

China Left Off Toughest Tier of UK's Foreign Influence Tracking Regime

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The UK government has faced scrutiny after it emerged that China was excluded from the most stringent tier of a new national security regime designed to track covert foreign influence. The Foreign Influence Registration Scheme (FIRS), introduced under the National Security Act, is intended to require individuals and organizations working on behalf of foreign states to declare their activities in the UK. While countries

deemed to pose the highest risk to national security are subject to a more rigorous level of disclosure, China was notably left off this top-tier list.

Security experts and some lawmakers have expressed concern over the omission, given the growing awareness of Beijing's efforts to exert political and economic influence in democracies worldwide. The regime currently places nations such as Russia, Iran, and North Korea in the upper tier, requiring stricter transparency rules for any affiliated actors. Critics argue that China's sophisticated and wide-reaching operations, ranging from academic partnerships to lobbying and media influence, warrant similar scrutiny.

The Home Office defended its position, stating that the list is based on current intelligence assessments and remains subject to regular review. It emphasized that the UK remains vigilant against all forms of state interference, and that any state could be added to the enhanced tier if its actions meet the threshold. Nonetheless, some MPs warned that excluding China could weaken the system's credibility and effectiveness, especially given prior allegations of espionage and political targeting linked to Beijing.

Advocates for stricter regulation have called on ministers to reconsider China's status under FIRS, pointing to the need for a consistent and proactive approach to national security. They argue that transparency and accountability are essential tools in safeguarding democratic institutions from foreign manipulation, particularly in a global environment where hybrid threats are evolving rapidly.

As geopolitical tensions continue to shape domestic security policies, the debate over China's placement in the UK's influence-tracking framework signals broader questions about how the government balances diplomacy, trade interests, and national defense. The conversation appears far from over.