International Threats from a First-AGI Nation

If one country achieves true artificial general intelligence (AGI) before all others, it could upend global power dynamics. As Russian President Vladimir Putin warned, "the one who becomes the leader [in AI] will be the ruler of the world"[cirsd.org]. Experts predict an AGI-first state would enjoy massive first-mover advantages. For example, RAND analysts describe AGI as a potential "decisive wonder weapon," able to invent breakthroughs (new energy sources, advanced weapon designs, etc.) that suddenly tilt the balance of power[rand.org]. In effect, the leading AGI nation could leapfrog rivals much as the U.S. did with the first atomic bomb – an outcome RAND likens to a nuclear-style arms race[rand.orgrand.org]. This report examines how that AGI power might exploit its lead – economically, militarily, technologically, and diplomatically – and how other nations might respond. We also consider threats like espionage and proxy conflict, the specter of "AI colonialism" or digital feudalism, and implications for global governance and alliances. Historical analogies (nuclear monopoly, colonial empires, Cold War proxy wars) help us frame possible scenarios.

First-Mover Strategic Advantages

The primary impact of a single AGI-leader would be its *strategic leverage*. With AGI it could unilaterally solve complex problems (e.g. designing novel technologies or optimizing entire industries), far outpacing any incremental AI gains in other countries. RAND notes this could yield a "significant first-mover advantage" as AGI brings a **sudden, decisive technical breakthrough**[rand.org]. In practical terms, an AGI-equipped nation might, for example, discover efficient fusion power, create revolutionary biotechnology, or decode all existing encryption schemes. Each such advance would be a strategic "wonder weapon" that rivals cannot match immediately. This mirrors history: the U.S. 1945 nuclear monopoly gave it decades of geopolitical clout, and even after other states caught up the Cold War nuclear race defined global security[rand.org]. Similarly, AGI could allow the first country to set the terms of competition – essentially shaping the emerging technological order on its own terms.

Once AGI exists, its leader could rapidly improve the intelligence system itself (via self-modification) and integrate AGI into every sector of society. Military forces would gain upgraded command-and-control and autonomous systems, industry would see near-instant research and development, and even diplomacy could be guided by superhuman forecasting models. Other nations might struggle to keep pace. Even as they adopt their own AI, they would be playing catch-up to the innovations already unleashed by the first mover. In RAND's words, global institutions' "technological adoption capacity" and "cultural factors" may lag behind the sudden jump that AGI provides[rand.orgrand.org]. In short, an AGI-first country could effectively *set the pace* of future advances, forcing others to react to its agenda rather than pursue independent strategies.

Economic and Industrial Domination

In the economic realm, an AGI superpower could **monopolize productivity and innovation**. It could automate manufacturing, logistics, and services so efficiently that its industries flood world markets with cheap goods and services. Advanced AGI planning would enable it to corner key supply chains (critical minerals, computer chips, etc.) and optimize trade to its benefit. One recent analysis warns that if AGI (and advanced AI) "remains in the hands of few nations," it could "entrench economic dominance and create global monopolies over intelligence, innovation, and industrial production"[cirsd.org]. In concrete terms, this might look like one country exporting AI-optimized factories or agriculture technology, forcing importers into dependency. It could undercut foreign competitors by dumping AI-enhanced products or by setting industry standards that only its own firms can meet.

- *AI-optimized industries:* The AGI state's factories and supply chains could self-improve constantly, lowering costs for everything from consumer electronics to heavy machinery. Rival companies would struggle to keep up without equivalent AGI.
- *Market control:* Using AGI's predictive power, the leader could game global financial markets and trade negotiations, imposing sanctions or tariffs that hurt opponents.
- *Resource leverage:* By controlling AI design, software platforms and essential hardware (AI chips, data centers), the AGI nation gains leverage over other economies. Foreign governments might be forced to accept restrictive technology agreements or revenue-sharing deals.

These dynamics would exacerbate global inequality. For example, major industries in weaker economies could collapse under competition with AGI-powered products, leading to unemployment and loss of fiscal capacity. At the extreme, countries might become "digital vassals" – suppliers of raw materials or cheap labor – to the AGI superpower's economy. The net effect is reminiscent of colonial-era trade imbalances, except that the "steering wheel" is coded algorithms and data rather than gunboats. Without countermeasures, the AGI leader could dominate world markets and set a de facto global economic order anchored on its technological superiority[cirsd.org].

Military and Technological Power

In the military domain, AGI could **transform warfare overnight**. The first-AGI country might deploy autonomous weapon systems, cyberdefense and offense AI, and rapid decision-making algorithms that dwarf any human capability. For instance, it could use AGI-driven drones or robots with superior coordination, or simulate millions of battle scenarios instantly to optimize strategy. RAND highlights that as AGI is adopted, it "could upend military balances by uplifting a variety of capabilities" – altering the classic advantages of stealth versus detection or of quantity versus precision[rand.org]. In practice, even states with smaller conventional forces could become formidable: their AI could neutralize or predict enemy actions with great speed.

