AMERICAN INFLUENCE AND THE GEOPOLITICAL POLICY DIMENSIONS OF THE AI ARMS RACE: GOVERNANCE, REGULATION, AND GLOBAL STRATEGY

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Abstract - Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping global geopolitics, economic competition, and governance frameworks, creating complex challenges and opportunities for policymakers. The accelerating international race to develop and deploy AI, often described as an "AI arms race,"is profoundly influenced by the United States of America (U.S), whose policies, regulatory frameworks, and strategic initiatives serve as key reference points for global AI governance. While the U.S. has historically led in AI innovation, its influence in shaping international standards, ethical norms, and regulatory convergence is still evolving amid competing approaches from China, the European Union, Russia, and other states.

This paper examines the geopolitical and policy dimensions of the AI arms race through the lens of American influence. It explores how U.S. domestic policy, industrial strategy, and multilateral engagement contribute to shaping global AI governance and ethical frameworks. The study situates U.S. initiatives within a comparative context, analysing how other actors respond to or resist American approaches, and how private corporations and global supply chains amplify or constrain U.S. influence.

The analysis highlights the mechanisms through which the U.S can consolidate leadership: regulatory guidance, standard-setting, industrial and innovation policy, diplomatic engagement, and public-private partnerships. Finally, the paper proposes policy pathways to strengthen American influence in global AI governance, promote responsible innovation, enhance strategic stability, and facilitate international coordination. By framing the U.S. role as both central and aspirational, the study provides actionable guidance for governments, multinational institutions, and private stakeholders navigating the rapidly evolving AI landscape.

By integrating insights from comparative regulatory approaches, the paper underscores the importance of multilateral cooperation, coalition-building, and inclusive dialogue with both state and non-state actors. This perspective illuminates not only the opportunities for the U.S. to assert global influence but also the potential pitfalls of unilateralism, regulatory overreach, or inconsistent policy implementation. Ultimately, the article situates American AI policy within a dynamic international system, highlighting the interplay between domestic priorities, corporate strategies, and transnational regulatory trends, and offering a nuanced framework for evaluating how U.S. leadership can foster responsible innovation while mitigating geopolitical tensions.

Keywords - American Influence and the Geopolitical Policy Dimensions of the AI Arms Race: Governance, Regulation, and Global Strategy.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN GLOBAL POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative force redefining the contours of global politics, economics, and governance. Once confined to academic laboratories and niche technological applications, AI now underpins strategic competition, economic growth, and social regulation worldwide. Its integration into core state functions—from defense systems and cyber operations to health, education, and public administration—renders AI not merely a technological advancement but a strategic instrument of national power and international influence. Thus, AI governance has evolved into a key arena for geopolitical contestation, where competing values and ideologies—liberalism, authoritarianism, and digital sovereignty—shape the emerging order of the information age.[1] At the same time, AI introduces profound ethical, legal, and governance challenges. Issues of algorithmic bias, data privacy, accountability, and transparency intersect with questions of human rights and social justice.

At its core, the AI arms race embodies a struggle for technological supremacy, data dominance, and

[1]Luciano Floridi, Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (Oxford University Press 2020); Henry A Kissinger, Eric Schmidt and Daniel Huttenlocher, The Age of AI: And Our Human Future (Little, Brown and Company 2021).

algorithmic advantage. States invest billions in AI research and development (R&D), talent cultivation, and infrastructure, viewing AI mastery as essential to national security and economic resilience. U.S. and China, in particular, frame AI as a strategic resource comparable to energy or nuclear power in earlier eras[2]. The U.S. National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence[3]warned that failure to lead in AI could jeopardise national security and democratic values. Conversely, China's 2017'Next Generation AI Development Plan' articulates a vision of AI as the foundation for global leadership by 2030.The interplay among these dimensions forms the foundation of the contemporary struggle for global AI leadership, within which U.S. influence remains decisive but contested.

