The Race to Develop Artificial Intelligence: Implications for International Security

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Abstract: Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a strategic technology that redistributes power through both material capabilities and rule-making authority. This article examines how national AI strategies in the United States, China, the United Kingdom, France, and Singapore shape international security and strategic stability. The study addresses a gap between two bodies of scholarship: strategic stability research, which tends to privilege military applications and great-power rivalry, and AI governance research, which emphasises regulation without fully integrating security competition. Using a qualitative comparative design informed by Most Different Systems Design (MDSD), the study analyses five structurally different cases selected from the Global Institute for National Capability (GINC) 2025 National AI Strategies dataset, drawing on official strategies, defence documents, and recent policy literature. The article compares six dimensions of AI power: computing infrastructure, chip ecosystem, safety and governance, standards diplomacy, public-sector delivery, and defence integration. The findings show that contemporary AI competition is not reducible to a United States-China rivalry. Instead, it is organised around two partially overlapping models of power. Material AI power is driven by technological sovereignty, computational scale, and military integration, most clearly visible in the United States, China, and France. Normative or regulatory AI power operates through governance frameworks, safety institutions, and standards diplomacy, as demonstrated by the United Kingdom and Singapore. France occupies a hybrid position, combining sovereign investment with European regulatory legitimacy. The analysis also indicates that the absence of interoperable trust and crisis-management mechanisms constitutes a major structural risk, since material acceleration without shared governance increases uncertainty, while governance without material capacity has limited strategic weight. The study contributes to international security scholarship by linking strategic stability, securitisation, and regulatory power in a single comparative framework, and offers practical recommendations on human oversight, crisis communication, and capacity-building for small and middle powers. It argues that future stability will depend not only on who develops the most advanced AI systems, but also on who institutionalises trust, human oversight, and interoperable governance mechanisms.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, International security, Strategic stability, AI governance, Regulatory power, Securitisation

1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer simply an emerging technology. It is increasingly a strategic infrastructure through which states organise economic competitiveness, military preparedness, surveillance capacity, public administration, and international influence. Its importance derives not only from technical performance, but also from the political authority to define acceptable uses, safety thresholds, and institutional rules. In this sense, AI has become a central object of international security because it affects both the distribution of capabilities and the governance of risk.

The contemporary AI race is usually described as a contest between the United States (US) and China. This framing captures an essential part of the problem, particularly in relation to computing scale, semiconductor controls, dual-use research, and military integration. However, it is analytically incomplete. The global AI order is also being shaped by middle and small powers whose influence is not based on material parity with superpowers. The United Kingdom (UK) has sought to convert AI safety, assurance, and standards diplomacy into a source of international influence. France has combined sovereign computing investments with European Union (EU) regulatory legitimacy. Singapore has used governance innovation, AI testing frameworks, and public trust to exercise disproportionate influence in relation to its material size.

This article therefore asks: how does the technological race in AI among the United States, China, the United Kingdom, France, and Singapore influence the balance of power and international security? The central argument is that AI competition is organised around a material-normative axis. Material AI power refers to computing infrastructure, semiconductor access, military integration, and technological sovereignty. Normative AI power refers to the capacity to shape rules, standards, safety frameworks, and international expectations. International stability depends on the interaction between these two forms of power, because material acceleration without trusted governance increases uncertainty, while governance without material capacity has limited strategic weight.

The motivation for this study is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it addresses a gap between strategic stability literature, which often prioritises military applications and great-power rivalry, and AI governance literature, which often emphasises regulation without fully integrating security competition. Practically, the article contributes to policy debates by showing that governance frameworks, safety institutions, and diplomatic standards are not secondary to the AI race; they are themselves instruments of power.

