

Dear Mr. Mattis,

I am writing regarding the article by Jamestown Foundation titled “PRC-UAE Collaboration and US Technology Transfer Concerns in Abu Dhabi” published on August 15, 2024 about Mohamed bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence (MBZUAI). While I appreciate the Foundation’s focus on important issues related to international technology transfer, I believe there are several inaccuracies and serious mischaracterizations in the piece that warrant clarification.

I would like to specifically address the article’s claims about MBZUAI’s leadership and trustees, which I believe are based on tenuous connections and mischaracterizations:

**Dr. Eric Xing:** The article cites my 2017 recognition as a “Zhongguancun Overseas Strategic Scientist” as evidence of concerning ties. However, this award was a one-time honorary recognition at a Silicon Valley event co-sponsored with the California city government. It involved no compensation, travel requirements, and no ongoing commitments. Several other leading Chinese American scholars currently employed at US universities also received this award. To suggest this implies any political or ideological obligation is a significant stretch. I am a proud US citizen and a computer scientist with a long career at top US institutions. My leadership of MBZUAI is consistent with my academic background and championing of US academic standards, not evidence of ‘undue foreign influence.’

**Kai-Fu Lee:** The article cites Mr. Lee’s recognition by “united front-affiliated organizations” and his board membership of a Chinese think tank. However, it fails to provide context on how these connections specifically influence his role as a trustee at MBZUAI or pose a technology transfer risk. Mr. Lee is a well-known figure in the global AI community with numerous international affiliations, e.g. he is currently listed on the global faculty pages of Columbia University and has chaired the World Economic Forum’s AI Council. His involvement with MBZUAI has been one of many of his broad professional activities and consistent with his expertise.

**Andrew Chi-Chih Yao:** Dr. Yao has had no involvement with MBZUAI since 2020. The article cites a 2005 award from the Chinese government as evidence of concerning ties. The cited award is nearly two decades old and is a type of recognition commonly given to international scholars by many countries.

**Min Wanli:** Your article lists several Chinese affiliations for Dr. Min. We have no record of Dr. Min ever participating in any MBZUAI Advisory Board meetings. Although it was never actually taken up, since it was made in 2021, his appointment on our board has subsequently been terminated.

The article’s approach of listing any and all connections to China, no matter how tenuous or outdated, creates a highly misleading impression. It fails to distinguish between normal international academic engagement and actual channels for improper technology transfer.

Many of the cited affiliations and recognitions are common among top global scholars – including those made to professors it lists like myself, Oxford’s Sir Michael Brady, and MIT’s Daniela Rus. They can hardly be used to imply undue foreign influence or substantiate the baseless threat of technology transfer.

Most of MBZUAI's board members are instead drawn from leading US and UK institutions. This broader context is crucial for a fair assessment of the university's governance.

Regarding specific technology transfer risks:

1. The article claims that MBZUAI has access to chips banned for export to China. However, the chips owned by MBZUAI were procured through legal channels. It fails to explain how access to compute resources differs from the access that international students have to such technologies at US universities. MBZUAI maintains rigorous controls over access and use of its facilities, fully complying with US export controls. The projects our students and faculty undertake are made publicly available, and our work is open source.
2. The piece cites collaborations with IBM and other US tech companies as potential risks. However, these are standard academic-industry partnerships similar to those many US universities maintain. In fact, MBZUAI has proudly positioned itself as an icon of US-UAE friendship and strategic partnership, and our collaboration with US companies and universities have received strong encouragement and support from US government agencies and legislators who visited the UAE. None of these collaborations involve or allow for improper technology transfer.
3. The article mentions that US government funding supports research involving myself. However, it fails to note that this funding is on work and duty I undertake in the US through my affiliation as a professor at Carnegie Mellon University, not MBZUAI. My dual appointments are fully disclosed to the universities and the funding agencies per standard procedure and requirement, and again are completely in line with common practices for international scholars.

In conclusion, the piece relies heavily on innuendo and 'guilt-by-association' rather than presenting any concrete evidence of improper technology transfer. It conflates normal international academic engagement with nefarious activity.

A more balanced assessment would recognize that MBZUAI's practices appear largely consistent with those of reputable international universities, including appropriate safeguards and compliance measures.

I urge the Jamestown Foundation to apply more rigorous standards of evidence in future reporting on these sensitive topics. Overstating risks based on tenuous connections does a disservice to the important discussion around responsible international scientific collaboration.

I have been made aware of further claims made on your website, especially regarding a Tunisian American colleague, to which the university will respond in due course,

Eric Xing  
President and University Professor  
Mohamed Bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence