ISSUE BRIEF

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THE PARIS AI ACTION SUMMIT 2025: GEOPOLITICAL DIVIDES AND REGULATORY DILEMMAS

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)

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The Artificial Intelligence (AI) Action Summit took place in Paris from February 10-11, 2025, which highlights a pivotal need for the ongoing discourse on global AI governance.[1] In the year 2023 and 2024 similar AI summits took place in the United Kingdom (UK)[2] and in South Korea[3] respectively, but they were predominantly more concentrated on speculative long-term AI risks as artificial general intelligence (AGI) and existential threats. The 2025 Paris Summit was focused on urgent real-world concerns which include the socio-economic consequences of AI, disruptions of market labours because of AI, algorithmic accountability, and the increasing strategic competition for AI leadership.

While the summit was marked by a large global presence, the final declaration lacked concrete, practical principles and recommendations. The summit concluded with the "Statement on Inclusive and Sustainable Artificial Intelligence for People and the Planet," which underscored the significance of human rights and the necessity of establishing an ethical AI framework. It reaffirmed broader commitments to reduce the global AI divide and foster an inclusive and ethical AI framework. Yet,

1 Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, "AI Action Summit (10 & 11 Feb. 2025)," France Diplomacy - Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, n.d., https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/digital-diplomacy/news/article/ai-action-summit-10-11-feb-2025.

2 "AI Safety Summit 2023 - Gov.Uk," November 2, 2023, https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/ai-safety-summit-2023.

3 Gregory C. Allen and Georgia Adamson, "The AI Seoul Summit," May 23, 2024, https://www.csis.org/analysis/ai-seoul-summit.

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the absence of binding mechanisms seemed to indicate that states would persist the development of AI policies on basis of their strategic interests, rather than adopting a unified global AI framework, at least for now.

Moreover, the Paris summit showed a significant geopolitical divide in approaches to AI policies rather than the promotion of a united global consensus.[4] On the one hand, the European Union, China and other allied nations recommended that comprehensive regulatory systems and rigorous safety protocols should be implemented that prioritize transparency of algorithms and offer ethical supervision. On the other hand, the United States and UK refused to sign the final communique over concerns that some of the rigid regulatory laws could hinder market innovation and economic competitiveness.

With an initial funding of $400 million, two notable initiatives were launched:

1. The establishment of an Observatory of the Energy Impact of AI.
2. The creation of the Current AI Foundation.

These efforts aimed to address environmental footprint of AI and for the promotion of ethical AI accessibility through public-private partnership.[5] However, these initiatives remained voluntary and lacked a firm stance on enforcement mechanisms, which limits the potential of achieving a coordinated and unified framework for global AI governance with a fair balance between security and scientific advancement. While there was broad international consensus on the importance of ethical AI principles, the absence of a unified binding global governance structure has led to divergent national approaches. This divergence underscores the likelihood that AI development will continue to be shaped more by geopolitical competition than by collective global action.

A textual analysis of previous summit statements from 2023 to 2025 reveals a significant transformation in the discourse on AI governance. The 2023 Bletchley Declaration was released during the AI Safety Summit held at Bletchley Park, UK, on November 1-2, 2023, and the 2024 Seoul Declaration, issued at the AI Seoul Summit in South Korea on 21 May 2024, were focused more on AI safety and existential hazards, while showing concerns about unchecked AI development. The Paris Declaration 2025, on the other hand, was more inclined towards economic governance and AI's

4 Al Jazeera, "Paris Ai Summit: Why Won't Us, Uk Sign Global Artificial Intelligence Pact?," Al Jazeera, February 12, 2025, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/2/12/paris-ai-summit-why-wont-us-uk-sign-global-artificial-intelligence-pact.

5 Jeremy Kahn, "France, Tech Companies Endow New $400 Million Foundation for Public Interest Ai," Fortune, February 10, 2025, https://fortune.com/2025/02/10/france-tech-companies-and-philanthropies-back-400-million-foundation-to-support-public-interest-ai/.

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involvement in defining global markets. Through a comparative textual analysis, following divergence in trends has been observed:

- In the Seoul Declaration, the term "safety" was referenced twenty times, and eighteen times in the Bletchley Declaration; however, in the Paris Summit Statement, it was only mentioned eight times.[6]

- In the earlier Declarations, "risk" was the primary subject matter, discussed nine times in the Seoul Declaration and fifteen times in the Bletchley Declaration; in the Paris Summit it was only given focus 3 times.

- Similarly, "Governance and Innovation" emerged as a central theme in the Paris summit, which has been focused on six to seven times, although it was given minimal importance in the previous Declarations.[7]

- In the final statement, there was no mention of substantial AI hazards or efforts to mitigate them[8] which shows a departure from existential risk narrative that was in focus with AI summits.

