusing on Chinese ***politics*** at City University of Hong Kong, said the coordinated move by the US and its allies undermines Beijing's "divide and rule" strategy.

"My observation is that China has always sought to create some distance between the US and other Western countries, such as European nations and Australia. Especially considering the possibility of a reelection of Donald Trump, China feels there may be a chance to separate them a little more," he said.

"But (the accusations) show that despite their differences, these countries remain united on many issues regarding China."

'Sensitive time'

The sanctions against two Chinese nationals and a technology company in the central Chinese city of Wuhan mark the first time Britain has slapped penalties on Chinese state-affiliated entities for alleged cyberattacks, even as Western intelligence agencies have increasingly sounded the alarm in recent years.

"It is an escalation, but perhaps only because the UK has been rather mild in its previous actions," said Jonathan Sullivan, an associate professor and China specialist at the University of Nottingham.

British cybersecurity officials said a Chinese state-backed hacking group known as APT31 had "conducted reconnaissance activity" against British parliamentarians who were openly critical of Beijing in 2021.

Chinese hackers have also "highly likely" breached the UK's Electoral Commission in 2021 and 2022 and accessed personal data of 40 million voters, according to British officials.

On Tuesday, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said China had made "technical clarification" in response to the APT31-related information submitted by the UK, calling its evidence "insufficient" and "unprofessional."

The sanctions come at a sensitive time in the UK, which is facing a general election and bracing itself for a wave of misinformation, said Sullivan, the China expert at the University of Nottingham.

"Our economic relations with China are already undergoing securitization, from investment to data protection," he said, citing Britain's bans on Chinese tech giant [*Huawei*](https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/14/tech/huawei-uk-ban/index.html) from its 5G networks, and on the camera systems of Chinese surveillance company [*Hikvision*](https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/25/tech/uk-chinese-surveillance-cameras-restrictions-intl-hnk/index.html) from sensitive sites.

Last September, a British parliamentary researcher was [*arrested*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/13/uk/china-alleged-spy-uk-parliament-intl-gbr-cmd/index.html) on suspicion of spying for China.

The sanctions could risk disrupting the upward trajectory of UK-China ties, which have stabilized in the past year after years of deterioration following British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's "robust pragmatism" approach to foreign policy, Sullivan said.

"I would be astonished if (Beijing) does not respond in kind. China does not tend to receive such actions without retaliation."

This story has been updated with additional developments.

CNN's Wayne Chang and Hilary Whiteman contributed to this story.

TM & © 2024 Cable News Network, Inc., a Time Warner Company. All rights reserved.

**Load-Date:** March 26, 2024

**End of Document**