GCHQ and NCSC heads warn of increasing cyber risk from China

Director GCHQ and the CEO of the National Cyber Security Centre both spoke at CYBERUK 24 in Birmingham

The Director of GCHQ warned today that the Chinese state poses a "genuine and increasing" cyber risk for the UK.

Speaking at the National Cyber Security Centre's (NCSC) flagship event, CYBERUK, in Birmingham, Anne Keast-Butler said that the Chinese Communist Party's cyber capabilities are "world-class", and it intends to use them to achieve its national goals.

In her first major speech since taking up her post last year, our first female head went on to say that responding to the challenge posed by China is GCHQ's top priority, with more resource devoted to the topic than any other single mission.

She said:

"We see the Chinese state acting in an increasingly assertive fashion on the world stage... The UK's intelligence community is working alongside our allies and in partnership with our industry and academic colleagues to combat and deter cyber threats from nation states and hostile actors."

You can read the full speech here or watch it below.

At the same event, Felicity Oswald, CEO of the NCSC, said that the challenge posed by China is "clear and pronounced" and that the Chinese government's capability is "vast in scale and sophistication".

Oswald referenced US warnings given about the VOLT TYPHOON group earlier this year, saying "what [this] signals about China's intent – to hold essential networks at risk – is of serious concern for the NCSC". She also urged service providers in the UK to take seriously the warnings about China state-sponsored attackers prepositioning themselves on critical networks.

CEO of the NCSC, Felicity Oswald said:

"Cyber is being deployed across multiple fronts to help the Chinese state meet its strategic ends…This should worry all of us concerned with cyber resilience. Business leaders and networks defenders must take action to make critical systems more secure across our economy… China is certainly not treating security as an extra, and neither should we."

The two-day event at CYBERUK brings together leading figures in tech and cyber security from around the world, with the theme of this year's conference being 'Future Tech, Future Threat, Future Ready'. A global panel of cyber security experts will share their insights into opportunities and threats that demand our collective attention – nation state threats, AI, quantum computing, cyber skills, and threats to critical national infrastructure. All the plenary sessions - and lots more fantastic content – are being streamed live, for free, on the CYBERUK 2024 YouTube channel.

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