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Insights

# Paris AI Action Summit: Nationalism beats out multilateralism

## Key takeaways

- The Paris AI Action Summit was marked by the emergence of economic nationalism in the AI sphere. From President Macron seizing the opportunity to position France as an AI leader to U.S. Vice President Vance's sharp criticism of European regulation, the summit was characterized by more competition than coordination. China's decision to sign the summit's communique—and the U.S. and U.K.'s decisions not to sign—illustrate the growing fragmentation of efforts toward intergovernmental regulatory cooperation.

- AI safety – a defining theme of the original Bletchley Park gathering – was relegated to side events. As a partial substitute, the French-led agenda promoted public interest AI. Open-source AI, which democratizes access, is central to this undertaking – but also brings new security risks.

- A series of announcements on AI infrastructure investments underscored the importance of hardware in the global AI race. How the Trump administration revises and uses the AI Diffusion rule will be a critical factor.

- With no global regulatory framework on the horizon, AI developers and deployers increasingly find themselves in the position of self-regulator. This dynamic fosters innovation but also heightens the risks borne by industry.

## The AI economy: Countries scramble to claim a piece of the AI pie

Under the leadership of French President Emmanuel Macron, the Summit was designed with a strong Francophone focus, with Macron using the gathering to position Europe, and France specifically, as a leader in global AI development. He framed this approach as the "Notre Dame strategy", in reference to the cathedral's swift reconstruction, calling for streamlined regulations to boost innovation across the EU. Macron pointed to France's robust nuclear energy output as a distinguishing feature, suggesting that in the U.S., AI would remain dependent on fossil fuels. Appealing to "European and French patriotism," Macron urged people to use "Made in Europe" AI products, such as those developed by homegrown AI champion Mistral.

Leading the U.S. delegation, Vice President Vance adopted a distinctly 'go-it-alone' stance, criticizing Brussels' "massive regulations" on technology, naming GDPR and the Digital Services Act. Vance warned that "America cannot and will not accept" foreign regulatory efforts that hinder U.S. companies. He also had choice words for China, asserting that "American AI will not be co-opted into a tool for authoritarian censorship. **Vance further leaned into the nationalist sentiment set by Macron, declaring that "the Trump administration will ensure that the most powerful AI systems are built in the US with American designed and manufactured chips."** However, he failed to acknowledge that the vast majority of AI semiconductors are manufactured in Taiwan, not the U.S. In a halfhearted effort to extend a hand, Vance noted

that the Trump administration "wants to partner" with nations that embrace an open regulatory environment. Vance's early departure from the Summit, before Macron and EU leaders spoke, also highlighted the unequal power dynamics of any partnership: any collaboration would be on American terms**.**

**This rhetoric signals the growing emergence of economic nationalism in the AI sphere**. As President Macron wrote on February 9, "the future of AI is a political issue and an issue of sovereignty and strategic dependence." Advanced AI hardware will be a key lever for the U.S. as countries race to build data centers. How the Trump administration revises and implements the AI Diffusion Rule – issued late in the Biden administration and an attempt to control other countries' access to advanced GPUs – will illuminate the direction of this next phase of the AI race, as more countries endeavor to get in the game.

As the race to build AI infrastructure heats up, the Summit featured a range of related announcements. The EU announced the InvestAI initiative, a € 200 billion fund for AI investments, which Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called a "CERN for AI" in reference to the particle physics lab. Initial funding will be drawn from existing EU programs and eventually draw in private sector investors, with the EU derisking those investments. President Macron announced a €109 billion AI investment plan for France, which includes up to €50 billion in funding from Abu Dhabi's MGX fund for new data centers and a €20 billion investment by asset manager Brookfield in AI infrastructure. Macron characterized the scope and ambition of the funding pledge as comparable to the $500 billion American Stargate Project. French open-source AI developer and national champion Mistral announced plans to open a new compute facility near Paris, with an investment of "several billion euros."

## With innovation in the spotlight, AI safety relegated to side events, angering UK and AI safety community

The Summit's program contrasted notably with the Bletchley Park gathering, held a mere 15 months prior. Framed as an effort to "broaden the conversation," existential AI risks – the primary, if not entire, focus of Bletchley – received scant official attention, though they were widely discussed at the many side events, including several that included AI/ML co-founder Yoshua Bengio and academic Stuart Russell, both of whom warned of AI's existential risks. AI safety was one of five Summit tracks, but panels on AI safety were removed from the official program at the last minute. Additionally, a panel reviewing the findings of Bengio's State of AI Science report, one of the principal deliverables at the Seoul Summit, was shunted to a side event. The emphasis on AI opportunity and the de-prioritization of safety prompted Bengio to warn that "AI poses major risks on a time horizon that requires world leaders to take them much more seriously." On the opposite side, Vice President Vance put the perceived stakes bluntly: "The AI future is not going to be won by handwringing about safety," going so far as to suggest that AI regulations would only benefit incumbent players, not the broader public.

