

Security summit ends with pledges to tackle emerging threats

Tech companies should prioritise the protection of their users and the wider public when designing services, the UK and international security partners have warned.

Senior ministers from the UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States have reaffirmed their commitment to work together with industry to tackle a range of security threats including the sexual abuse and exploitation of children online.

The commitment follows a two-day summit, known as the Five Country Ministerial, where Home Affairs, Interior Security and Immigration Ministers of the Five Eyes countries discussed current and emerging threats which could undermine national and global security. This important partnership and these issues will remain a focus for the UK now and after Brexit.

During a roundtable with tech firms, ministers stressed that law enforcement agencies' efforts to investigate and prosecute the most serious crimes would be hampered if the industry carries out plans to implement end-to-end encryption, without the necessary safeguards.

They added that encrypted services could mask the full scale of harms on the internet and put vulnerable users at risk.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

The Five Eyes are united that tech firms should not develop their systems and services, including end-to-end encryption, in ways that empower criminals or put vulnerable people at risk.

We heard today about the devastating and lifelong impact of child sexual exploitation and abuse and agreed firm commitments to collaborate to get ahead of the threat.

As Governments, protecting our citizens is our top priority, which is why through the unique and binding partnership of Five Eyes we will tackle these emerging threats together.

Also speaking at the conclusion of the two-day conference United States Attorney General William P. Barr said:

The Five Eyes partnership is vital. Throughout this week, we have had substantive, frank and positive discussions surrounding our shared duty to protect public safety, including those related to the internet.

Encryption presents a unique challenge. We must ensure that we do not stand by as advances in technology create spaces where criminal activity of the most heinous kind can go undetected and unpunished.

Indeed, making our virtual world more secure should not come at the expense of making us more vulnerable in the real world. We are grateful for the leadership of Home Secretary Patel in facilitating these critical discussions and shared commitment to safety for all.

Industry agreed to collaborate with the Five Eyes governments on a set of voluntary principles, to be drawn up by the end of the September, on steps they will take to combat child sexual exploitation and abuse, including the growing threat of livestreaming.

The theme of this year's meeting was 'emerging threats', with ministers also turning their attention to common risks posed by new technologies, including connected devices, terrorist use of the internet and foreign terrorist fighters.

Joint communiques have been published following the [Five Country Ministerial meetings](#) and [Quintet meetings](#) summarising the discussions and conclusions.

The following commitments were agreed by Ministers present:

- to continue to develop and share learning on cyber threats to improve the collective response
- the importance that supply chains in the 5G network should be trusted and reliable to protect it from unauthorised access or interference
- to create a stronger approach to the misuse of drones, with the UK hosting an event next year to enhance cooperation
- to explore enhancing cross border information sharing
- to maintain efforts to combat foreign interference in elections, the economy and academia

The Quintet of Attorneys General from the Five Eyes countries also joined the Five Country Ministerial for meetings on online harms, encryption and foreign terrorist fighters.

Tomorrow, Attorneys General from the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand will meet for the Quintet and will discuss a range of shared issues including cybercrime, hostile state activity and social media and data privacy issues.

The Five Country Ministerial partnership continues and will be hosted in 2020 by New Zealand.