Rishi Sunak considers banning Chinese officials from half of AI summit

Rishi Sunak is considering banning Chinese officials from half of his artificial intelligence safety summit in November, amid growing concern over widespread spying by Beijing on western governments. Downing Street has already invited China to attend the summit, which will be held in early November at Bletchley Park and is set to shape the international community's approach to AI for years to come. The invitation has attracted some criticism in the wake of recent revelations that a parliamentary researcher was arrested earlier this year on suspicion of spying for China. Sources have told the Guardian that Chinese officials might only be allowed to attend the first day of the two-day summit in part because of concern over their espionage activities – although not directly as a result of the arrest. Other world leaders expected to attend the full summit, those close to the planning process said, include the French president Emmanuel Macron, the Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau and Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission. Joe Biden, the US president, is not due to attend and will be represented instead by his vice-president, Kamala Harris. One person with knowledge of the plans said: "We always knew Biden was unlikely to attend, but the question Downing Street now has to decide is what to do about the Chinese." A government spokesperson said: "The UK will host the first major global summit on AI safety this November, bringing together key countries, as well as leading companies and researchers, and civil society, to drive targeted, rapid international action on the safe and responsible development of the technology." The spokesperson added: "As is routine for summits of this nature, we won't speculate on potential invitees." Sunak announced the summit in June, following warnings from some of those at the top of the AI industry that the technology could be used for misinformation and fraud and could even pose a future threat to all humanity. The prime minister, who completed an MBA at Stanford University in California and is well connected in technology circles, hopes to position the UK at the forefront of global AI regulation. He has expressed excitement about AI's potential to transform public services, for example, by helping doctors diagnose conditions, but also says he wants to develop "guardrails" to prevent it being exploited in destructive ways. Those aware of the summit's proposed schedule say it will focus on the risks AI poses to human life, amid concerns that it could be used by states or even individuals to accelerate the development of biohazards and bioweapons. Officials hope the summit will become an annual or biennial event, hosted by another country each time in the mould of the G7, G20 or CoP gatherings. Those invited will include heads of government, tech industry executives and representatives of civil society. Sir Nick Clegg, the former deputy prime minister, is expected to attend in his role as president of global affairs for Meta, Facebook's parent company. It is not clear yet whether Mark Zuckerberg, the company's founder, will be there. Elon Musk, the technology

entrepreneur and world's richest man, may also come, although officials pointed out that none of his companies are yet global leaders in AI development. The invitation to Beijing has been one of the most sensitive elements of planning the summit. Sunak has talked about the importance of engaging with Beijing, and recently met the Chinese premier Li Qiang on the sidelines of the G20 in Delhi, where the pair discussed AI among other issues. British officials have been exploring the option of inviting China to only one of the two days, as intelligence experts ramp up their warnings that the country is carrying out extensive spying in the UK and elsewhere. Last weekend it emerged that a parliamentary researcher had been arrested on suspicion of spying for Beijing – although sources said the debate over only inviting China to one day of the AI summit was not connected to those revelations. Downing Street must also navigate a number of other tricky issues, including where to house Harris and her large travelling delegation. Bletchley Park is an hour and a half by car from central London, where an American delegation would normally stay during a bilateral visit. Officials are planning to erect several marquees in the grounds of the estate to host all the events planned over the two days. Additional reporting by Lisa O'Carroll in Brussels