

SDU SAFE guide regarding international partners who require special consideration



INTRODUCTION

The URIS guidelines recommend that universities be aware of the risks associated with collaborating with international partners in relation to espionage and unwanted knowledge transfer. [URIS-guidelines](#) do not specify a list of countries or specific partners from which there is a risk of espionage or unwanted knowledge transfer, and there is no official positive or negative list of specific partners.

Danish Security and Intelligence Service assesses in "[Vurdering af spionagetruslen mod Danmark, Færøerne og Grønland](#)" from 2023 that China, Russia and Iran as potential countries¹, which may pose a risk of "unwanted knowledge transfer". Global or national geopolitical changes may also influence whether Danish universities should collaborate with specific institutions or countries.

CONTENT

SDU SAFE has prepared this guide² to help SDU researchers and employees make an initial assessment of which partners³:

- SDU SAFE does not recommend collaboration with.
- Employees should seek advice from SDU SAFE in relation to.
- Does not entail further action.

In general, special attention should be paid if the collaboration involves "critical research"⁴ or defence technologies (defence/NATO-funded). SDU SAFE is aware that there may be grey areas in these contexts, such as:

- Ongoing projects involving "critical research" with partners from URIS countries.
- Unclear whether it is "critical research," including, for example, robot or AI technologies for use in the green transition, which only in some instances is covered by "critical research."
- EU-funded projects involving "critical research" that have been in development for several years and include partners from URIS countries.
- Varying SDU involvement or access to international projects involving "critical research" and including partners from URIS countries.
- Exchange of students who, during their stay, may encounter *critical research* at SDU.
- Etc.

The head of department must be informed and has an obligation to assess the risk of "un-wanted knowledge transfer" when entering cooperation with institutions from URIS countries, including whether it is on an equal footing. SDU SAFE is happy to provide advice on the risk of 'unintended knowledge transfer'. It is recommended that this guide does not lead to SDU staff failing to remain vigilant regarding the risk of unintended knowledge transfer to other countries or partners.

SDU RIO must be informed of cooperation agreements at contracts@sdu.dk if the cooperation includes agreements on research collaboration, agreements on commissioned research, Material Transfer Agreements (MTA) or Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDA).⁵

¹ The URIS project group at SDU has decided that Belarus, Iran, China, and Russia are "URIS countries" at SDU. However, partners requiring special consideration may also come from other countries.

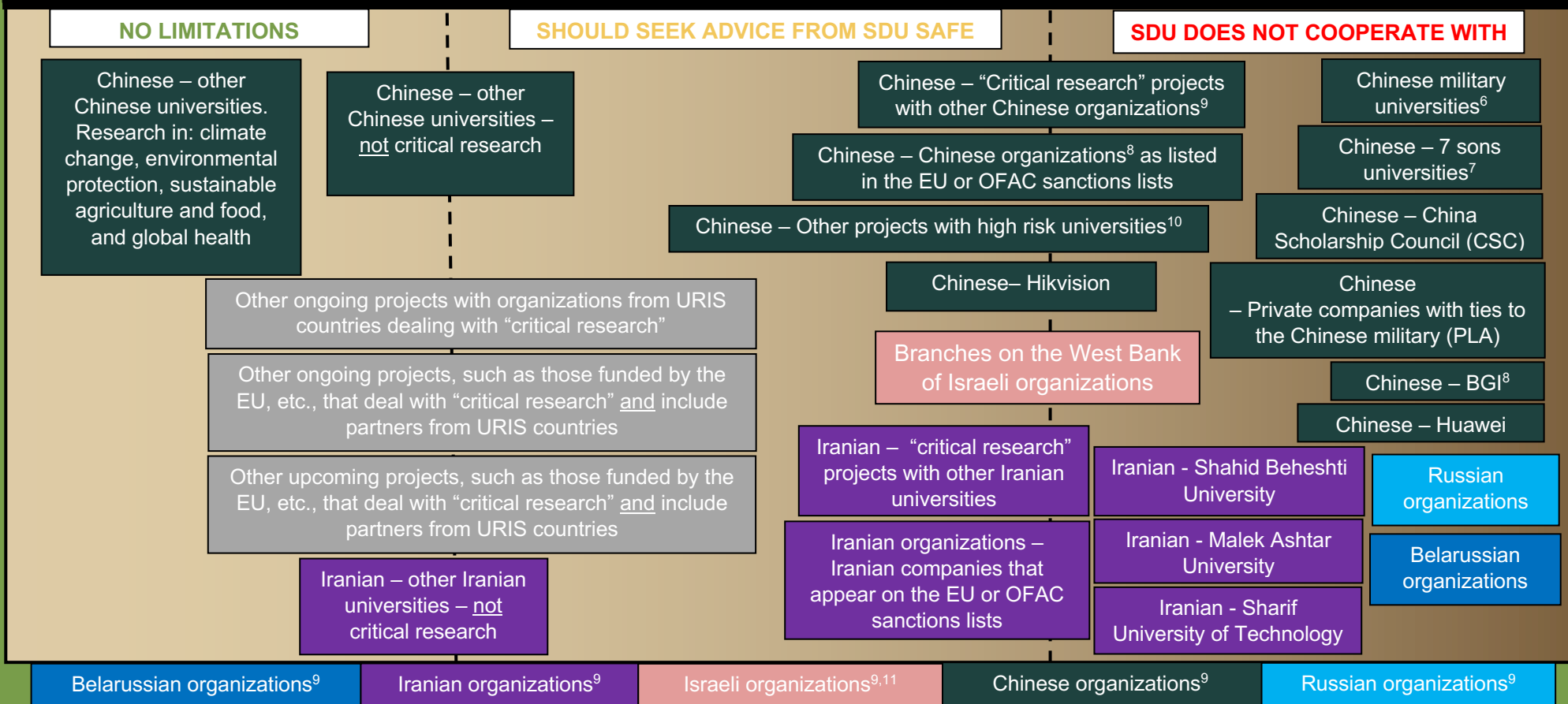
² The guide is based on Danish universities' approach to the area, includes OFAC's and the EU's sanctions lists, and takes into account the practices of other Danish universities in this area, including AAU, AU, DTU, and KU.

