



ACADEMIC SECURITY AND COUNTER EXPLOITATION PROGRAM

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THE OPEN SOURCE MEDIA SUMMARY

February 17, 2021

MICROSOFT: SOLARWINDS ATTACK TOOK MORE THAN 1,000 ENGINEERS TO CREATE

Liam Tung | ZD Net | February 15, 2021

The months-long hacking campaign that affected US government agencies and cybersecurity vendors was "the largest and most sophisticated attack the world has ever seen," Microsoft president Brad Smith has said, and involved a vast number of developers. The attack, disclosed by security firm FireEye and Microsoft in December, may have impacted as many as 18,000 organizations as a result of the Sunburst (or Solorigate) malware planted inside SolarWinds's Orion network management software. "I think from a software engineering perspective, it's probably fair to say that this is the largest and most sophisticated attack the world has ever seen," Smith told CBSNews' 60 Minutes. Microsoft, which was also breached by the bad Orion update, assigned 500 engineers to investigate the attack said Smith, but the (most likely Russia-backed) team behind the attack had more than double the engineering resources. "When we analyzed everything that we saw at Microsoft, we asked ourselves how many engineers have probably worked on these attacks. And the answer we came to was, well, certainly more than 1,000," said Smith.

Read the full article [here](#).

CHINESE SPYING FEARS REVIVED BY UNIVERSITIES SECURITY PROBE

University World News | February 14, 2021

An inquiry into national security risks facing Australia's universities has revived fears of Chinese interference and espionage, as well as concerns of an overreaction by Canberra that could impact research and collaboration across borders, writes John Power for the South China Morning Post. Australia's Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security has been receiving submissions from security agencies, universities, academics and other stakeholders as part of an ongoing probe into foreign interference in higher education. The inquiry, which is due to report its findings in July, has highlighted tensions between national security considerations and academic freedom within Australia's tertiary education sector, which relies heavily on exchanges with China. In its submission to the inquiry, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation said it was aware of cyber-attacks aimed at acquiring intellectual property and of academics being threatened and intimidated by actors looking to pass on their sensitive research to a foreign country.

Read the full article [here](#).



ACADEMIC SECURITY AND COUNTER EXPLOITATION PROGRAM

PENTAGON LAUNCHES NEW TASK FORCE TO EXAMINE CHINA THREAT

Lara Seligman | Politico | February 10, 2021

President Joe Biden announced the establishment of a China task force during his first presidential visit to the Pentagon on Wednesday, signaling his intent to make countering Beijing's rise a top priority for the military. Biden made the announcement at the Pentagon alongside Vice President Kamala Harris and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. The move underscored the message that the administration is prepared to counter China on the military front, after some former officials expressed concern that Beijing is taking advantage of the White House's deliberate approach to Asia policy. "The task force will work quickly, drawing on civilian and military experts across the department to provide within the next few months the recommendations to Secretary Austin on key priorities and decision points so that we can chart a strong path forward on China-related matters," Biden said.

Read the full article [here](#).

AS LOCKDOWNS MOW DOWN OVEREXTENDED U.S. UNIVERSITIES, CHINA STANDS READY WITH A CHECKBOOK

Teresa R. Manning | The Federalist | February 8, 2021

Late this January, the University of Pennsylvania's president, Amy Gutman, got a second letter from Congress about China's million-dollar donations there. The campus is home to the Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement, or "the Biden Center." It was launched in 2017, after which Chinese gifts more than tripled — from \$21 million over 36 months before 2017 to more than \$72 million during a similar time-frame after. Signed by Jim Jordan, James Comer, and Virginia Foxx of the House Judiciary, Oversight and Education committees, the letter explained: In light of your university's close relationship with the Biden family, and recent revelations regarding their potentially illicit ties to foreign adversaries including China, we request an immediate response to this inquiry. The letter requests all records and information regarding the school's China contacts, including those in the custody of President Biden and of Anthony Blinken, his secretary of state and former managing director of the center.

Read the full article [here](#).

HUAWEI FILES U.S. LAWSUIT DISPUTING THAT IT IS A SECURITY THREAT

Dan Strumpf | The Wall Street Journal | February 10, 2021

China's Huawei Technologies Co. filed a lawsuit in the U.S. disputing its designation as a national security threat by the Federal Communications Commission, stepping up legal challenges in the country despite a change of administration in Washington. The lawsuit filed Monday in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit asked for a review of an FCC ruling last year that found the company poses a national security threat and blocked American telecommunications operators from accessing a multibillion-dollar fund to buy Huawei-made telecom gear. The complaint is Huawei's latest challenge to the U.S.'s numerous actions targeting it over the past several years. Former President Donald Trump's administration blocked the company from accessing American technology and sought to persuade allies that Huawei's telecom gear presented national security risks. Huawei's lawsuit said the FCC's ruling in December exceeded its authority and was "arbitrary, capricious, and an abuse of discretion, and not supported by substantial evidence."