From early breakthroughs funded by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) during the Cold War to the rise of Silicon Valley as a global hub of digital entrepreneurship, U.S. leadership has been characterized by the synergy of government investment, academic excellence, and private enterprise. U.S. companies such as Google, Microsoft, NVIDIA, and OpenAI dominate the global AI ecosystem, setting technical standards and driving commercial adoption worldwide.The absence of a unified federal AI law, growing domestic political polarization, and rising antitrust scrutiny of Big Tech complicate coherent policymaking. Meanwhile, China's state-coordinated model and the EU's regulatory assertiveness present credible alternatives to American influence. The U.S. must therefore navigate a delicate balance between fostering innovation, safeguarding democratic values, and sustaining global legitimacy.

This paper critically analyses the geopolitical and policy dimensions of the AI arms race, focusing on how the U.S shapes global AI governance through its domestic strategies, international diplomacy, and corporate ecosystems.The research focuses on the period 2015–2025, capturing the decade in which AI became central to U.S. policy discourse and international rivalry. While the primary emphasis is on the U.S., the analysis adopts a comparative and global perspective, incorporating developments in the EU, China, and selected middle powers.This research has employed a qualitative and comparative analytical framework integrating legal, political, policy and strategic perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of U.S. influence in global AI governance.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF U.S. AI POLICY AND STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

U.S. leadership in AI traces back to the Cold War era, when technological innovation was perceived as a core component of national security and geopoliticalinfluence. [4]The U.S. government recognised that advanced computational systems could confer strategic advantages in defense, intelligence, and scientific research. [1] The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), established in 1958 following the Soviet launch of Sputnik, became the cornerstone of U.S. efforts to foster cutting-edge technological capabilities.[2]DARPA's early AI initiatives were framed within a dual-use paradigm, aimed both at military superiority and the advancement of computer science.[3] The agency funded research in symbolic reasoning, machine learning prototypes, and autonomous problem-solving systems, which laid the foundation for later commercial and academic innovations.[4] Early projects, such as the Strategic Computing Program, integrated AI into defense applications, including robotics, command-and-control systems, and intelligence analysis.The early U.S. approach established several enduring features ofAI policy: a strong public investment in R&D, collaboration with academic institutions, and an orientation towards dual-use applications that blended civilian and military objectives. These patterns persist in contemporary U.S. AI policy, reflecting a historical continuity between strategic imperatives and innovation policy.

In 2016, the Obama administration released the National Artificial Intelligence Research and

[2]Gregory C Allen and Taniel Chan, Artificial Intelligence and National Security (Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School 2017).

[3] National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence, Final Report (United States Government Publishing Office 2021) https://reports.nscai.gov/final-report/ accessed 3 January 202

[4]Gregory C Allen and Taniel Chan, Artificial Intelligence and National Security (Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School 2017) https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/artificial-intelligence-and-national-security accessed 3 January 2026, Michael C Horowitz, "Artificial Intelligence, International Competition, and the Balance of Power" (2018) Texas National Security Review 1(3) 36–57 https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/Artificial%20Intelligence%20and%20National%20Security.pdf accessed 3 January 2026; National Science and Technology Council, National Artificial Intelligence Research and Development Strategic Plan (Executive Office of the President of the United States, 2016) https://www.nitrd.gov/pubs/national_ai_rd_strategic_plan.pdf accessed 3 January 2026.

Development Strategic Plan,[5]which represented a coordinated federal approach to AI innovation.[6] The plan emphasized fostering fundamental research, developing public-private partnerships, and addressing ethical, legal, and societal implications[7]. Significantly, the Obama plan foregrounded normative considerations, including transparency, fairness, and accountability, as part of the broader R&D strategy. It also sought to position the U.S. as a global leader in AI through international collaboration, encouraging the sharing of best practices and harmonization of research standards.[8] This period marked the formal integration of AI policy into federal strategic planning, linking technological leadership with ethical and legal governance frameworks.