The article makes three contributions. First, it provides a comparative framework for analysing AI power across structurally different states. Second, it demonstrates that middle and small powers can shape the AI order through governance innovation or hybrid material-normative strategies. Third, it identifies the absence of interoperable trust and crisis-management mechanisms as a major structural risk for international security. The article proceeds as follows: Section 2 reviews the related literature and identifies the research gap; Section 3 presents the methodology; Section 4 discusses the five national cases; Section 5 analyses the results; Section 6 presents practical recommendations and future research directions; and Section 7 concludes.

2. Theoretical Background and Research Question

2.1 Security Studies and Securitisation

The Copenhagen School remains useful for analysing AI because it expands security beyond the military sector. Buzan (1991) and Buzan, Waever and de Wilde (1998) conceptualise security as a multi-sector phenomenon involving political, economic, societal, environmental, and military dimensions. The merit of this approach is that it captures the cross-cutting nature of AI, which simultaneously affects defence, public administration, economic production, social trust, information ecosystems, and critical infrastructure.

However, a limitation of classic securitisation theory is that it was developed before digital infrastructures became central to state power. Its categories require adaptation to explain technologies that are not threats in themselves, but enabling infrastructures through which threats, vulnerabilities, and governance claims are produced. This article therefore uses securitisation theory as a mapping framework rather than as a claim that all AI policy is equally securitised. The depth of securitisation varies across cases: it is more explicit in the United States and China, more governance-oriented in the United Kingdom and Singapore, and hybrid in France. Subsequent scholarship has further refined how security problems emerge and dissolve through discursive and institutional practices (Balzacq, 2010).

2.2 AI, Military Competition, and Strategic Stability

Recent international security literature identifies AI as a technology capable of changing the speed, opacity, and scale of strategic decision-making. Horowitz (2018) argues that AI may alter the balance of power by diffusing across military and economic domains. This concern echoes classical accounts of power transition, in which shifts in relative capabilities generate systemic instability and incentives for competition (Gilpin, 1981; Mearsheimer, 2001). More recent assessments suggest that the implications of AI for strategic stability remain contested and unresolved (Horowitz, 2026).

Kania (2017) shows how Chinese military thinking has interpreted AI as part of a broader transformation in military affairs. RAND's recent work on strategic competition in the age of AI highlights the risks of time compression, automation bias, and escalation under uncertainty (Black et al., 2024). The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC, 2021; 2024) similarly stresses the need to preserve meaningful human control in the use of force.

The strength of this literature is its attention to operational risk. It shows why AI matters for deterrence, command and control, targeting, intelligence, surveillance, and crisis stability. Its main limitation is that it often privileges high-end military applications and the US-China dyad. It pays less attention to states that shape AI governance through regulation, safety diplomacy, and institutional design. Consequently, it risks treating the AI race as a purely material competition.

2.3 Regulatory Power and AI Governance

A second body of literature examines AI through regulation and governance. Bradford (2020) demonstrates how regulatory power can travel beyond the territory of the rule-maker when markets and institutions adopt external standards. This distinction parallels Nye's (2011) argument that power increasingly operates through attraction, institutions, and agenda-setting rather than coercion alone. This logic is increasingly relevant in AI governance, especially after the adoption of the EU Artificial Intelligence Act, Regulation (EU) 2024/1689, and the UN High-level Advisory Body's final report on global AI governance (European Union, 2024; United Nations, 2024). Recent

studies on adaptive and operational AI governance further argue that static regulatory regimes are insufficient for fast-moving frontier systems (Reuel and Undheim, 2024; Ritchie, Anderljung and Rachman, 2025).

The merit of the governance literature is that it explains how influence can emerge from standards, certification, assurance, and institutional trust rather than from military capability alone. Its limitation is that it sometimes underestimates the coercive and dual-use dimensions of AI. Governance frameworks can stabilise international relations only if they interact with states that possess strong material capabilities. This creates a problem of linkage between material power and regulatory legitimacy.