Read the full article [here](#).



HOW BIDEN IS ALLOWING CHINESE GOVT. TO QUIETLY CREEP ONTO U.S. COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Bill Gertz | The Washington Times | February 11, 2021

The Department of Homeland Security has dropped plans for a federal rule that would have required American schools and universities to disclose agreements with Chinese government-funded Confucius Institutes on their campuses. A Federal Register notice said the rule, first proposed Dec. 31 at the end of the Trump administration, was withdrawn Jan. 26 without comment. Confucius Institutes and Confucius Schools operate as education centers that ostensibly teach Chinese culture and language. Federal authorities, however, say the institutes are stalking horses for covert Chinese government influence efforts. Sen. Marco Rubio, Florida Republican, said the institutes engage in covert influence operations designed to sway American public opinion and teach half-truths about China. Under pressure from the Trump administration, scores of the institutes were closed.

Read the full article [here](#).

WASTED TALENTS? CHINA'S HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS EXPERIENCED THROUGH ITS VISITING SCHOLARS ABROAD

Joshua S. McKeown | Journal of Contemporary China | February 9, 2021

China's post-1978 modernization plans include an internationally competitive higher education system. Central to this effort are researchers and professors capable of advancing China's technological capabilities and educating its ambitious, globally-minded youth. National funding for scholars going abroad was designed to infuse the nation with sophisticated knowledge and to improve university quality. Research on 131 Chinese scholars who spent significant time abroad, mostly in the United States, shows little evidence that these funded experiences abroad were used deliberately to improve Chinese universities. Results show that policies supporting scholarly exchange have not produced successful internationalization efforts on Chinese campuses. Scholars in STEM fields and those receiving national funding indicated significantly higher research focus and productivity, however did not indicate putting it to use at their home institutions.

Read the full article [here](#).

AMERICA'S SPY-BUSTERS OUT SECRET-STEALING CHINESE 'GRAD STUDENTS' UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

Richard Bernstein | The Center Square | February 11, 2021

The FBI last month arrested Gang Chen, a well-known MIT nanotechnologist, and charged the China-born naturalized American with concealing close and lucrative connections to China's scientific and technological establishment on his applications for federal research grants. Chen, who has pleaded not guilty and is supported by MIT, is not the only prominent academic figure to be arrested and charged with failing to disclose connections to Chinese research institutes. At least half a dozen have been arrested in the last year or so. They include Charles Lieber, the chair of the Harvard University Chemistry Department, who is accused of concealing his participation in an ambitious, state-sponsored Chinese effort to recruit top scientists and engineers from around the world to work in China. The prosecutions illustrate growing American alarm about Chinese technology theft, an important part of China's effort to supplant the United States both as the dominant military power in Asia and as the world's leader in science and technology. Despite the publicity surrounding the American academics' arrests, U.S. officials and analysts say a particular concern is Chinese graduate school researchers with advanced backgrounds.

Read the full article [here](#).



UTAH LAWMAKER WANTS TO CLOSE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES IN UTAH, CITING ESPIONAGE CONCERNS

Katie McKellar | Deseret News | February 11, 2021

A resolution is making its way through the Utah Legislature to encourage closure of all Confucius institutes on university campuses due to national concerns over China's efforts to conduct espionage through those Chinese language learning centers. The House Government Operations Committee voted unanimously on Wednesday to advance HJR8, forwarding it to the full Utah House for consideration. "I really think it's essential for students on Utah's campuses to have access to language and cultural offerings free from the manipulation of the Chinese Communist Party and its proxies," the resolution's sponsor, Rep. Candice Pierucci, R-Herriman, told the committee. Since 2004, Confucius institutes have been established at universities in the U.S. to offer Mandarin language and Chinese cultural classes. But in recent years, the institutes have garnered national concerns and warnings from the FBI that China aimed to conduct "espionage" through them.

Read the full article [here](#).