This transition reflects a strategic shift from perceiving 'AI solely as a potential threat' towards adopting a more balanced approach that integrates 'AI with economic and technological consideration'. The 2025 Paris AI Summit underscored a growing geopolitical divide in global AI governance by revealing three different blocs. It highlighted how national interests, economic competitiveness, and strategic autonomy continue to shape governance models, reinforcing global fragmentation in the AI domain. These blocs reflect divergent priorities towards regulatory approaches, which further complicates efforts towards a global unified AI governance framework.

1. The European Union: Ethical AI Regulations

The European Union has been at the forefront of the movement for promotion of an 'ethics-first approach', exemplified by the AI Act, which is first ever comprehensive AI legal framework that enforces "regulations and aims to foster trustworthy AI in Europe".[9] European leaders emphasised the importance of strict ethical standards and transparency of algorithms, highlighting that

6 Jovan Kurbalija, "The Paris Ai Summit: A Diplomatic Failure or a Strategic Success? - Diplo," February 12, 2025, https://www.diplomacy.edu/blog/the-paris-ai-summit-a-diplomatic-failure-or-a-strategic-success/.

7 Ibid.

8 Billy Perrigo/Paris, "U.s. Pushes for Less Ai Regulation at Paris Summit," TIME, February 11, 2025, https://time.com/7221384/ai-regulation-takes-backseat-paris-summit/.

9 "Ai Act | Shaping Europe's Digital Future," European Commission, August 1, 2024, https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/regulatory-framework-ai.

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uncontrolled AI development could further exacerbate privacy concerns of data and will promote socio-economic disparities.

2. The United States: Market-Driven AI Approach

The U.S. opposed the implementation of strict regulations, while identifying AI's potential as a transformational socioeconomic and strategic commodity. U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance, during his speech at the summit, said: "I'm not here this morning to talk about AI safety, which was the title of the conference a couple of years ago. I'm here to talk about AI opportunity." He further added that "the Trump administration cannot and will not accept foreign governments tightening the screws on U.S. tech companies."[10]

The U.S. approach reflects broader concerns about maintaining technological dominance and ensuring AI legislation remains flexible enough to allow rapid advancements without restrictions.

3. China: AI Governance and Strategic Development

The Chinese President Special Representative, Zhang Guoqing, in his address stated that "China is willing to work with other countries to promote development, safeguard security, share achievements in the field of artificial intelligence (AI), and jointly build a community with a shared future for mankind".[11] China also conducted an official side event on AI at same time, hosted by the China AI Development and Safety Association and the Shanghai Qi Zhi Institute in collaboration with the Institute for AI International Governance at Tsinghua University.[12] The event, titled "Progress in AI Technology and Its Applications" focused on promoting dialogues utilising international cooperation platforms to close the AI gap, guarantee mutual development.

China's AI governance model has also implemented a centralised AI approach which emphasises technological sovereignty and surveillance under control by the state.[13] This governmental oversight helps China to effectively balance innovation with intervention to ensure that AI development is in accordance with national security objectives, which has enabled China to develop AI capabilities rapidly.

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10 Perrigo/Paris, "U.s. Pushes for Less Ai Regulation at Paris Summit."

11 Global Times, "China Willing to Promote Ai Development with Other Countries: Chinese Vice Premier - Global Times," February 12, 2025, https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202502/1328281.shtml.

12 "'China Ai Development and Safety Association' Successfully Hosted an Official Side Event During the Paris Ai Action Summit-Institute for Ai International Governance Tsinghua University," February 12, 2025, https://aiig.tsinghua.edu.cn/en/info/1025/1461.htm.

13 Huw Roberts et al., "The Chinese Approach to Artificial Intelligence: An Analysis of Policy, Ethics, and Regulation," *AI & SOCIETY* 36, no. 1 (March 1, 2021): 59–77, https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-020-00992-2.

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Conclusion

The absence of a consensus among these key global actors has underscored the challenges associated with the development of a globally harmonised governance framework. Additionally, these diverse approaches towards AI models make it unlikely to formulate a unified regulatory model in the foreseeable future. The Paris Declaration has prioritised 'inclusive AI governance' but uncovers certain structural errors that undermine its effectiveness and adaptability. The objectives are mostly idealistic rather than being practical. The absence of a unified structure gives states leverage to interpret and execute AI policies according to their respective national interests. In order to establish effective regulatory frameworks, it is important to establish binding international regulatory framework that guarantee a commitment to ethical and safety guidelines by ensuring that future AI summits transition from just voluntary pledges to formal and legally binding instruments. Additionally, it is imperative to build public-private partnerships which will be helpful to engage the policy side with technical matters and to develop practical AI policies that can tackle both technical realities and regulatory concerns. The Paris AI Summit emphasised the essential need for a systematic and coordinated approach to AI governance that overcomes political differences and national interest. Global powers must establish a universally acceptable regulatory framework on priority, as the 2026 AI Summit approaches in order to address the unpredictable challenges posed by AI development

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