2.4 Research gap and Problem Statement

The literature therefore suffers from a fragmentation problem. Security studies explains why AI may destabilise the strategic environment but often overemphasises military competition. Governance studies explain why standards and rules matter, but often under connects regulation to hard security and power transitions. Existing approaches also give insufficient attention to middle and small states that influence the AI order without possessing superpower-level material resources.

This study addresses that gap by comparing five structurally different states through a common analytical framework derived from the Global Institute for National Capability (GINC) 2025 dataset. The problem addressed is not only which state is ahead in AI, but how different combinations of material and normative capacity shape international security. The article therefore contributes to debates on strategic stability by showing that the AI race is simultaneously a competition over capabilities and a competition over the rules governing those capabilities.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative methodology informed by Most Different Systems Design (MDSD). The cases differ significantly in political regime type, state-market configuration, geopolitical position, and strategic culture. The United States is a federal liberal democracy with private-sector-led innovation and a deeply institutionalised defence AI apparatus. China is a party-state with centralised coordination and civil-military fusion. The United Kingdom is a post-Brexit middle power seeking regulatory and safety leadership. France operates within EU institutions while preserving traditions of strategic autonomy. Singapore is a small city-state that compensates for material constraints through governance innovation.

The common variable across all cases is AI as a strategic power vector. Case selection was guided by the GINC (2025) National AI Strategies dataset and three criteria: demonstrated leadership in computing, strategic investment, or defence integration; existence of consolidated national AI strategies or institutional AI policy frameworks; and geopolitical relevance in norm-setting, technical standards, or global governance.

The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, national AI strategies and supporting institutional reports were identified. Second, cases were standardised across six comparative dimensions: computing infrastructure, chip ecosystem, safety and governance, standards diplomacy, public-sector delivery, and defence integration. Third, the cases were interpreted transversally to identify whether their influence is primarily material, normative, or hybrid.

The method has limitations. It does not claim to establish deterministic causality or produce a formal quantitative index. Its purpose is interpretive comparison. A further limitation is source bias: official strategies present policy aspirations and may understate weaknesses, political trade-offs, or implementation gaps. To mitigate this risk, official documents are read alongside academic literature and institutional reports.

4. Case Studies

4.1 China

China's New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan positions AI as central to national security, economic growth, and global leadership, with the stated ambition of becoming the world's leading AI innovation centre by 2030 (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2017). The strategy reflects a state-coordinated model in which basic research, applied innovation, talent policy, data platforms, and military modernisation are integrated into a long-term national project.

China scores strongly in computing infrastructure and defence integration because AI is embedded in broader industrial and military modernisation. Yet it faces constraints in the chip ecosystem, particularly as export controls affect access to advanced semiconductors and manufacturing equipment (Chan et al., 2025). Its

governance model is strong domestically but less transferable internationally in liberal institutional settings. China therefore represents material AI power: scale, coordination, and defence integration are its strengths, while regulatory legitimacy outside its strategic sphere remains a limitation.

4.2 United States

The United States presents the most complex case. On the civilian side, America's AI Action Plan frames AI leadership as a national competitiveness and security imperative, prioritising accelerated innovation, infrastructure expansion, and international AI leadership (Executive Office of the President, 2025). The plan favours private-sector dynamism and a deregulatory orientation, reflecting the US advantage in frontier firms, cloud platforms, and semiconductor ecosystems.

On the defence side, AI has already been institutionalised through the Department of Defense (DoD), the Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Office (CDAO), and programmes associated with surveillance, decision support, and autonomous systems (Department of Defense, 2018; Department of Defense, 2023). This creates a duality: the United States combines exceptional material power with regulatory ambiguity. Its civilian model prioritises speed and market leadership, while its military model embeds AI into strategic organisation. This duality gives the United States unmatched capability but complicates predictability for allies and competitors. The NSCAI (2021) final report had already framed AI leadership as a national security imperative, consolidating the institutional consensus that later shaped both civilian and defence strategies.