At the same time, AGI would shrink the learning curve for developing new weapons. (RAND warns that advanced AI makes it easier for non-experts to design chemical, biological or cyber weapons[rand.org].) While this is a global risk, an AGI leader could engineer both cutting-edge systems for itself and deny others access to the know-how. Militaries that fall behind AGI might find their doctrines outdated. They could be forced into costly arms races or become deterred from action altogether (echoing the idea of nuclear deterrence).

In addition, the AGI nation's intelligence and cybersecurity would be vastly stronger. It could use AGI to break foreign encryption, predict insurgencies, or harden its own defenses. Its technological edge would make any direct confrontation extremely asymmetrical. Historical

analogies help frame this: just as the U.S. nuclear monopoly imposed a "missile gap" for other powers, an AGI gap could similarly skew strategic stability. Rival states might try to secure alliances or deploy their own high-tech defenses, but the first mover would command the underlying tech stack. In sum, the AGI superpower could project force and protect itself with an order-of-magnitude technological advantage that others might not feasibly match for years.

Diplomatic and Information Coercion

Beyond brute force, AGI offers subtle instruments of dominance. The AGI state could use **mass surveillance and propaganda at scale** to influence other societies. For example, it might generate hyper-personalized disinformation campaigns, flooding social media in rival countries with AI-crafted content to sow discord or bias elections. RAND specifically warns that AGI could "manipulate public opinion through advanced propaganda techniques, threatening democratic decisionmaking"[rand.org]. In diplomacy, AGI agents could parse an opponent's intentions from vast data, predict their reactions, or even pose as human diplomats with persuasive arguments.

Information control is another lever. With its technical edge, the AGI nation could threaten to disable internet connectivity or critical servers in countries that resist its demands. Conversely, it could offer "AI governance" aid: broadcasting the illusion of helping with AI safety while binding recipients under its rules. Even international negotiations might be skewed – the AGI country could outmodel and outforecast other delegations, giving it undue bargaining power.

Think of this like the extension of Cold War-era propaganda and censorship into a new realm. Where once superpowers created radio broadcasts and television spin, now an AGI power could flood global communications with deepfakes and tailored narratives. It might also abuse cyber-tools to blackmail foreign leaders (exposing private data or fabricating incriminating "evidence" via AI). All told, the border between military power and information power blurs: digital coercion through AI becomes as forceful as any missile. This threatens the sovereignty of other nations' political systems and could destabilize or even overthrow governments covertly.

Espionage, Sabotage, and Proxy Warfare

Unsurprisingly, other states would *not* accept an AGI monopoly passively. In response, espionage and indirect conflict would intensify. Intelligence agencies would target AGI programs relentlessly. Experts predict AGI's emergence will make it "the #1 priority of every intelligence agency in the world" (preparing infiltrations of labs and infrastructure)[situational-awareness.ai]. In practical terms, rival powers might pour billions into hacking and stealing AGI code or model weights, akin to wartime industrial espionage. (Historically, Soviet spies attempted to steal nuclear secrets; one can imagine cyber-penetration of AGI supercomputers next.)

Sabotage is another risk. Competitors could attempt to incapacitate AGI facilities – through physical attack on data centers or by planting malware in software updates. Because AGI is software-driven, an insider threat or supply-chain attack could cripple the advantage (similar to how Stuxnet sabotaged Iran's centrifuges). Nations might also support proxy conflicts: funding friendly non-state groups that use stolen or crude AI tools to undermine rivals. For example, an AGI nation could back AI-equipped militias or drone swarms in a third country to pressurize an opponent, without direct war.

Proxy cyber-warfare would likely surge. With AGI, a minor incident (like a manipulated stock market plunge or a sabotaged power grid) could be magnified at lightning speed, making plausible-deniability attacks extremely dangerous. This "gray zone" conflict – using AI as a force multiplier for covert ops – becomes more potent. In all these ways, AGI security would be tightly contested. Non-AGI states would scramble to secure their own labs (analogous to "lock down the labs" proposals) and to detect any foreign penetration.

AI-Enabled Colonialism and Digital Feudalism

A powerful AGI nation could effectively establish **digital colonialism** over the rest of the world. If its technology, data infrastructure and AI platforms dominate, many countries may become dependent on "foreign AI" to run everything from phone networks to agriculture. Chatham House analysts warn that if AI development is concentrated in major powers, it "risks creating a new form of digital colonialism, particularly in Africa and other parts of the Global South"[chathamhouse.org]. In other words, the AGI state's values and language could be baked into the software used everywhere – marginalizing local customs and even causing cultural "fragmentation" much as classic colonialism did[chathamhouse.org].

