THE OPEN SOURCE MEDIA SUMMARY

ASCE
ACADEMIC SECURITY AND COUNTER EXPLOITATION PROGRAM

https://asce.tamus.edu

March 22, 2023

CHINA ROLLS OUT 'RADICAL' CHANGE TO ITS RESEARCH ENTERPRISE

Dennis Normile | Science | March 15, 2023

Facing tighter restrictions on access to key technologies and an increasingly competitive global scientific landscape, China has launched a major shake-up of its research organizations in pursuit of "self-reliance" in science and technology. The National People's Congress last week approved a plan that will refocus China's Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) on key efforts to meet top national priorities. It also creates a powerful Central Science and Technology Commission intended to enforce consistent policies across government agencies—and hold them accountable for achieving their objectives. Many details have yet to be released, but the revamp represents "the most radical change to [China's] innovation system since the end of the Mao era," says Richard Suttmeier, a political scientist now retired from the University of Oregon. The goal, says Denis Simon, a China science policy expert at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, is to get China "producing usable, desirable, needed technology that can be put into application sooner rather than later." But the plan does not slight basic research, which has enjoyed a surge in funding. In part, the moves represent a response to recent decisions by the United States to restrict sales of advanced computer chips and semiconductor manufacturing equipment to China. The United States is pushing Japan and the Netherlands to adopt similar bans.

Read the full article here.

A SPY WANTS TO CONNECT WITH YOU ON LINKEDIN

Jennifer Conrad and Matt Burgess | Wired | March 15, 2023

There is nothing immediately suspicious about Camille Lons' LinkedIn page. The politics and security researcher's profile photo is of her giving a talk. Her professional network is made up of almost 400 people; she has a detailed career history and biography. Lons has also shared a link to a recent podcast appearance—"always enjoying these conversations"—and liked posts from diplomats across the Middle East. So when Lons got in touch with freelance journalist Anahita Saymidinova last fall, her offer of work appeared genuine. They swapped messages on LinkedIn before Lons asked to share more details of a project she was working on via email. "I just shoot an email to your inbox," she wrote. What Saymidinova didn't know at the time was that the person messaging her wasn't Lons at all. Saymidinova, who does work for Iran International, a Persian-language news outlet that has been harassed and threatened by Iranian government officials, was being targeted by a state-backed actor. The account was an imposter that researchers have since linked to Iranian hacking group Charming Kitten.

Read the full article here.

ASCE
ACADEMIC SECURITY AND COUNTER EXPLOITATION PROGRAM

UK MINISTERS REVIEWING ALL R&D LINKS WITH CHINA, FREEMAN SAYS

Robin Bisson | Research Professional News | March 9, 2023

Science minister promises to look at organisations "we know to be aggressive" in acquiring IP. The UK government is reviewing all its research and innovation links with China, according to science minister George Freeman. Speaking in the House of Commons on 8 March, Freeman said he had "literally just received" a detailed assessment of such links from the national funding agency UK Research and Innovation. Freeman said that along with security minister Tom Tugendhat, he would use the assessment to look at organisations that "we know to be aggressive in their international acquisition of intellectual property". The news comes against a backdrop of increasing global concerns over research security, including the threat of intellectual property theft and use of research findings for military purposes. A similar review of R&D links with Russia last year preceded science sanctions against state-backed collaborations between UK and Russia. Freeman said the UK was "toughening up our regime" on research security, highlighting the establishment in 2022 of a research collaboration advice team in the Cabinet Office designed to help researchers who engage in international collaboration.

Read the full article here.

CHINA INITIATIVE'S SHADOW LOOMS LARGE FOR US SCIENTISTS

Natasha Gilbert | Nature | February 24, 2023

One year after the US government ended its controversial China Initiative, scientists of Chinese heritage say that they are still being targeted unfairly and fear for their safety.The initiative — which was aimed at safeguarding US laboratories and businesses from espionage — created the perception of bias against researchers of Chinese descent, said assistant attorney-general Matthew Olsen when shutting it down in February 2022, although he denied that the programme had actually used racial profiling. While it was active, more than 150 people were criminally charged for actions such as failing to disclose funding or partnerships with institutions in China, according to an analysis by MIT Technology Review. Nearly 90% of them were of Chinese heritage. Many of the charges brought by the US Department of Justice (DoJ) after the initiative's launch in 2018 were eventually dropped or dismissed, and some prosecutions ended in acquittal.