4.3 United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's National AI Strategy sets a ten-year ambition to become a global AI superpower through investment, diffusion, and governance (HM Government, 2021). Its Defence Artificial Intelligence Strategy seeks to make defence AI-ready while upholding standards, values, and trustworthiness (Ministry of Defence, 2022). The British model is therefore organised around pro-innovation governance rather than material dominance.

The UK scores highly in safety, governance, and standards diplomacy. It does not match the United States or China in compute or semiconductor control, but it has sought influence through AI safety institutions, assurance, and international convening power. This makes the UK a regulatory power whose strategic value lies in shaping the conditions under which AI systems are tested, trusted, and deployed.

4.4 France

France represents a hybrid model. Its strategy combines sovereign material investment with European regulatory legitimacy. The expansion of the Jean Zay supercomputer and its integration into the European AI Factories initiative strengthen France's position in sovereign computing (CNRS, 2025; EuroHPC JU, 2025). In defence, the Loi de Programmation Militaire 2024-2030 and programmes such as SCORPION connect AI to command-and-control, collaborative combat, cyber defence, and robotics (Ministère des Armées, 2023).

France scores highly in computing, governance, and defence integration, but its semiconductor base remains less autonomous than its computing ambitions. Its distinctive contribution is mediation: it links material autonomy to EU regulatory legitimacy and human oversight. France therefore demonstrates that material and normative power are not mutually exclusive.

4.5 Singapore

Singapore's National AI Strategy 2.0 frames AI as a public good and emphasises a whole-of-nation approach to capability building, public trust, and international relevance (SNDGO, 2023). Singapore lacks the material scale of the United States or China, but it has developed governance instruments such as AI Verify and the Model AI Governance Framework for Generative AI, which operate as exportable regulatory tools (IMDA and AI Verify Foundation, 2024).

Singapore scores highly in safety, governance, and standards diplomacy, while its compute, chip ecosystem, and defence integration remain comparatively limited. Its importance lies in demonstrating that small states can influence global AI governance by converting trust, certification, and policy design into strategic assets.

5. Analysis of Results

5.1 Two Power Models

The comparative analysis reveals two coexisting power models. Material AI power is centred on technological sovereignty, computing infrastructure, semiconductor access, and defence integration. It is most visible in the

United States, China, and France. Normative AI power is centred on governance diplomacy, ethical frameworks, assurance tools, and standards. It is most visible in the United Kingdom and Singapore. France occupies a mediating position because it combines sovereign capacity with EU regulatory legitimacy.

This finding challenges the assumption that AI power is equivalent to technological supremacy alone. In the emerging AI order, the capacity to shape the rules under which AI is developed and deployed can generate international influence even when material resources are comparatively limited. Table 1 summarises the strategic orientation and international security dimension of each national case.

Table 1: Comparative overview: national AI strategies and international dimensions

Country	Primary Document	Strategic Emphasis	International Dimension
China	New Generation AI Development Plan (2017)	State-coordinated civil-military integration; AI as engine of economic and military transformation; targeted 2030 global leadership.	Projects normative influence selectively; limited regulatory legitimacy in Western-led forums.
United Kingdom	National AI Strategy (2021)	Pro-innovation regulatory governance; public trust as strategic pillar; AI as democratic values project.	Standards diplomacy; international governance framed around democratic norms and ethical convergence.
United States	America's AI Action Plan (2025) + DoD AI Strategy (2018-2023)	Deregulatory civilian posture (private-sector-led innovation); CDAO, Project Maven, Replicator.	Containment of Chinese AI influence; semiconductor export controls; allies-facing AI frameworks.
France	LPM 2024-2030 + EuroHPC AI Factories	Material sovereignty (Jean Zay supercomputer, SCORPION); hybrid model; human-on-the-loop.	Mediating power within EU regulatory architecture; leadership in European AI governance standards.
Singapore	National AI Strategy 2.0 (2023)	Whole-of-Nation approach; AI literacy; pace-setter model in selected high-impact AI domains.	Exportable governance (AI Verify; Model AI Governance Framework for GenAI); regulatory foreign policy.