The Trump administration's American AI Initiative marked a shift toward economic competitiveness and national security.[9]While the Obama plan emphasized research and collaboration, the Trump initiative prioritized rapid deployment, deregulation, and fostering U.S. dominance in AI markets.[10] Executive Order 13859[11], which established the initiative in February 2019, highlighted AI as a critical technology for maintaining U.S. strategic advantage, reflecting a realist perspective on technological competition.Key features included increased funding for AI R&D, promotion of AI workforce development, and the development of standards through agencies such as the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).The initiative also underscored the role of private-sector leadership, incentivizing technology firms to accelerate innovation in alignment with national security priorities.[12]This approach reflected a hybrid policy model, blending market-driven incentives with strategic oversight.The Biden administration sought to consolidate and expand U.S. AI leadership while foregrounding responsibility, ethics, and governance.

The 2023 Executive Order on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy AI emphasizes risk mitigation, transparency, and international cooperation.[13]Unlike previous initiatives, the Biden framework explicitly integrated AI governance into legal and normative structures, linking innovation with regulatory compliance, ethical oversight, and international standard-setting.[14]This reflects a synthesis of the Obama focus on ethics and the Trump emphasis on strategic competitiveness. The initiative also stresses collaboration with allies and multilateral institutions

[5]National Science and Technology Council, National Artificial Intelligence Research and Development Strategic Plan (Executive Office of the President of the United States, October 2016).

[6]Patrick Lin, Keith Abney and Ryan Jenkins, Robot Ethics 2.0: From Autonomous Cars to Artificial Intelligence (Oxford University Press 2017); Michael C Horowitz, "Artificial Intelligence, International Competition, and the Balance of Power" (2018) Texas National Security Review 1(3) 36–57 https://tnsr.org/2018/05/artificial-intelligence-international-competition-and-the-balance-of-power/ accessed 3 January 2026.

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[12] Atul Rawal, Katie Johnson, Curtis Mitchell, Michael Walton and Diamond Nwankwo, Responsible Artificial Intelligence (RAI) in U.S. Federal Government: Principles, Policies, and Practices (2025) https://arxiv.org/abs/2502.03470 accessed on 3 January 2026.

[13] White House, Executive Order on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence (28 February 2023) https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/11/01/2023-24283/safe-secure-and-trustworthy-development-and-use-of-artificial-intelligence accessed 3 January 2026.

[14]Emily Hadley,Prioritizing Policies for Furthering Responsible Artificial Intelligence in the United States (Cornell University, 2022) https://arxiv.org/abs/2212.00740 accessed 3 January 2026.

to promote responsible AI adoption globally. [15]These milestones illustrate a trajectory in U.S. AI policy that alternates between innovation-driven, strategic dominance and normative governance, reflecting the hybrid nature of U.S. leadership in the AI domain.These continuities and shifts demonstrate how U.S. AI policy balances domestic priorities with global ambitions, navigating the tension between innovation, security, and governance.

Further, U.S. AI strategy is shaped by a network of key institutions that together form a decentralized governance ecosystem:Institutional arrangements—spanning OSTP, NIST, NSF, DoD, and NSCAI—support a hybrid model of innovation governance, combining public funding, private-sector collaboration, and decentralized regulation. Collectively, these institutions balance innovation, ethical considerations, and national security priorities within the U.S. AI governance framework.

The U.S. approach to AI is distinguished by market-driven innovation coupled with regulatory flexibility.[31] Unlike centralized models in China or the EU, U.S. AI policy relies on a network of public and private actors, including technology firms, universities, and think tanks.[32] This decentralized approach allows rapid experimentation and adaptation but also creates potential inconsistencies in standards and enforcement.[33]

Public-private partnerships have proven particularly effective in translating research into deployable technologies. DARPA and NSF funding supports academic breakthroughs, which are then commercialized by private companies.[16] The U.S. model also relies on soft law mechanisms, such as NIST guidelines and industry-led ethical frameworks, to guide responsible AI adoption.[17]

However, this model presents challenges. Decentralization can lead to regulatory fragmentation, uneven ethical compliance, and competitive pressures that incentivize speed over safety. Balancing innovation, security, and governance remains a central tension in U.S. AI policy, shaping both domestic outcomes and international influence.