SCHOLARS CALL FOR BIDEN TO REINSTATE TRANSPARENCY FOR CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES

National Association of Scholars | February 11, 2021

President Biden has quietly withdrawn a Trump Administration policy proposal that would have required all colleges and K-12 schools to disclose any contracts, partnerships, or financial transactions from Confucius Institutes or Confucius Classrooms. The rule, "Establishing Requirement for Student and Exchange Visitor Program Certified Schools to Disclose Agreements with Confucius Institutes and Classrooms," put forward by the Department of Homeland Security, would have made great strides for transparency in education and national security. "Already President Biden has shown his willingness to tolerate Chinese government propaganda programs in American colleges and universities," said National Association of Scholars (NAS) president Peter W. Wood. "By withdrawing basic transparency requirements, Biden is permitting American institutions to engage in secret, lucrative partnerships with the Chinese government. The American people deserve to know when foreign governments attempt to purchase influence over our colleges and universities."

Read the full article [here](#).

AUTHORITARIAN INTERFERENCE TRACKER

Alliance for Securing Democracy | The German Marshall Fund of the United States

The Authoritarian Interference Tracker catalogues the Russian and Chinese governments' activities to undermine democracy in more than 40 transatlantic countries since 2000 using five tools: information manipulation, cyber operations, malign finance, civil society subversion, and economic coercion. The Tracker shines a light on the tactics and trends that define the Russian and Chinese governments' interference efforts, and highlights the interconnectivity between different parts of the asymmetric toolkit. See below for definitions of these tools and an explanation of the methodology for including cases in the Tracker. Efforts by the Russian and Chinese governments to undermine democracy are not restricted to the transatlantic community. For example, China is particularly active in interfering in democracies in the Asia-Pacific region. Forthcoming iterations of the Tracker will expand to regions beyond North America and Europe, as well as add instances of authoritarian interference by other regimes that adopt similar tactics to undermine democracies.

Read the full article [here](#).



WHAT DOES CHINA'S DUAL CIRCULATION POLICY MEAN?

Futao Huang | University World News | February 13, 2021

The national five-year plan is the most important guide of policy direction for China's short-term economic, political, cultural and social development. Against a background of higher education enrolment surpassing 50% of the university age cohort in 2019 and a growing number of Chinese universities achieving world-class status as institutions or for certain disciplines, the 14th Five-Year Plan for 2021-25 and Economic Goals for 2035 (hereafter, the Plan) was reviewed and approved in the 19th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in late October 2020. It consists of two policy blueprints. One is the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), which is the first five-year period in which China outlines its aims to become a broadly prosperous society. The other is the 2035 vision (2021-35), which creates a mid-term vision for how China can achieve 'socialist modernisation'. Although the final and full plan still has to be ratified by the National People's Congress in March 2021, the guidelines and key points are unlikely to be changed. So, what, together, do these suggest?

Read the full article [here](#).

SOLARWINDS: HOW RUSSIAN SPIES HACKED THE JUSTICE, STATE, TREASURY, ENERGY AND COMMERCE DEPARTMENTS

Bill Whitaker | CBS News | February 14, 2021

President Biden inherited a lot of intractable problems, but perhaps none is as disruptive as the cyber war between the United States and Russia simmering largely under the radar. Last March, with the coronavirus spreading uncontrollably across the United States, Russian cyber soldiers released their own contagion by sabotaging a tiny piece of computer code buried in a popular piece of software called "SolarWinds." The hidden virus spread to 18,000 government and private computer networks by way of one of those software updates we all take for granted. The attack was unprecedented in audacity and scope. Russian spies went rummaging through the digital files of the U.S. departments of Justice, State, Treasury, Energy, and Commerce and for nine months had unfettered access to top-level communications, court documents, even nuclear secrets. And by all accounts, it's still going on.

Read the full article [here](#).

US GOVERNMENT TO STOP BUYING CHINESE-MADE DRONES

John Xie | VOA | February 16, 2021

In its latest move to address national security threats posed by Chinese-made drones, the U.S. federal government's purchasing agency no longer will purchase drones from Chinese manufacturers. Citing the inherent threat in using Chinese-made drones, the General Services Administration (GSA) said in a January 12 blog post that it will remove all drones from multiple award schedule contracts, except those drones approved by a Department of Defense (DoD) Defense Innovation Unit program for its small unmanned aircraft systems (sUAS). China currently dominates the drone-manufacturing market. The world's largest drone maker, the Shenzhen-based SZ Dà-Jiāng Innovations Science and Technology Co., Ltd., or DJI, has a 76.8% share of the U.S. market, according to the German drone research organization Droneii. The world's second-largest drone company also is Chinese, according to Droneii. Yuneec International, based in Suzhou, China, produces more than 1 million drones annually, with operations around the world, including the U.S., according to its website.

Read the full article [here](#).



