

KAIST Gets Boycotted Because of Its Military Association

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Science and technology can either be a blessing or a curse to the society, mostly depending on its use. The world has seen involvement of industries leading to [manipulation of research data](#) and incorrect research results being published. Military indulgence in the field of science and research seems to produce similar results, consequently leaving the researchers thinking what might befall on them. Such a case happened when the Korea Advanced Institute of Science & Technology (KAIST) decided to join hands with a defense weapons group in South Korea. Researchers worldwide have condemned KAIST for the violation of research ethics. Let us learn about the incident in details.

Beginning of the KAIST Chaos

KAIST has [signed an agreement with the defense weapons systems](#) group of South Korea, named Hanwha. They will team up in order to produce weapons with the aid of artificial intelligence (AI) in the Research Centre for the Convergence of National Defense and Artificial Intelligence. The KAIST partnership is an attempt to globally weaponize AI to compete in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The project is expected to finish by the end of 2018. Interestingly, Hanwha Defense Systems is a home to

weapons of mass destruction. They have an arsenal of weapons ranging from those for ground warfare to air combat. Their weapons come equipped with high precision in terms of navigation. Therefore, this partnership may prove deadly for the research community as well as society.

Researchers Boycott KAIST

KAIST recently received the WRDS -SSRN Innovation Award for being pioneers in business research. Tackling issues to [improve finance with science-driven data research](#) tactics made them winners in 2017. KAIST's reputation is at stake because of this recent controversy. Furthermore, there are several foreign professors as well as students in this institute. This announcement has definitely created a gap among them. The professors from Japanese universities, who teach at KAIST, are absolutely furious with this issue. A detrimental military association has them in the line of fire with the Japan Science Council (JSC).

KAIST faced strong opposition from global universities and institutions. In spite of that, KAIST insisted on moving forward with the development of autonomous weapons. The military association with Hanwha would continue. Because of the constant pressure from researchers worldwide followed by their boycott, the organization finally issued a statement on April 10, 2018 that it would not develop weapons that compromise human safety.

A survey including a large number of students from various universities and institutions suggested that students do not want to participate in questionable research that combines AI with military efforts to weaponize the technology. In fact, 30 countries have signed an open letter that states the reasons for boycotting the Korean university.

The important terms of the open letter include :

Researchers from these countries would refrain from visiting KAIST

Universities or research institutes of these countries would refrain from accepting visitors from KAIST

Activities involving collaboration with KAIST university would remain suspended, until the President of KAIST, Professor Sung-Chul Sing, offers assurance.

Japanese Researchers Remain Divided

JSC has called on numerous academic institutions to [review the policies related to the military-specific research](#) being carried out in those institutes. This would help them gain control over defense technology. It includes policies related to the recruitment of scientists to carry out research on military-based agendas. Acquisitions Technology Logistics Agency (ATLA) was also established by Japan Ministry of Defence. Some of

the tasks of ATLA included buying military equipment, aircrafts, and ships for a sum of 5 trillion Yen. These actions taken were in response to the North Korean imminent threat of war by testing ballistic missiles.

The academic community in Japan is still in a dilemma. They are currently analyzing the policies set around these types of ethical issues. It would help them take better action against the universities supporting military associations. Japanese universities and institutions remain divided on whether to boycott military associations. Rather than condemning this step, the Japan Astronomy Society is supporting military associations. This is because its rejection could result in less funding for the researchers working in the universities.

AI can excel in precision where an ordinary human being fails. Using AI, robots are being weaponized and sent to hunt and kill a target automatically. The robot/machine is free of conscience. The use of AI weapons can thus, be extremely problematic in that they can fall into the wrong hands and be used as a very lethal weapon to wipe out large number of people. Hence, research institutes partnering with military practices would possibly have no beneficial effect.

Should the scientific community promote military-based research? Please share your thoughts with us in the comments section below.

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