

Policy Brief

Series Information:

This policy brief is part of the EPINOVA Policy Brief Series on AI-Enabled Warfare, Sustainability, and Global Security Governance.

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Wu, S.-Y. (2025). *Artificial intelligence as national power: Implications of the 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy* (EPINOVA-2025-02-PB). EPINOVA Policy Brief Series on AI-Enabled Warfare, Sustainability, and Global Security Governance. Global AI Governance Research Center, EPINOVA LLC.

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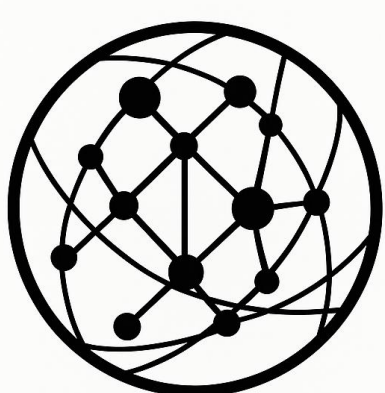
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Artificial Intelligence as National Power: Implications of the 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy

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Key Findings:

- **AI is treated as a foundational state capability**, not an emerging technology.
- **AI governance is reframed** from ethical regulation to control of access, supply chains, and standards.
- **U.S. AI strategy is alliance-centric**, using technology and standards to bind partners and exclude rivals.
- **Global AI governance is fragmenting**, with national security exceptions becoming structural rather than temporary.
- **Primary AI risks are increasingly political and institutional**, not purely technical.

1. AI's Strategic Repositioning in the 2025 NSS

The NSS consistently situates AI alongside nuclear deterrence, space systems, quantum computing, autonomous weapons, and energy infrastructure. This positioning signals that AI is understood as a **cross-domain force multiplier** that underpins both military effectiveness and economic resilience (White House, 2025).

Rather than isolating AI as a sectoral innovation policy, the strategy embeds it across three interlinked domains:

- **Military power:** autonomy, decision-speed advantage, and cost-efficient defense systems;
- **Economic security:** productivity growth, reindustrialization, and supply-chain resilience;
- **Technological sovereignty:** intellectual property protection and standards-setting dominance.

The strategic implication is clear: **loss of AI leadership is treated as loss of national power**, not merely competitive disadvantage.

2. From AI Regulation to AI State Capacity

A defining characteristic of the 2025 NSS is the collapse of traditional boundaries between national security, economic policy, and industrial strategy. AI appears throughout the document as an enabling infrastructure rather than a regulated object.

This reflects the emergence of an **AI-State Complex**, in which:

- AI systems shape how state capacity is organized,
- economic competitiveness becomes inseparable from security readiness,
- and technological leadership functions as deterrence.

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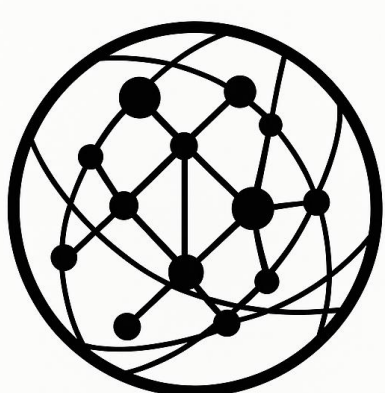
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In this framework, AI development is no longer primarily a private-sector or innovation concern, but a **state capacity problem**.

3. Strategic Silence on AI Risk Governance

The NSS devotes minimal attention to themes central to international AI governance debates, such as algorithmic transparency, explainability, or systemic AI risk. This absence should be interpreted as **strategic silence**, not policy neglect.

Within a national security framework:

- AI risks are managed internally, not negotiated multilaterally;
- ethical constraints are subordinated to operational effectiveness;
- governance is treated as an administrative function rather than a global norm-setting exercise.

This marks a shift away from universal AI governance toward **sovereign, capability-driven approaches**.

4. AI as a Tool of Geopolitical Alignment

The NSS explicitly frames AI cooperation and advanced technology sharing as instruments of diplomacy and alliance-building, particularly in the Indo-Pacific and Middle East. Access to U.S. AI ecosystems, infrastructure, and standards becomes a mechanism for strategic alignment (White House, 2025).

AI thus functions as a **political asset**:

- selectively shared to strengthen partnerships,
- withheld to constrain adversaries,
- and embedded in broader economic and security agreements.

This approach transforms AI from a neutral technology into a **structuring force in international relations**.

5. Standards as Long-Term Structural Power

The strategy's emphasis on ensuring that "U.S. technology and U.S. standards, particularly in AI, drive the world forward" underscores the centrality of standards as instruments of power (White House, 2025).

AI standards shape:

- interoperability,
- platform dependence,
- and long-term institutional lock-in.

In this sense, standards operate as **digital-era equivalents of postwar financial or trade institutions**, embedding influence beyond immediate policy cycles.

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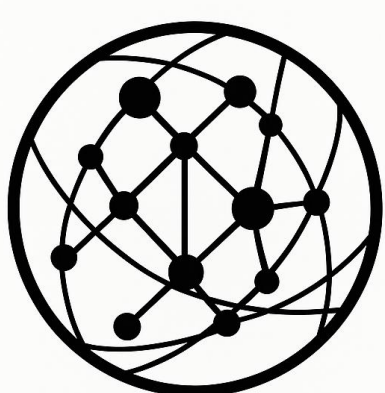
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6. Entering the Post-Breakthrough Phase of AI Development

The NSS assumes AI capability as a given. It does not debate feasibility, social disruption, or speculative future risks. Instead, strategic focus shifts to:

- who controls AI deployment,
- how benefits are captured domestically,
- and how diffusion is constrained internationally.

This signals entry into a **post-breakthrough phase**, where AI development is primarily institutional and geopolitical rather than technical.

7. Implications for Global AI Governance

7.1 Fragmentation Is Structural, Not Transitional

The NSS implicitly acknowledges that global, universal AI governance regimes are unlikely to hold under conditions of strategic competition. Export controls, alliance-based technology blocs, and national security exemptions are becoming permanent features.

7.2 Political Risk Supersedes Technical Risk

As AI becomes embedded in state capacity, the dominant risks shift:

- from model failure to institutional concentration,
- from algorithmic bias to governance asymmetry,
- from technical error to political lock-in.

These risks demand analytical frameworks that go beyond traditional AI ethics or compliance models.

Reference

White House. (2025). *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (November 2025). Washington, DC.