5.2 GINC-based Comparison

The following table presents an evaluative synthesis across the GINC-inspired dimensions used in this article. Scores indicate relative strength on a 1-5 scale and should be read as interpretive assessments rather than a formal quantitative index.

Table 2 extends the GINC-based comparison across all five cases, showing how different resource endowments and strategic priorities yield distinct profiles within the material-normative spectrum, from the material concentration of the United States and China to the governance orientation of the United Kingdom and Singapore, with France positioned between the two.

Table 2: Comparative evaluation of the five cases across GINC dimensions (1–5 scale)

Country	Compute	Chips	Safety	Standards	Public	Defence	Representative evidence
China	5/5	3/5	3/5	3/5	4/5	5/5	Civil-military fusion; New Generation AI Plan (2017); chip ecosystem constrained by export controls
United Kingdom	3/5	2/5	5/5	5/5	4/5	3/5	AI safety and standards diplomacy; National AI Strategy (2021); democratic-values framing
United States	5/5	5/5	2/5	4/5	3/5	5/5	Leading compute and chip control; CDAO, Project Maven, Replicator; deregulatory civilian posture
France	5/5	2/5	4/5	4/5	4/5	4/5	Jean Zay and EuroHPC AI Factories; SCORPION; EU regulatory legitimacy

Country	Compute	Chips	Safety	Standards	Public	Defence	Representative evidence
Singapore	3/5	1/5	5/5	4/5	4/5	2/5	AI Verify and Model AI Governance Framework for GenAI; limited material base

Note: Compute (computing infrastructure), Chips (chip ecosystem), Safety (safety and governance), Standards (standards and diplomacy), Public (public sector delivery), Defence (defence integration). Scores (1–5, higher is stronger) are the authors' evaluative synthesis, not a formal index.

5.3 Strategic Stability and Governance Implications

The results suggest that AI power is multidimensional and unevenly distributed. High material capacity strengthens operational efficiency but can reduce predictability when decision cycles accelerate faster than diplomatic communication. This is particularly relevant to military AI integration, where automation may compress crisis timelines and increase uncertainty over intent (Black et al., 2024).

Conversely, governance-oriented states can mitigate systemic risk by institutionalising trust, certification, assurance, and human oversight. The United Kingdom and Singapore show that regulatory capacity can become a strategic asset. Yet normative power has limits: it can stabilise only if material powers adopt or at least interoperate with governance frameworks. The central risk is therefore a gap between AI capability and AI governance. Table 3 synthesises this typology, mapping each type of AI power to its representative states and implications for strategic stability.

Table 3: Types of AI power and implications for strategic stability

Power Type	Representative States	Main Features	Stability Implication
Material	China, France, United States (DoD)	Technological sovereignty, defence integration, algorithmic deterrence	Increases military efficiency; amplifies escalation risk
Normative / Regulatory	United Kingdom, Singapore	Ethical governance, standards diplomacy, public trust	Mitigates risks; promotes institutional stability
Hybrid	France, United States (civilian)	Combines material investment with regulatory legitimacy	Context-dependent; depends on interagency coordination

6. Contributions, Practical Recommendations, and Future Research

6.1 Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

The article contributes to international security debates in four ways. First, it reframes AI power as a dual structure composed of material and normative dimensions. Second, it extends analysis beyond the US-China dyad by including middle and small powers. Third, it connects securitisation, strategic stability, and regulatory power in a unified framework. Fourth, it demonstrates that international AI stability depends not only on technological capacity but also on the institutionalisation of trust and human oversight.

Empirically, the article shows that national AI strategies are not merely innovation policies. They are security documents that reveal how states imagine power, vulnerability, and legitimacy in a digital order. The United States illustrates capability combined with regulatory ambiguity; China illustrates state-led material acceleration; the United Kingdom illustrates governance leadership; France illustrates hybrid sovereignty; and Singapore illustrates regulatory influence without material parity.