FRANCE JUST SUFFERED A SOLARWINDS-STYLE CYBERATTACK

Lucas Ropek | Gizmodo | February 15, 2021

As the U.S. continues to chart the damage from the sweeping “SolarWinds” hack that targeted government and industry alike, France has announced that it too has suffered a large supply chain cyberattack. The news comes via a recently released technical report published by the Agence Nationale de la sécurité des systèmes d’information—or simply ANSSI—the French government’s chief cybersecurity agency. Like the U.S., French authorities have implied that Russia is probably involved. According to ANSSI, a sophisticated hacker group has successfully penetrated the Centreon Systems products, a French IT firm specializing in network and system monitoring that is used by many French government agencies, as well as some of the nation’s biggest companies (Air France, among others). Centreon’s client page shows that it partners with the French Department of Justice, Ecole Polytechnique, and regional public agencies, as well as some of the nation’s largest agri-food production firms.

Read the full article [here](#).

SPY CHIEF SAYS CHINA IS BENT ON STEALING CANADIAN SECRETS, SILENCING CRITICS

Yahoo | February 9, 2021

The head of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service warns that China is undermining Canada through its efforts to steal valuable technology and silence critics of Beijing's policies. In a speech sponsored by the Centre for International Governance Innovation today, CSIS director David Vigneault says all sectors of Canadian society must work together to fend off these threats. Vigneault says ill-intentioned countries will aim to "take advantage" of Canada as it works to get back on its economic feet once the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. Federal officials openly say that China has the capacity to conduct foreign interference activities in Canada by applying pressure and influence in a clandestine and deceptive way to pursue its strategic objectives. They say China and certain other foreign nations routinely threaten and intimidate individuals around the world through various state entities and non-state proxies.

Read the full article [here](#).

ALMOST 200 ACADEMICS FROM MORE THAN A DOZEN BRITISH UNIVERSITIES COULD FACE JAIL AMID PROBE OVER FEARS THEY INADVERTENTLY HELPED CHINA DEVELOP WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

James Robinson, Ian Birrell, and Glen Owen | Daily Mail | February 8, 2021

A group of almost 200 British academics from more than a dozen UK universities could face jail, as officials probe whether they may have unwittingly helped the Chinese government build weapons of mass destruction. Officials are investigating the academics amid suspicion they may have breached laws designed to protect national security and human rights. The academics, who are from 20 UK universities, including some of the most prestigious in the country, are suspected of breaching the Export Control Order 2008. The law carries a maximum 10 year prison sentence for those who breach it. It is intended to prevent intellectual property in highly sensitive fields - including military and security - from being sent to hostile states. Pioneering technology on aircraft, missile design and cyberweapons may have been sent to China, according to the Times.

Read the full article [here](#).



CHINESE SPYING FEARS REVIVED BY SECURITY PROBE INTO AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES

John Power | South China Morning Post | February 11, 2021

An inquiry into national security risks facing Australia's universities has revived fears of Chinese interference and espionage, as well as concerns of an overreaction by Canberra that could impact research and collaboration across borders. Australia's Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security has been receiving submissions from security agencies, universities, academics and other stakeholders as part of an ongoing probe into foreign interference in higher education. The inquiry, which is due to report its findings in July, has highlighted tensions between national security considerations and academic freedom within Australia's tertiary education sector, which relies heavily on exchanges with China. In its submission to the inquiry, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation said it was aware of cyberattacks aimed at acquiring intellectual property and of academics being threatened and intimidated by actors looking to pass on their sensitive research to a foreign country.

Read the full article [here](#).

WITH 200 UK ACADEMICS TO BE PROBED OVER CHINA LINKS... WHY WE HAVE ONLY OURSELVES TO BLAME, WRITES EDWARD LUCAS

Edward Lucas | Daily Mail | February 8, 2021

Chinese spies have been looting British universities for years. That is one scandal. The other – even more outrageous – is that we are only now waking up to it. The fact that almost 200 leading UK academics are being investigated for their unwitting connections to Chinese weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programmes is scarcely surprising. As the think-tank Civitas details in its new report, 20 British universities have relationships with 29 military-linked Chinese universities and nine military-linked firms. Indeed, China's interest in our technology has long been overt. In October 2015, just two years after he became president, Xi Jinping made a point of visiting the National Graphene Institute at Manchester University during his trip to Britain. Graphene is a great British discovery, the world's first 'super-material'. It is one million times thinner than a single human hair, 200 times stronger than steel and more conductive than copper.

Read the full article [here](#).

