

Official Chinese Statements

In April 2025 Chinese state media reported that the **Harbin Public Security Bureau** issued a 悬赏通缉 (rewarded wanted) notice on its official channels (Weibo) naming three alleged U.S. cyber agents. The notice identified **Katheryn A. Wilson, Robert J. Snelling, and Stephen W. Johnson** (凯瑟琳·威尔逊, 罗伯特·思内尔, 斯蒂芬·约翰逊) as NSA Tailored Access Operations (TAO) officers who “repeatedly carried out cyber attacks on China’s critical information infrastructure” and were implicated in attacks on the Asian Winter Games (AWG) systems ¹ ² . The Chinese reports stated that the suspects had “participated in network attacks against the AWG event information systems” and even attacked companies such as Huawei ¹ ² . (In Chinese: “美国国家安全局特定入侵行动办公室...3名特工.....参与实施了上述网络攻击活动.....参与对华为公司等企业的网络攻击活动。”) The Harbin notice emphasized it would offer rewards for information leading to their capture and called on the public to assist ³ ¹ .

These announcements were carried by Xinhua and CCTV. For example, a Xinhua dispatch published on China Daily’s site quotes Harbin police saying they “decided to place these three NSA-linked suspects on a wanted list” ⁴ . A CCTV news summary similarly reports the Harbin bureau found that **NSA’s TAO office (“代号S32”)** had orchestrated a network intrusion campaign against the AWG systems and Heilongjiang infrastructure ⁵ ³ . Chinese sources detail that the NSA hackers used front organizations to buy overseas IP addresses and rented servers anonymously to cover their tracks, and even “sent unknown encrypted packets” to activate pre-installed backdoors on Windows devices in Heilongjiang ⁶ . In short, Chinese official statements accuse the NSA of a **coordinated cyber-espionage campaign** against the Harbin 2025 Games.

English-Language Reporting

International media quickly reported China’s claims. Reuters, citing state media, summarized that “China accused the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) of launching ‘advanced’ cyberattacks during the Asian Winter Games” and explicitly named the three alleged operatives ⁷ . The Reuters article confirms the suspects’ names (Wilson, Snelling, Johnson) and notes they were added to a wanted list. It also mentions that Harbin police accused the University of California and Virginia Tech of involvement, though details were unspecified ⁸ ⁹ .

Other outlets provided similar accounts. Al Jazeera (Reuters content) reported that Harbin police accused the NSA of targeting “important industries such as energy, transportation, water conservancy, [and] communications” during the Games, with the intent to “sabotage China’s critical information infrastructure” ¹⁰ ¹¹ . The Nextgov cybersecurity site noted a Chinese technical report claiming some 170,000 cyberattacks on the Games and quoted Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian urging the U.S. “to take a responsible attitude” on cybersecurity ¹² . The Record (Recorded Future) similarly explained that Chinese state media (Xinhua) accused the NSA of buying foreign IPs and renting servers to hide its trail ¹³ .

Major Western news (e.g. Reuters, SCMP, CyberScoop) highlighted the novelty of China naming individual NSA agents and specific technical details. The *South China Morning Post* noted Harbin police even offered cash rewards for tips on the three “NSA agents” and that “cybersecurity experts” cited by Chinese media claimed the attacks used artificial intelligence techniques ¹⁴ ² . The *Cyberscoop* cybersecurity journal emphasized that these allegations were unusually “specific and aggressive” and

noted Foreign Ministry condemnations and US trade tensions as context ¹⁵ ¹⁶ . It reported that Virginia Tech publicly denied any involvement, saying it found “no evidence that these allegations are true” ¹⁷ .

Allegation Details: Individuals, Targets, Timeline

Chinese reports and Western summaries agree on key points of the accusations:

- **Named Suspects:** Katheryn A. Wilson, Robert J. Snelling, and Stephen W. Johnson – identified as NSA/TAO officers. Harbin police allege these three orchestrated the hacks ⁴ ¹⁸ . (Authorities say the suspects have repeatedly attacked Chinese targets, including Huawei ¹ ² .)
- **Targets & Impact:** The alleged attacks focused on the Asian Winter Games’ network and Heilongjiang critical infrastructure. Chinese sources state the NSA attacked AWG systems (registration, arrival/departure management, competition entry platforms) and also launched cyberattacks on energy, transportation, water conservancy, communications, and defense research networks in Heilongjiang ¹¹ ¹⁹ . Xinhua reported that the attackers sought to steal athletes’ personal data from games databases and “to sabotage China’s critical information infrastructure” ¹¹ ²⁰ .
- **Timeline:** The AWG took place Jan 26–Feb 14, 2025 in Harbin. Chinese sources say the NSA hackers stepped up activity around the Games. Xinhua notes the campaign “reached its peak” after the first AWG ice hockey game on Feb 3 ²⁰ . In early April 2025, Chinese cyber teams released a report (NCVERC) claiming tens or hundreds of thousands of attacks had been detected during the Games ²¹ .
- **Methods:** According to state reports, the NSA operatives used advanced tradecraft: they rented overseas servers and purchased IP addresses via front companies to mask their origin, and even pushed “unknown encrypted packets” to activate backdoors in Windows systems in Heilongjiang ²² ²³ . The *Cyberscoop* story adds that technical teams believed the U.S. operators aimed “to undermine normal operations of the Asian Winter Games” by targeting game-critical systems ²⁴ .
- **Universities Implicated:** Chinese claims extend beyond individuals. The Harbin investigation alleged that the University of California and Virginia Tech were “involved” in the network attack (via IP addresses traced to them) ²⁵ ¹ . Chinese state media noted that both institutions have historical ties to NSA cybersecurity programs. (Virginia Tech publicly denied involvement, calling the allegations baseless ¹⁷ .)