**Because the original intent of the AI Summits, as conceived by the UK, was to focus almost exclusively on managing the risks posed by frontier AI models, the UK declined to sign on to the Summit's final communiqué**, seeing the document as a step back from the original Bletchley Park agreement in November of 2023. The U.S. also declined to sign, but for different reasons. The U.S. reportedly refused to sign the text due to reservations about its headline language on "inclusive and sustainable" AI. Other reporting suggested the U.S. delegation further objected to language regarding AI's environmental costs and the United Nations.

The UK issued a statement that "the declaration didn't provide enough practical clarity on global governance, nor sufficiently address harder questions around national security and the challenge AI poses to it." Based on discussions with senior figures we understand that India – the next host – intends to put the term "safety" back in the title of the next Summit. Having realized that an annual event was not sufficient amid rapidly technological advancements, the UK government worked with South Korea on a "mini-Summit" six months after Bletchley. The UK is likely to advocate for this periodicity again, particularly as the leaders of leading AI labs have indicated that they are getting closer to something resembling artificial general intelligence (AGI). Safety concerns are growing within labs, some governments, and the broader AI safety community, which was outraged by France's downplaying of the issue in Paris. As one UK official who attended the Summit put it, "the French organizers invited 1,000 people to Paris, 950 of whom were irrelevant for dealing with the challenges posed by frontier models."

As a partial substitute for safety, the agenda promoted public interest AI through a variety of initiatives (detailed below), many of which centered on open-source AI to democratize access. Ultimately, the unspoken theme of the Summit and its associated initiatives was "voluntary." There was little mention of regulation, a striking omission given Europe not-so-distant pride in being the world's tech regulator. Instead, the relationship between governments and industry was framed as one of partnership. **This dynamic was distinctly unsatisfying to many stakeholders who argue that a stronger approach is necessary to address the collective action problems posed by AI in the face of unrestrained capitalist incentives.**

- The **"Current AI" public-private investment fund** aims to advance public interest AI, bringing together an initial €400 million and a five-year fundraising goal of €2.5 billion. Its stated aims include expanding access to high-quality public and private datasets, investing in open-source tools and infrastructure, and developing systems to measure AI's social and environmental impact. The embrace of open-source AI is integral to efforts to broaden access.

- **Robust Open Online Safety Tools (ROOST)** is an initiative designed to provide open-source tools that promote online safety in the AI era. It will focus on online child safety, aiming to create technical solutions for identifying, reviewing, and reporting child sexual abuse material.

- **The Coalition for Sustainable AI** seeks to standardize metrics for AI's environmental impact and emissions, incentivize the development of efficient hardware and software, and leverage AI in a manner that promotes the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Coalition members include a wide range of industry, investor, government, startup, and academia stakeholders.

Following the Summit, the UK government announced it would be renaming its AI institute the AI Security Institute, to avoid association of the term "safety" with issues the Trump administration is deemphasizing, such as bias. The new U.S. AI team — which includes Vance, AI and Crypto Czar David Sacks, and Office of Science & Technology Policy Director Michael Kratsios, with input from Trump advisor and Tesla and xAI CEO Elon Musk — will likely follow suit with the U.S. Institute and may also add a nod to innovation in the name. The Chinese AI Safety Institute, for example, includes the term "development" in its name, referencing its role in supporting innovation and AI deployment. The title of the next AI Summit in India will likely replace the term "safety" with "security" and potentially add "development." All of this will be sorted out in the coming months; with new models being released at a rapid pace, there is mounting pressure to hold the next summit before the one-year mark.

## Transatlantic divergence on Chinese involvement

During a 2024 discussion on bilateral AI governance, President Macron invited President Xi to attend the Summit. However, Xi instead sent a senior representative, Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing, who arrived with a sizeable delegation of officials associated with China's AI safety community. The Summit saw the official debut of the China AI Safety and Development Network, which will serve as China's AI Safety Institute. The U.S. delegation, on the other hand, pushed for the inclusion of language in the final communiqué that was critical of China. Such language was ultimately omitted, and the U.S. did not sign the final statement.

Demonstrating that Beijing is serious about participating in the process, Chinese official signed the Summit declaration after declining to do so in Seoul. **The flip-flop – China in, the U.S. and UK out, albeit for different reasons – reflects a temporary fracturing of progress towards intergovernmental regulatory cooperation on AI.** The UK government, which holds a regular dialogue with China on frontier AI model issues and collaborates closely with the U.S. AI Safety Institute, will be forced to reassess its strategy going forward, hoping that the Trump administration will change course on cooperation with China on AI safety. Significantly, former Googe CEO Eric Schmidt, who remains influential in American AI policy circles, for the first time endorsed U.S.-China collaboration on AI safety – while warning that China could seize the lead in open-source/weight models and urging the U.S. to prioritize open-source development.

