# UK government weighs US security warnings over China’s planned ‘super-embassy’ in London



Security concerns surrounding the proposed Chinese embassy in Royal Mint Court, London, have intensified following warnings from the United States. The embassy, which would be China's largest in Europe, is located close to significant communications hubs in the City’s financial district, raising fears that the embassy could facilitate espionage and compromise sensitive data. In light of these serious considerations, Technology Secretary Peter Kyle reassured the public that the UK government would address US security concerns judiciously. Speaking to Sky News, he stated, “These issues will be taken care of assiduously in the planning process,” signalling the UK’s commitment to engage with allies on security matters.

The potential ramifications of allowing China to establish such a substantial diplomatic presence have drawn criticism not only from US officials but also from domestic political voices, with the UK opposition party echoing caution over national security implications. A senior US official has expressed disquiet about possible access for Chinese authorities to sensitive communications, which was relayed during US-UK trade negotiations. The official noted, “The United States is deeply concerned about providing China with potential access,” indicating that ongoing transatlantic trade talks could be undermined if the embassy construction proceeds without sufficient safeguards.

Originally rejected by Tower Hamlets Council in 2022 due to security and community impact considerations, the embassy proposal has resurfaced amid diplomatic pressure from Chinese leaders. The plan entails converting the former site of the Royal Mint—which has historical significance—into a sprawling complex that would accommodate various diplomatic functions, including what some have called a “super-embassy.” As local opposition continues, residents, human rights activists, and even politicians have rallied against the project, citing fears of increased intimidation and surveillance, as well as an adverse impact on the local community.

Analysis from intelligence experts has been stark. Former MI6 chief Sir Richard Dearlove has warned that the embassy's proximity to critical infrastructure could allow for interception of communications vital to national security. This sentiment was echoed by members of the US congressional committees, who underscored the strategic risks posed by the embassy. Their letter to the UK government has urged caution, asserting that granting such a significant existential presence to the Chinese Communist Party would be a “reward” for human rights abuses.

With the Planning Inspectorate currently reviewing objections, the journey towards a final government decision is set against a backdrop of both local dissent and international concern. Public demonstrations opposing the embassy have drawn large crowds, further complicating the dialogue surrounding its approval. Critics, including local Councillor Peter Golds, have highlighted the potential for significant disruptions, suggesting that protests against the Chinese regime could regularly close major thoroughfares in London.

Despite the formidable array of concerns, support for the embassy has been voiced by some British ministers who argue the importance of maintaining diplomatic relations. However, a planning inquiry will ultimately determine the fate of this controversial project. The final decision will lie with Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, as the anticipation of a verdict grows amid escalating tensions.