THE GEOPOLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE AI ARMS RACE

Technological supremacy in AI involves algorithmic capacity, data control, hardware infrastructure, and human capital.[18]Leadership in these areas provides states with enhanced predictive capabilities, autonomous operational systems, and economic leverage in global markets. The stakes are both tangible—control over strategic industries, defense systems, and critical infrastructure—and normative, shaping international standards, ethical norms, and governance frameworks.[19]The race is also accelerated by exponential advances in computational power, machine learning, and data availability, creating a scenario where delays in research or regulatory adoption may result in lasting strategic disadvantages. Consequently, the AI arms race is characterized by speed, competition, and high uncertainty, making governance and coordination both urgent and challenging.[20]

The U.S.–China rivalry is the central axis of the contemporary AI arms race, reflecting the realist imperative of relative advantage.[21] Both states pursue

[15] Ibid 11. White House, Executive Order on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence (28 February 2023)

[16] Department of Defense, DARPA and the AI Next Campaign (DARPA, 2020) https://www.darpa.mil/research/programs/ai-next-campaign accessed 4 January 2026; National Science Foundation, NSF Partnerships for Innovation: Translating Research into Practice (NSF, 2021).

[17]Floridi L and others, 'AI4People—An Ethical Framework for a Good AI Society' (2018) 28 Minds and Machines 689 https://ai4people.org/PDF/AI4People_Ethical_Framework_For_A_Good_AI_Society.pdf accessed 4 January 2026.

[18]Lee K-F, AI Superpowers: China, Silicon Valley, and the New World Order (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2018) chs 1–3https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7305858/pdf/146_2020_Article_991.pdf accessed 4 January 2026.

[19] Farrell H and Newman A, 'Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion' (2019) 44 International Security 42 https://direct.mit.edu/isec/article/44/1/42/12237/Weaponized-Interdependence-How-Global-Economic accessed 4 January 2026.

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comprehensive strategies encompassing R&D investment, talent acquisition, infrastructure development, and international influence. The U.S., leveraging its innovation ecosystem and regulatory flexibility, prioritizes a market-driven, decentralized model that fosters rapid technological breakthroughs.[22]Conversely, China employs a state-directed, security-oriented approach, integrating AI into military modernization, civil surveillance, and industrial policy.[23]Export controls and technology restrictions exemplify the strategic dimension of this rivalry. The U.S. has implemented policies limiting the export of high-end semiconductors, AI software, and advanced research tools to Chinese entities, reflecting concerns over dual-use applications and national security. China, in response, has accelerated domestic semiconductor development, AI talent cultivation, and strategic industrial partnerships to reduce dependency on U.S. technologies.[24]

AI is also central to national security doctrines. The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) integrates AI into intelligence analysis, autonomous systems, and cybersecurity operations, while China emphasizes civil-military fusion to enhance both defense and economic capabilities. This rivalry extends into normative spaces, with both countries seeking to shape global AI governance frameworks according to their domestic models: liberal-democratic principles for the U.S., and techno-authoritarian approaches for China.

The European Union represents a distinct approach in the AI competition: a rights-based, regulatory-focused model that emphasizes ethical oversight, accountability, and risk management.[25] The EU's AI Act (2024) exemplifies this framework, classifying AI systems by risk level and imposing mandatory governance requirements on high-risk applications.[26]

Compared to the U.S., which relies on decentralized governance and private-sector innovation, the EU seeks to shape international standards through law and regulation, projecting normative influence via trade agreements, international forums, and standard-setting bodies. This divergence creates both opportunities and tensions: while the U.S. focuses on rapid technological deployment and market advantage, the EU emphasizes predictability, legal certainty, and ethical compliance. The interaction between U.S. innovation-led approaches and EU regulatory models illustrates the broader polycentric nature of AI governance, where competing norms coexist, intersect, and sometimes conflict.