Read the full article here.

1,100 SCIENTISTS AND STUDENTS BARRED FROM UK AMID CHINA CRACKDOWN

Hannah Devlin | The Guardian | March 15, 2023

More than 1,000 scientists and postgraduate students were barred from working in the UK last year on national security grounds, amid a major government crackdown on research collaborations with China. Figures obtained by the Guardian reveal that a record 1,104 scientists and postgraduate students were rejected by Foreign Office vetting in 2022, up from 128 in 2020 and just 13 in 2016. The sharp increase follows a hardening of the government's stance on scientific ties with China, with warnings from MI5 of a growing espionage threat, major research centres being quietly shut down and accusations by a government minister that China's leading genomics company had regularly sought to hack into the NHS's genetic database. Geopolitical tensions stepped up further this week, as the US, Australia and the UK announced a multi-decade, multibillion-dollar deal aimed at countering China's military expansion in the Indo-Pacific. China said the Aukus plan to build a combined fleet of elite nuclear-powered submarines was "a path of error and danger".

Read the full article here.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN DECLINE IN 22 COUNTRIES WORLDWIDE

Nathan M. Greenfield | University World News | March 16, 2023

Over the past decade, academic freedom has declined in more than 22 countries representing more than half of the world's population, four billion people, says the Academic Freedom Index: Update 2023 (AFI), a new study, produced by researchers at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Institute of Political Science (FAUIPS, Erlangen-Nuremberg), Germany, and the V-Dem Institute in Gothenburg, Sweden. Among these countries are India, China, Mexico, Britain and the United States. Only 0.7% of the world's population live in the five small countries in which academic freedom has increased. In countries such as Czechia (also known as the Czech Republic), Luxembourg, Sweden, Peru, Portugal and Canada, academic freedom is robust. For many of the remaining 152 countries, the AFI shows, academic freedom is stagnant at a low level. "Our data provides the first comprehensive overview of academic freedom worldwide, allowing us to compare countries and investigate developments over time," says Dr Lars Pelke, a postdoctoral researcher at FAUIPS who is part of the AFI project. "We use a 10-year window to compare the state of academic freedom globally for several reasons." First, we are interested in the longer-term developments in addition to short-term changes in single countries. Second, year-to-year comparisons would mask developments that need time," says Pelke.

Read the full article here.

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN US EXPORT CONTROL POLICY

John Krige and Mario Daniels | Issues in Science and Technology | Winter 2023

The question of instituting new export controls, usually only of interest to specialists, has taken center stage in the current tensions between the United States and China. The Biden administration's new high-technology export controls deliberately blur the boundaries between concerns over military confrontation and economic competition. These rules restrict China's ability to obtain advanced computer chips to promote the dual objectives of securing or enhancing US technological leadership while also making it more difficult for China to use artificial intelligence (AI) and high-performance computers for military purposes. The administration's technology denial strategy is complemented by the CHIPS and Science Act, which aims to strengthen the US semiconductor industry and build a domestic science and technology base capable of translating federally funded research into commercial applications. The Biden administration's technological protectionism of the semiconductor industry exemplifies a strategy of "economic security": a dual-use industrial policy, first embraced in the Clinton era, that understands domination in the civilian market and global military leadership as two sides of the same coin.

Read the full article here.

