

## FYI SCIENCE POLICY BRIEFS

### Review leaves US extremely large telescopes in limbo

The future of the proposed Giant Magellan Telescope in Chile and the Thirty Meter Telescope in Hawaii remains cloudy following the release late last year of a report evaluating whether NSF should progress either project to its final design phase. Written by a panel of external experts, the report concludes that receiving NSF funding is “critical to both projects” but warns that pursuing either project could dominate the agency’s limited facilities budget and damage other research areas absent a significant and sustained budget increase from Congress.

Reacting to the report, Sethuraman Panchanathan, director of NSF, stated that the agency agrees that “the success of the U.S.-ELT [US Extremely Large Telescope] program hinges on securing the necessary resources from Congress.” (The ELT program is the vehicle through which NSF would fund one or both of the telescopes.) Panchanathan had commissioned the report to help guide his decision on whether NSF should proceed with one project, both projects, or neither project. The report does not express a clear preference for one project over the other. Emphasizing the gravity of advancing either telescope to the final design phase, the report observes, “Entering FDP is not a commitment by NSF to fund construction; however, the community expectation and the past precedent is that no project has entered FDP without ultimately being built.” —LM

### US and China narrow scope of S&T cooperation agreement

In December, the US and China agreed to extend their bilateral science and technology cooperation agreement by five years but narrow it to only cover basic research. The agreement explicitly excludes work related to developing critical and emerg-

ing technologies and includes “new guardrails for implementing agencies to protect the safety and security of their researchers,” said a State Department release. The agreement also includes “newly established and strengthened provisions on transparency and data reciprocity.” (As *PHYSICS TODAY* went to press, the text of the agreement was not yet public.)

The previous agreement lapsed in August 2023 amid a stalemate in negotiations and an increase in tensions between the two countries. Some Republican politicians criticized the negotiating posture of Joe Biden’s administration and pushed to add new congressional oversight mechanisms to the process. Representative John Moolenaar (R-MI), chair of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, and other Republican Congress members condemned the extension, calling it “a clear attempt to tie the hands of the incoming administration.” —LM

### DOE launches new research-security-risk review process

Late last year, the Department of Energy finalized a framework for mitigating research security risks across its grant projects and loans. The framework’s effects are far reaching, introducing new protocols for the design of DOE funding solicitations, criteria for grant applications, and ongoing reviews of funded projects. Among the risk factors are connections to foreign entities subject to US export controls, Chinese military companies, and certain research institutions that pose risks of inappropriate technology transfer, according to the Department of Defense. DOE will consider past relationships with such entities but will take into account whether they started before the government began raising concerns about them.

The framework factors in the “technology considerations” of each project, demanding higher scrutiny of projects that involve critical and emerging technologies, access to critical infrastructure, or work near military installations. DOE may require the removal of individuals or vendors from proposed projects as a condition of receiving funding as well as less-consequential actions such as “certifications, tailored mitigation agreements, reporting, and special terms and conditions.” —JT PT

FYI (<https://aip.org/fyi>), the science policy news service of the American Institute of Physics, focuses on the intersection of policy and the physical sciences.

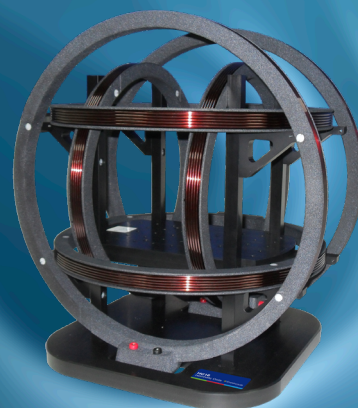


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