Geopolitical Context and Reactions

The accusations come amid escalating U.S.–China tensions. The trade war, sanctions, and mutual cyber-espionage claims have strained relations. Western media note that China’s move is part of a recent pattern of “pointing the finger” back at Washington for cyber intrusions ²⁶ ²⁷ . Reuters reminded readers that the U.S. recently indicted a dozen alleged Chinese hackers for attacking U.S. systems ²⁸ , and Chinese media mention Washington’s long-standing claims of PRC cyber espionage.

China’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian publicly affirmed the Harbin allegations and urged the U.S. “to take a responsible attitude” and stop “groundless smears and attacks on China” ²⁹ . The Chinese Embassy in Washington echoed this, warning the U.S. to halt any cyberattacks and vilifications.

Conversely, U.S. officials have offered no evidence supporting the Chinese claims. The U.S. Embassy in Beijing did not comment, and the NSA issued no immediate response ³⁰. Some independent observers remain skeptical, noting that China typically does not release such granular details. For example, one cyber security news site observed that China “often accuses” the U.S. of hacking but this case is notable for naming specific individuals and techniques ³¹ ³².

In sum, Chinese authorities have publicly blamed NSA operatives for the Harbin Winter Games hack, naming names and detailing methods. These claims have been widely reported by Western media (Reuters, Al Jazeera, Nextgov, SCMP, etc.), but U.S. officials deny or have yet to substantiate them. The episode highlights how cyber-espionage accusations have become intertwined with the broader U.S.–China rivalry ²⁶.

Sources: Chinese state media (Xinhua/CCTV) and Harbin police announcements ⁴ ¹; Western news reports (Reuters, Al Jazeera/Reuters, Nextgov, South China Morning Post, Cyberscoop, Recorded Future) ⁷ ¹² ¹⁸ ¹⁷.

¹ 哈爾濱市公安局懸賞通緝3名美國特工 – 新華澳報

<https://www.waou.com.mo/>

2025/04/16/%E5%93%88%E7%88%BE%E6%BF%B1%E5%B8%82%E5%85%AC%E5%AE%89%E5%B1%80%E6%87%B8%E8%B3%9E%E9%80%9A%E7%B

² ⁹ ¹⁴ ¹⁸ China names 3 alleged NSA spies wanted for US cyberattacks on Asian Winter Games | South China Morning Post

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3306582/china-names-3-alleged-nsa-spies-wanted-us-cyberattacks-asian-winter-games>

³ ⁶ 哈尔滨市公安局悬赏通缉3名美国国家安全局（NSA）特工 - 2025年4月15日, 俄罗斯卫星通讯社

<https://sputniknews.cn/20250415/1064989101.html>

⁴ ²⁵ 哈尔滨市公安局公开通缉3名美国国家安全局（NSA）特工 - 中国日报网

<https://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202504/15/WS67fdb2d1a310e29a7c4a9140.html>

⁵ 悬赏通缉！3名美国特工对亚冬会实施网攻窃密被锁定 - 中国日报网

<https://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202504/15/WS67fdb569a310e29a7c4a914a.html>

⁷ ⁸ ¹¹ ²⁰ ²² ²⁷ ²⁸ ²⁹ ³⁰ ³² China accuses US of launching 'advanced' cyberattacks, names alleged NSA agents | Reuters

<https://www.reuters.com/technology/cybersecurity/chinas-harbin-says-us-launched-advanced-cyber-attacks-winter-games-2025-04-15/>

¹⁰ China accuses US of launching cyberattacks during Asian Winter Games | Cybersecurity News | Al Jazeera

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/4/15/china-accuses-us-of-launching-cyberattacks-during-asian-winter-games>

¹² ²¹ Chinese police say NSA hacked networks of Asian Winter Games - Nextgov/FCW

<https://www.nextgov.com/cybersecurity/2025/04/chinese-police-say-nsa-hacked-networks-asian-winter-games/404569/>

¹³ ³¹ China accuses NSA of launching cyberattacks on Asian Winter Games | The Record from Recorded Future News

<https://therecord.media/china-accuses-nsa-hack-asian-winter-games>

¹⁵ ¹⁶ ¹⁷ ¹⁹ ²³ ²⁴ ²⁶ Chinese law enforcement places NSA operatives on wanted list over alleged cyberattacks | CyberScoop

<https://cyberscoop.com/chinese-law-enforcement-places-nsa-operatives-on-wanted-list-over-alleged-cyberattacks/>