As UK officials navigate the implications of this project, the dynamic between security, diplomacy, and community interests remains precariously balanced, with stakes that extend beyond national borders.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/uk-will-handle-us-security-concerns-over-new-chinese-embassy-plan-says-kyle/a1598466808.html), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/056c0343-2f8d-4a70-9901-5468894ecf24)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/70151e6c-bd34-4830-a558-bb7de2f296e6), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/88129701-0695-406b-b449-131d7fc8de14), [[5]](https://selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/media/press-releases/chairmen-moolenaar-and-smith-urge-uk-ambassador-reject-ccps-largest-european-0)
* Paragraph 3 – [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/dec/02/london-council-tower-hamlets-rejects-new-chinese-embassy-amid-residents-safety-fears), [[7]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/china-embassy-london-security-risk-tower-hamlets-b1212362.html)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/uk-will-handle-us-security-concerns-over-new-chinese-embassy-plan-says-kyle/a1598466808.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/056c0343-2f8d-4a70-9901-5468894ecf24> - The United States has raised concerns with the UK government regarding China's plan to construct a massive embassy in Royal Mint Court, London. The proposed 20,000 sq m compound, set to be China’s largest embassy in Europe, is near sensitive communications hubs in the City's financial district, prompting fears of potential espionage. Intelligence officials, including former MI6 head Sir Richard Dearlove, warned that the proximity to critical data cables could allow Chinese intelligence to intercept communications. The US emphasizes the need to consider national security and ensure mitigation strategies as part of any decision-making process, given the intelligence-sharing alliance of Five Eyes. The UK opposition Conservative party has also opposed the embassy, citing national security risks and China’s record of surveillance and intimidation. Although the local council previously rejected the plan on security and community impact grounds, the project has regained traction following pressure from Chinese President Xi Jinping and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Some UK officials hope that granting approval could improve strained UK-China relations. The British government has yet to comment on the renewed proposal.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/70151e6c-bd34-4830-a558-bb7de2f296e6> - A US congressional committee has expressed concern over China's plan to build a massive embassy in London, citing risks to the UK's financial industry. The embassy, which would be the largest in Europe, is located near the Tower of London, replacing its current headquarters in Marylebone. Local residents and some politicians fear an increase in espionage. Both Chinese President Xi Jinping and Foreign Minister Wang Yi have discussed the project with British leaders. Although the Tower Hamlets local authority rejected the project on security grounds, the final decision will be made by UK Housing Secretary Angela Rayner. Despite initial opposition from the Metropolitan Police, British ministers have shown support for the project, highlighting the need for diplomatic presences. The concern in Washington comes amid discussions about an agreement affecting a joint military base in Diego Garcia, where the US fears Chinese espionage.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/88129701-0695-406b-b449-131d7fc8de14> - US lawmakers have raised concerns about China's plan to build its largest embassy in Europe, situated in London, due to China's human rights record and alleged transnational repression. They argue that allowing such a significant diplomatic presence would reward China undeservedly and enable intimidation and harassment of UK citizens and dissidents. The proposed embassy site, the former Royal Mint Court, is also problematic due to its proximity to critical communications infrastructure, which could facilitate espionage. The lawmakers, Chris Smith and John Moolenaar, urged UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer to address these concerns during his meeting with US President Donald Trump. The opposition from UK and US officials comes amid heightened diplomatic engagements between the UK and China, with the Labour government viewing China as a crucial investment partner.
5. <https://selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/media/press-releases/chairmen-moolenaar-and-smith-urge-uk-ambassador-reject-ccps-largest-european-0> - Chairmen John Moolenaar (R-MI) and Chris Smith (R-NJ) of the US House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and China and the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) have sent a letter to Lord (Peter) Mandelson, Ambassador of the United Kingdom to the United States, expressing serious concerns regarding the proposed construction of the largest Chinese Embassy in Europe on the site of the Royal Mint Court in London. The letter expresses concerns that granting such a prominent diplomatic presence to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) would be a counterproductive and unearned reward for the CCP’s human rights abuses and efforts to suppress political opposition.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/dec/02/london-council-tower-hamlets-rejects-new-chinese-embassy-amid-residents-safety-fears> - Earlier this week, the UK government confirmed that the levelling up secretary, Michael Gove, had received a request for the embassy planning application to be “called in” and it was under consideration. The secretary of state has a six-week period to act, after which an inquiry could follow. Speaking in the House of Lords before the council vote, Lord Alton said that after what took place in Manchester, and what happens in China, families were scared and angry and had been ignored. “The deal led to 200 British citizens having the freehold of their homes sold to the Chinese state, over their heads,” said Alton who raised the questions to the secretary of state, including who brokered the deal. The site, which falls within the Tower of London conservation area, has four office buildings and one residential block. It was vacated by the Royal Mint in 1976 and was later sold by the crown estate in the late 1980s. In 2010, it was acquired by Delancey until its purchase by the Chinese government in 2018. The proposed plans included the partial demolition and restoration of Grade II-listed buildings, a cultural exchange building, and an additional £223,853 for CCTV coverage around the site. The Tower Hamlets local council received 51 objection letters from residents, according to the planning application. Councillors raised additional concerns about tourist safety, policing measures and the site’s historical significance, as it is home to a Black Death burial grounds and archaeology from the Royal Navy’s first yard in the late 16th century. Objecting to the application on Thursday, residents expressed concerns about being swept up in potential protests, security concerns, and not being adequately consulted. Sue Hughes, a resident and the chair of Friends of St Katharine Docks, was present at the previous consultation for the site 10 years ago. Hughes, citing security issues, called on councillors to reject the application so that it could be called in by the secretary of state and independently investigated. “That person we believe would be better suited to deal with the very complex security, heritage and political issues that the application raises,” said Hughes. “This site is just not suitable for the use as an embassy.” The Chinese embassy has been approached for comment.
7. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/china-embassy-london-security-risk-tower-hamlets-b1212362.html> - Controversial plans for China’s ‘super embassy’ in central London pose a “significant” security risk, US lawmakers have warned. Senators on the US Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party warned the proposed site in Tower Hamlets risked “interference and surveillance” from Beijing and “risks for sensitive infrastructure like London’s financial services”. The committee, led by Republican John Moolenaar, hinted the plans should be dropped, saying: “We must work to urgently address this issue and work with our allies to protect national security.” China plans to redevelop the five acres of land at Royal Mint Court, close to the Tower of London, into the largest embassy in Europe. But the proposal has sparked a huge backlash from local residents, human rights campaigners, and several prominent politicians, including the Conservatives’ shadow justice secretary, Robert Jenrick. Public hearings led by the Planning Inspectorate over the proposal are currently ongoing, which will make a recommendation on the project’s future before a final decision is made by Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner. Tower Hamlets Council initially refused permission, before ministers intervened, citing security concerns previously raised by the Met Police. Image: The proposed site for the Chinese embassy at Royal Mint Court, London. The scheme would be Europe’s largest embassy. Counter-terror officers at the force had warned that the site was unsuitable for the embassy, as there was not enough space to accommodate the protests it would attract, with the potential for people to spill into the road and bring traffic to a standstill. But Scotland Yard last month backtracked on that assessment, citing a “pedestrian comfort assessment”, which had been commissioned and paid for by China. However, residents opposed to the scheme have continued to raise concerns over the impact of protests against Beijing outside the embassy, amid a demo last week of around 1,000 people. Cllr Peter Golds, a Conservative on Tower Hamlets Council, said: “The demonstration earlier in February resulted in Tower Bridge, East Smithfield, Tower Bridge Approach, Lower Tames Street and other City approaches being closed by order of the police. “Were this application to succeed it is likely that closures on this scale would be a regular occurrence, affecting the economy of the City and visitors to the Tower.” But those concerns were rejected last week by Christopher Katkowski KC, a lawyer speaking on behalf of the embassy, who told the planning inquiry there was “literally no basis” on which the proposed embassy could be refused permission. He said that planning decisions for embassies are required to be “nation-neutral”, meaning that an embassy proposed by one country must be treated the same as any other, regardless of whether one is likely to attract more protests. A date for the inspectorate’s recommendation on the embassy, and a decision by Ms Rayner, has not yet been set.