6.2 Practical Recommendations

The analysis points to a set of measures that states and international bodies could realistically pursue. Interoperable AI safety and assurance mechanisms are needed among allied and non-allied states alike — above all for systems embedded in critical infrastructure and defence-adjacent environments, where failures carry the highest costs. Military AI raises a related concern: meaningful human oversight must be preserved, and autonomous or semi-autonomous functions should be subject to transparent review procedures rather than treated as opaque black boxes. Because incidents will occur regardless of how careful individual states are, crisis communication channels for AI-enabled events — failures in automated decision-support, misinformation cascades, cyber operations — deserve the same institutional attention that nuclear hotlines once received.

There is also a distributive dimension: without deliberate capacity-building for small and middle powers, global AI governance risks being written by a handful of states and corporations. Export controls, finally, cannot operate in isolation from diplomacy; restrictions that deepen fragmentation without offering cooperative pathways for trust-building may prove counterproductive in the long run.

6.3 Future Research Directions

The framework developed here invites further testing. Applying the material-normative lens to a broader set of GINC cases — Germany, Japan, India, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, and the European Union as a collective regulatory actor — would show whether its explanatory power holds beyond the initial sample. The qualitative scoring used in this study could also be strengthened by pairing it with quantitative indicators: compute capacity, semiconductor imports, AI patents, defence procurement, and participation in standards-setting bodies all offer measurable proxies for the dimensions discussed above. Modern warfare constitutes a third, largely open question — how AI-enabled decision-support, autonomous systems, and information operations reshape deterrence, escalation dynamics, and command responsibility remains poorly understood. And it is still unclear whether emerging institutions such as the EU AI Act, the AI Safety Institutes, and UN governance initiatives can generate durable crisis-management rules for frontier AI, a question that only sustained empirical observation will answer.

7. Conclusion

This article examined how the technological race in Artificial Intelligence (AI) among the United States, China, the United Kingdom, France, and Singapore influences international security and the balance of power. The analysis confirms that AI does not simply add a new tool to existing power politics; it restructures how states project influence, define risks, and seek legitimacy. The core finding is that contemporary AI competition is organised around two coexisting models of power. Material power is based on technological sovereignty, computing capacity, semiconductor access, and defence integration. Normative power is based on regulation, safety institutions, standards diplomacy, and public trust. The United States and China dominate material competition, although the United States combines this dominance with a deregulatory civilian posture that generates strategic ambiguity. France occupies a hybrid position, combining sovereign computing and defence integration with European regulatory legitimacy. The United Kingdom and Singapore demonstrate that regulatory power can shape the AI order even without superpower-level material capabilities.

The article's main contribution is to move beyond the binary framing of the AI race as a US-China contest. It shows that middle and small powers are not passive observers. They can shape international security through governance innovation, regulatory diplomacy, and institutional trust. This matters because strategic stability in the AI era will depend not only on controlling advanced capabilities, but also on building shared rules for their development, deployment, and oversight. The policy implication is clear: innovation, security, and regulation must be treated as interdependent. Without credible governance mechanisms, the acceleration of AI capabilities may increase uncertainty, compress decision-making, and intensify crisis instability. Without material capability, governance frameworks may lack strategic traction. The emerging AI order will therefore be stabilised only if material powers and normative powers converge around interoperable standards, human oversight, and crisis-management institutions.

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Ethics Declaration: No ethical clearance was required for this research. The study is based exclusively on publicly available official documents, institutional reports, and published academic literature. No human participants, personal data, or sensitive materials were involved.

AI Declaration: Artificial intelligence was used as an auxiliary tool for linguistic revision, structure refinement, and formatting assistance. All research planning, theoretical framing, empirical interpretation, and final conclusions remain the responsibility of the authors.

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