WAVE OF STEALTHY CHINA CYBERATTACKS HITS U.S., PRIVATE NETWORKS, GOOGLE SAYS

Robert McMillan and Dustin Volz | The Wall Street Journal | March 16, 2023

State-sponsored hackers from China have developed techniques that evade common cybersecurity tools and enable them to burrow into government and business networks and spy on victims for years without detection, researchers with Alphabet Inc.'s Google found. Over the past year, analysts at Google's Mandiant division have discovered hacks of systems that aren't typically the targets of cyber espionage. Instead of infiltrating systems behind the corporate firewall, they are compromising devices on the edge of the network—sometimes firewalls themselves—and targeting software built by companies such as VMware Inc. or Citrix Systems Inc. These products run on computers that don't typically include antivirus or endpoint detection software.

Read the full article here.

THE ENDLESS FRONTIER: U.S. SCIENCE AND NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL POLICY (PART 1)

Steve Blank | Berkeley Blog | University of California, Berkeley | January 14, 2013

The U.S. has spent the last 70 years making massive investments in basic and applied research. Government funding of research started in World War II driven by the needs of the military for weapon systems to defeat Germany and Japan. Post WWII the responsibility for investing in research split between agencies focused on weapons development and space exploration (being completely customer-driven) and other agencies charted to fund basic and applied research in science and medicine (being driven by peer-review.) The irony is that while the U.S. government has had a robust national science and technology policy, it lacks a national industrial policy — leaving that to private capital. This approach was successful when U.S. industry was aligned with manufacturing in the U.S., but became much less so in the last decade when the bottom-line drove industries offshore. In lieu of the U.S. government's role in setting investment policy, venture capital has set the direction for what new industries attract capital. This series of blog posts is my attempt to understand how science and technology policy in the U.S. began, where the money goes and how it has affected innovation and entrepreneurship.

Read the full article here.

CHINA-BACKED ESPIONAGE IS GETTING HARDER TO SPOT, RESEARCHERS SAY

Sam Sabin | Axios | March 17, 2023

Suspected China-linked hacking groups are continuing to build on a new tactic targeting internet-facing security tools as a way of stealthily breaking into some of the most data-rich organizations, researchers at Google-owned Mandiant warn. Driving the news: In a report Thursday, researchers said they've uncovered a new bug targeting software security company Fortinet, which makes firewalls, antivirus programs and similar tools. The Wall Street Journal first reported on the new bugs. The new report is the fifth that Mandiant has released in two years in which suspected China-affiliated hackers have targeted internet-facing security tools. Other affected product-makers include SonicWall, VMware and Citrix. Charles Carmakal, chief technology officer at Mandiant, told the WSJ it's likely that "the problem is a lot bigger than we know today." What they're saying: "Given how incredibly difficult they are to find, most organizations cannot identify them on their own," Carmakal said in a statement to Axios.

Read the full article here.

TIKTOK HAS YOUR DATA EVEN IF YOU'VE NEVER USED THE APP: REPORT

Aaron Katersky | ABC News | March 16, 2023

A ban on TikTok in the United States or a sale of the app by its Chinese owner, ByteDance, will not resolve national security concerns or fears TikTok could be used to siphon Americans' data, according to a new cybersecurity report obtained by ABC News. The report, from the cybersecurity company Feroot, said the app still has your data even if you've never used TikTok. And it's collecting and transferring that data whether or not the app is deleted, according to the report. "TikTok can be present on a website in pretty much any sector in the form of TikTok pixels/trackers," the report said. "In many cases, the pixels/trackers immediately start executing and have little to nothing to do with the immediate business of the website owner." Webpages associated with everything from airlines and e-commerce sites to technology companies and state and federal governments are riddled with TikTok's trackers called pixels, which are part of the code that loads into your browser from various websites, according to Feroot.

Read the full article here.

UK GOVERNMENT BANS TIKTOK | ASD'S LINDSAY GORMAN ON BBC WORLD NEWS

The German Marshall Fund of the United States | BBC World News | March 17, 2023

Lindsay Gorman, senior fellow for emerging technologies at the Alliance for Securing Democracy at GMF, joined BBC World News on Thursday, March 16, 2023 to discuss the United Kingdom's decision to ban TikTok on government devices. The UK ban follows similar ones in the United States and European Union.

Read the full article here.