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Hello. Ahead of the UK prime minister's state visit to China this week, a surprising detail about his security arrangements made headlines. Sir Keir Starmer's team had been issued with burner phones, temporary SIM cards and throwaway laptops rather than their usual computers, to limit the likelihood of being bugged during the trip. It sounded extreme, but was it really? I spoke to an expert to find out. We also look at Apple's record iPhone sales, Tesla's shift to robots, and try on a wearable exoskeleton for size.

THE DOWNLOAD

Spy tech in the spotlight during China trip



Sir Keir Starmer met President Xi Jinping this week in Beijing. Credit: Getty Images

There are growing concerns about **Chinese espionage in the UK**, so it's not surprising that tough security measures were imposed during Sir Keir's state visit to Beijing.

So cautious was his team that they reportedly used temporary email addresses and notepads and pens in the absence of electronic devices.

The UK delegation will have been trying to avoid several risks, says Joe Jarnecki, a research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), a defence and security think tank.

One would be a hacker physically getting hold of a device, making it easier for them to steal data or install spyware.

Others could be attacks "over the air" through bluetooth or wi-fi, or even via devices plugged into power sockets. "As our phones have become more capable and connected their attack surface has increased," Jarnecki said.

China has form when it comes to intercepting foreign leaders' communications. In 2024, the phones of President-elect Donald Trump and Vice-President-elect JD Vance were targeted **during a major hack** of US telecoms companies and government agencies, according to US officials.

Yet Western countries have also been accused of such tactics. The US National Security Agency allegedly **bugged German chancellor Angela Merkel's phone** between 2002 and 2013.

And in 2002, a Boeing 767 jet manufactured in the US for former Chinese premier Jiang Zemin was reportedly found to contain at least 27 spying devices.

Such incidents are "largely treated as an acceptable part of international relations" and rarely lead to diplomatic spats, says Jarnecki.

"The precautions taken by Sir Keir's team are standard practice for ministers visiting a country where their devices might be compromised," he told me. "I would fully expect the Chinese to take similar provisions were they to come to the UK."

The download: The UK's cautious approach in China may have made headlines, but it won't have surprised intelligence experts.

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How AI helps blind people 'see' the world



Milagros Costabel uses an AI-powered app each morning as a kind of audible mirror. Credit: Serenity Strull/ BBC

A new wave of AI apps is helping blind people access visual feedback about their bodies. Through image recognition and intelligent processing, these tools can provide detailed information about the world they inhabit - not only describing a scene, but also offering critical feedback, comparisons and advice. **Milagros Costabel explains how it works.**

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