³ Partners include institutions or organizations. The guide does not cover employment or affiliation of guests, including researchers or TAP. See, if applicable. <https://sdunet.dk/da/servicesider/uris/sdu-safe/sdu-safe-nyheder/baggrundstjek-af-kommende-medarbejdere>.

⁴ See SDU's definition of "critical research" here: [https://sdunet.dk/-/media/sdunet/filer/servicesider/sdu-safe/kritisk-forskning/definition-af-kritisk-forskning-paa-sdu-\(1\).pdf](https://sdunet.dk/-/media/sdunet/filer/servicesider/sdu-safe/kritisk-forskning/definition-af-kritisk-forskning-paa-sdu-(1).pdf)

⁵ For more take a look at: https://sdunet.dk/en/research/legal-services/researchportal_legal_contracts.

SDU SAFE – overview of international partners requiring special consideration – updated 04.05.26



⁶ It can be difficult to discern whether, to what extent, or on which areas a Chinese university is affiliated with the Chinese military. Generally, the name of the institution can give a hint. For example if wording such as aeronautics, aerospace, air force, aviation, defence, nuclear, officers, police, rocket force, security, etc. are included in the name of the institution. In several cases, however, words such as corporation, engineering, logistics, shipbuilding, etc. are included in connection with military-affiliated universities. If you are in doubt, please contact SDU SAFE.

⁷ “7 sons”-universities: “Beihang Universitet”, “Beijing Institute of Technology”, “Harbin Engineering University”, “Harbin Institute of Technology”, “Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics”, “Nanjing University of Science and Technology” and “Northwestern Polytechnical University”.

⁸ Beijing Genome Institute (BGI), including all subsidiaries such as BGI Research, BGI Tech Solutions, Forensic Genomics International, etc.

⁹ “Organizations” covers universities, think tanks, foundations, companies, authorities, etc. The employment of individuals at SDU is not covered in this context, and they should undergo a “background check” in connection with any employment, cf. the guidelines for background checks at SDU.

¹⁰ According to Aspi.org, among others: Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Hunan University, Jiangnan Social University, Jilin University, North University of China, Shandong University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shenyang Ligong University, Sichuan University, Southeast University, Southwest University of Science and Technology, University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, University of International Relations, University of Science and Technology Beijing, Wuhan University, Xi’an Technological University, Xidian University, and others.

¹¹ Denmark’s general approach to educational and research cooperation with Israel is to cooperate exclusively with departments of Israeli institutions located in Israel based on the pre-1967 borders. This means that there no cooperation is allowed with departments of institutions in the illegal settlements on the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.