## Implications for industry

In light of these outcomes from Paris, global industry players – which had been supportive of national-level AI Safety Institutes and the nascent AI Safety Institute Network – now find themselves the central actors in AI safety, **as voluntary self-regulation emerges as the de facto model as countries prioritize speed and innovation. This dynamic benefits innovation but also increases the risks borne by AI developers and deployers. Companies should stay abreast of voluntary cooperative efforts between AI developers and deployers** concerning best practices for responsible model scaling, testing, and risk mitigation. Where self-assessment is limited in reassuring users, third-party testers hold promise in providing an objective safety rating – potentially evolving into a BCorp-style certification for AI models.
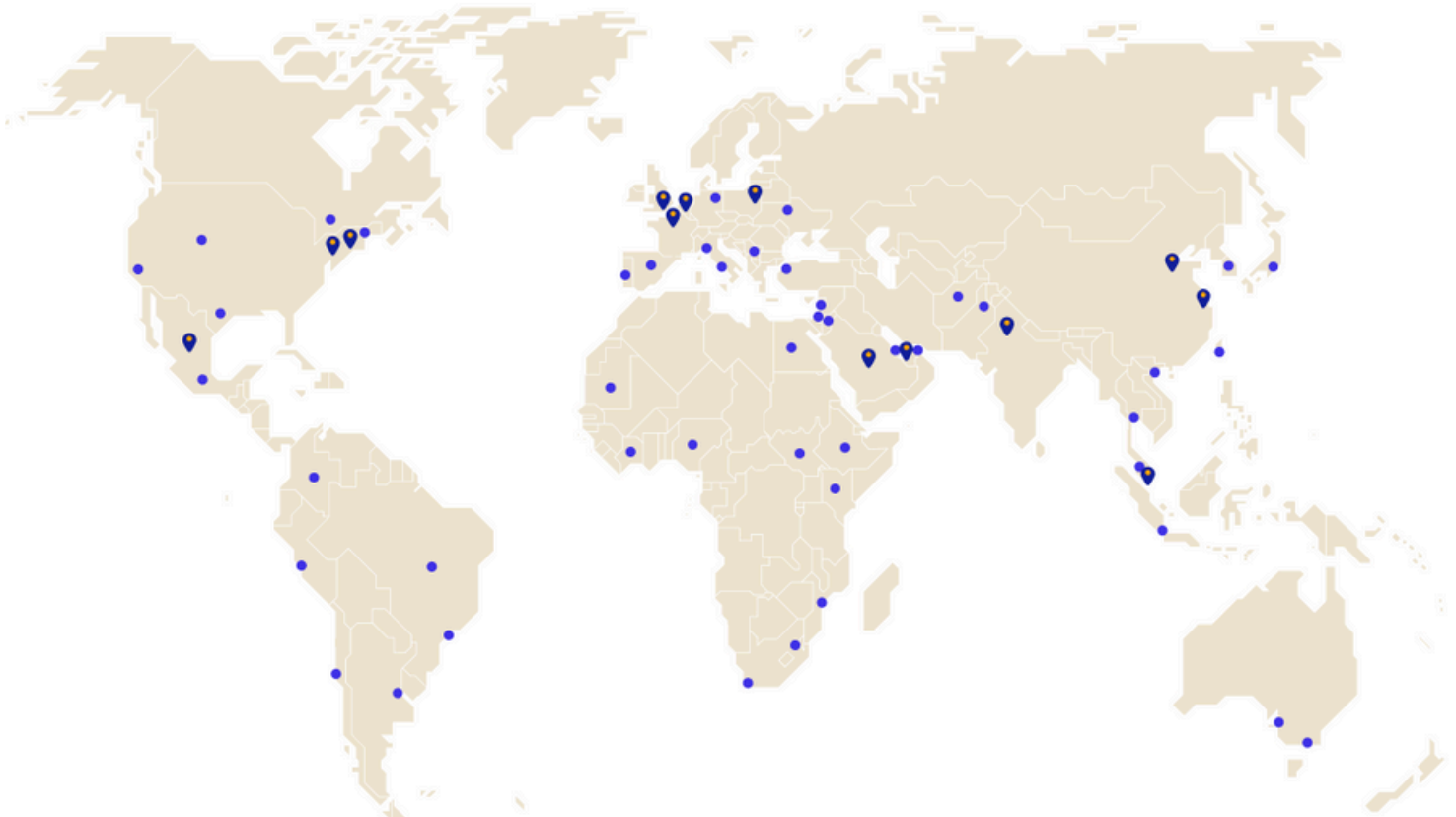
Bengio echoed the views of many in the global AI safety community, calling Paris a "missed opportunity." However, that community – spanning borders and including many safety advocates embedded within frontier AI developers – will likely regroup and launch a renewed push for global collaboration to counter mounting geopolitical pressures and U.S.-China technology competition. **The world has long been shifting toward a new era of geopolitics in which non-state actors – including select corporate entities and technologists – hold equal weight with governments in shaping the global power dynamic.** AI appears to be the first high-stakes arena in which this evolving power structure will unfold.

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Please contact **Paul Triolo**, Partner, at **Paul.Triolo@dgagroup.com** and **Jessica Kuntz**, Associate Partner, at **Jessica.Kuntz@dgagroup.com** with any questions or to arrange a follow up conversation.

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