Middle powers such as the UK, Japan, and India occupy strategic positions in the AI arms race, often aligning with U.S.-led initiatives while pursuing autonomous national policies.[27] UK Leverages its historical alliance with the U.S. and technological expertise to support AI innovation while promoting ethical standards.[28]Japan emphasizes safety, reliability, and human-centric AI, integrating ethical frameworks into industrial and technological strategy.[29]India focuses on AI-driven development and digital infrastructure, balancing engagement with the U.S. and participation in multilateral initiatives like the Global Partnership on AI.[30]These middle

ategic-competition-in-an-era-of-artificial-intelligence accessed 4 January 2026.

[22] National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence, Final Report (NSCAI, 2021) 39–62

[23] Kania E, 'China's Military–Civil Fusion Strategy' (2019) Center for a New American Security https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/in-military-civil-fusion-china-is-learning-lessons-from-the-united-states-and-starting-to-innovate accessed 4 January 2026.

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[29]The White House, Quad Leaders' Joint Statement: The Spirit of the Quad (24 September 2021) https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/24/joint-statement-from-quad-leaders/ accessed 4 January 2026.

[30]NITI Aayog, National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence: #AIforAll (Government of India, 2018);

powers contribute to coalition-building, regulatory diffusion, and the creation of shared standards, reinforcing the U.S.-led normative and technological architecture.

The AI arms race has profound implications for international alliances, reshaping strategic cooperation, interoperability, and collective defense capabilities.NATO integrates AI into defense modernization, emphasizing ethical use, cybersecurity, and intelligence sharing.[31] U.S. leadership within NATO supports the diffusion of AI norms aligned with democratic principles.QUAD (U.S., Japan, India, Australia) focuses on technological collaboration, including AI research, infrastructure security, and regional stability initiatives.(Australia, UK, U.S. highlights the strategic centrality of AI and advanced technologies in defense partnerships, reinforcing supply chain resilience and joint research programs.

Alliances serve as force multipliers for U.S. influence, enabling the projection of technological leadership, normative standards, and strategic coordination. At the same time, differing national priorities and domestic regulations within alliances create challenges for harmonized AI governance, illustrating the complex interplay between technology, policy, and international law.

CONCLUSION

The AI arms race constitutes a multidimensional geopolitical contest encompassing technological supremacy, strategic competition, and normative influence. The U.S.–China rivalry is the central axis, with implications for national security, global governance, and ethical standards. The EU provides a regulatory counterweight, promoting rights-based and risk-focused approaches, while Russia exemplifies militarized AI strategies with implications for conflict escalation and governance fragmentation. Middle powers and alliances such as NATO, QUAD, and AUKUS serve to amplify or mediate U.S. influence, highlighting the polycentric and interdependent nature of global AI governance.Understanding these dynamics is essential for evaluating American leadership, the diffusion of norms, and the design of policy frameworks that reconcile innovation, ethics, and international stability. The subsequent chapters will build on this geopolitical analysis, examining U.S. influence in global AI governance, comparative approaches, and the role of corporate and industrial actors.

Overall, the article demonstrates that U.S. leadership is multi-layered, combining technological innovation, normative authority, and strategic diplomacy to shape global AI governance.By leveraging innovation, corporate influence, and normative frameworks, the U.S. can shape global AI governance while reinforcing democratic values and international stability.Artificial intelligence represents both an opportunity and a challenge in the 21st-century global order. The U.S, by leveraging its innovation ecosystem, regulatory influence, and corporate power, occupies a central position in shaping the development, governance, and ethical application of AI.

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