BIDEN ANNOUNCES NEW PENTAGON-RUN CHINA TASK FORCE

Aaron Mehta | Defense News | February 11, 2021

President Joe Biden on Wednesday announced at the Pentagon a review of how the military is postured to deter China in the Pacific region. Biden, who was joined by Vice President Kamala Harris as he made his first visit to the department since taking office, said the review will help "chart a strong path forward on China-related matters." "It will require a whole-of-government efforts, bipartisan cooperation in Congress, and strong alliances and partners," Biden said. "That is how we will meet the China challenge and ensure the American people win the competition of the future." The effort, described by the department as a "sprint," is aimed at delivering its findings to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin within four months; however, the report is not expected to include a public-facing document. It will be made up of "up to" 15 civilian and uniformed officials, and will be led by Ely Ratner, a former deputy national security adviser to Biden who joined the department as Austin's special assistant on China. Per a department fact sheet, the authors will take a deep dive into the department's strategy; operational concepts; technology and force structure; force posture and force management; intelligence; alliances and partnerships; and military relations with China.

Read the full article [here](#).



CALL BETWEEN BIDEN AND CHINA'S XI PORTENDS ROCKY ROAD IN POST-TRUMP ERA

Gerry Shih | The Washington Post | February 11, 2021

After the first call between President Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping, the U.S. and Chinese governments released accounts that diverged sharply in tone and focus. But both sides signaled they would not yield on the thorny issues of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Xinjiang, foreshadowing the areas that could generate protracted tensions in the post-Trump era. In the call Wednesday evening U.S. time, Xi spoke in conciliatory tones about the importance of a healthy bilateral relationship, according to the Chinese state broadcaster. But Xi pointedly warned Biden to “act prudently” in regard to the three regions, where China’s forceful policies have drawn U.S. condemnation. Biden took a harder tack, telling Xi he had “fundamental concerns about Beijing’s coercive and unfair economic practices, crackdown in Hong Kong, human rights abuses in Xinjiang, and increasingly assertive actions in the region, including toward Taiwan,” according to the White House.

Read the full article [here](#).

GOP SLAMS BIDEN REVERSAL OF TRUMP-ERA RULE TARGETING CHINESE 'PROPAGANDA' ON CAMPUSES

Brendan Cole | Newsweek | February 10, 2021

Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas has joined the list of Republicans condemning the Biden administration for withdrawing a proposed rule that required campuses to disclose links to Chinese cultural programs accused of promoting propaganda. The Confucius Institute U.S. Center facilitates Chinese language and cultural courses in around 500 K-12 schools and 65 colleges across the country. China hawks in the U.S. have long accused the programs of being a tool of the Chinese Communist Party, pointing to the institute's links to the Hanban agency, which is affiliated with Beijing's Ministry of Education. On December 31, 2020, the Trump administration submitted a proposed rule to the Department of Homeland Security that would have required American educational establishments to disclose links with Confucius Institutes. The rule would also apply to other cultural institutes or student groups funded directly or indirectly by China.

Read the full article [here](#).

WHY ARE OUR UNIVERSITIES SO DESPERATE TO WORK FOR CHINA'S DICTATORS? MI6 FEARS OVER UK COLLEGES LINKS TO BEIJING AS AT LEAST A DOZEN INSTITUTIONS ARE PROBED BY SPOOKS

Ian Birrell and Glen Owen | Daily Mail | February 6, 2021

More than a dozen British universities are under investigation over commercial relationships with the Chinese government that might break laws designed to protect national security and human rights, The Mail on Sunday can reveal. The institutions – which include some of the most prestigious universities in the country – could be hit by ‘enforcement notices’ imposed by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs over alleged breaches of export controls in their dealings with Beijing. It is understood the security services fear some academics have been sharing pioneering British technology with China that could be facilitating the dictatorial Communist government’s repression of minorities and dissidents. The MoS has agreed not to identify the universities at the centre of the inquiry on the grounds of national security. The security service investigation, led by MI6 officers seconded to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, was launched amid growing concern in Downing Street that academics were engaged in a ‘new gold rush’ to strike deals with the Chinese over cutting-edge scientific breakthroughs.

Read the full article [here](#).



HMRC ACCUSES BRITISH UNIVERSITIES OF INADVERTENTLY AIDING CHINESE MILITARY

Matt Dathan and Billy Kenber | The Times | February 8, 2021

More than a dozen universities may be inadvertently assisting the Chinese military by sharing research in sensitive areas ranging from hypersonic technology to graphene, a think tank claims. Civitas alleges that 20 British universities have dealings with 29 Chinese universities and nine companies that have military links, including with Chinese weapons conglomerates. The development comes as HM Revenue and Customs is preparing to inform up to 200 British academics that they are being investigated for potential breach of export control rules by sharing highly sensitive information that could help China develop weapons of mass destruction.

Read the full article [here](#).

THE TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

The Academic Security and Counter Exploitation Program is coordinated by The Texas A&M University System Research Security Office as a service to the academic community.

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