Watching Me, Watching You: Chinese Surveillance Cameras Banned in South Australia Amidst Security Concerns

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Following Australia’s latest round of expanded 5G restrictions, the South Australian Government has made a decision to remove all close circuit surveillance cameras made by a Chinese surveillance giant from health department buildings, according to an article by the Sydney Morning Herald.

The article notes that the relevant cameras are made by the partially state-owned Chinese surveillance technology company Hikvision, which was blacklisted in October 2019 by the United States for their alleged role in human rights violations and in purporting to create a surveillance network amongst federal agencies. Issues with Hikvision in South Australia were first identified in the course of a Commonwealth-funded trial in which Hikvision cameras were to be used in the rooms of aged care residents as a means to improve overall safety.

Upon South Australia Health asking for more information from Hikvision to ensure its compliance with South Australian security guidelines, the company promptly quit the pilot, with South Australian Health Minister Stephen Wade further indicating that “security and technical issues” arose with the pilot. This comes following the Department of Defence removing two Hikvision cameras from their Perth and
Adelaide bases in 2018. However, despite this ban, Hikvision cameras remain in use across the public hospital network in New South Wales.

The ban serves as a timely reminder that the importation and outsourcing of sophisticated technology products and services brings its own set of complex challenges and therefore that it is fundamental the Australian government understands the full suite of security risks inherent in such technology forms.

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