Likewise, one can imagine **digital feudalism**: large technology lords (in effect, a bureaucracy of the AGI state or its corporations) extracting data and rent from vassal communities. The first country might leverage its AGI to run global digital infrastructure, then levy "tolls" – for example, charging fees or conditions for access to AGI-based services. Developing countries could be compelled to supply cheap data and labor (for AI training) in return for AI-driven economic development, echoing colonial extraction. A commentator describes today's trends as "AI colonialism," where "the benefits accrue to a select few while the burdens are externalized to the most vulnerable"[e-ir.info].

Practically, this might look like global reliance on one nation's AI assistants or platforms. All non-leader states would be consumers of foreign AI: their privacy could be compromised (data handed over to the AGI power), and they might be locked into proprietary systems. Think of it as outsourcing sovereignty to algorithms. Without safeguards, local languages and media could be drowned out by AI tuned to the leader's culture. To avoid this, experts emphasize embedding diverse values into AI and strengthening regional AI capabilities. Otherwise, history's lesson is clear: unchecked power – whether on land or in cyberspace – tends to subjugate others.

Global Governance, Sovereignty, and Alliances

The AGI monopoly scenario would throw existing international institutions into disarray. There is no ready global framework to limit one country's AGI. Some have floated new ideas (e.g. OpenAI founders and the UN Secretary-General have suggested creating an "IAEA for superintelligence"[carnegieendowment.org]), but geopolitical reality complicates such moves. Already, core players differ sharply on digital policy. The U.S. champions a mostly market-led approach, Europe favors strong human-rights constraints, and China enforces state control over technology[carnegieendowment.org]. These rival visions – and underlying distrust – mean that any AI treaty or regime complex would be deeply fragmented.

In practice, nations might vie to reassert **sovereignty** in the digital age. We could see tightened export controls on AI hardware and software, new "AI sovereignty" laws, or fortified national infrastructures (the EU's push for a "European cloud" is a nascent example). States may band together: technology alliances (akin to NATO) might form among like-minded AI powers to pool R&D and set shared standards. Conversely, isolated or technologically lagging countries might align themselves as neutral zones, granting the AGI leader special privileges in exchange for security or development aid.

The competition could also reshape traditional alliances. Allies might pressure each other over AI strategy (for example, a U.S. ally using Chinese AI tools might face U.S. ire). Strategic partnerships could split into "AI blocs," with rival groups following different tech ecosystems. The balance of power might shift: a military alliance that includes the AGI leader would be far more formidable than one that does not. Overall, the global order could realign rapidly. Just as the nuclear age created the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Cold War blocs, the AGI era might produce new treaties (or arms-race dynamics) over AI governance. But as RAND cautions, in a high-stakes rush "perceptions of AGI's feasibility and first-mover advantage" may drive policies more than the actual tech itself[rand.org] – meaning miscalculations could precipitate conflict rather than cooperation.

Case Studies and Scenario Modeling

The following scenarios illustrate plausible outcomes if one country achieves AGI first. They draw on historical precedents (nuclear arms race, colonial scramble, cyber conflicts) to contextualize the possibilities:

Scenario	Description	Historical Analogues
Hegemonic AGI Empire	The AGI nation aggressively uses its power. It floods global markets with AI-made goods, enforces digital dependencies, and threatens rivals with its superior military AI. Other states endure economic hardship or coerced alliances.	British colonial trade monopolies in the 1800s; U.S. nuclear monopoly (1945–49)
Global AI Arms Race	Alarmed by one's lead, rival states (or blocs) rush to develop their own AGIs in secrecy. Tensions spike as espionage, cyber-sabotage, and proxy skirmishes multiply. Ultimately the world looks bipolar or multipolar in AI power.	Cold War arms race; emerging internet/cyber rivalries (US vs China)
Collaborative Transition	International pressure (UN or coalition) forces sharing or joint governance of AGI. The leader agrees to distribute benefits (medicine, AI tools) under a multilateral framework, in exchange for safety guarantees. Risk is managed collectively.	Averted nuclear war through treaties (NPT, IAEA inspections); climate accords or WHO collaborations

In the **Hegemonic** case, the AGI-superpower's monopolistic approach resembles 19th-century empires carving spheres of influence. The dependent states might resist nonviolently (analogous to post-colonial independence movements) or band together into a counter-weighting alliance. In the **Arms Race** case, fear of falling behind leads to intense competition – akin to the 1950s nuclear race – and this may be the most unstable outcome, since high stress can trigger miscalculations[rand.org]. Finally, the **Collaborative** scenario is optimistic: it assumes early recognition that AGI is a global public good and that institutions can be built (perhaps echoing the 1950s Atoms for Peace initiative or the global IPCC model) to share benefits and avoid catastrophe[carnegieendowment.org]. However, achieving this requires rare international unity.

Conclusion

A first-AGI country would wield a fundamentally new kind of power. Economically and militarily, it could leap ahead of rivals in ways that historical analogies (nuclear or colonial dominance) only partially capture. Other nations would face acute vulnerabilities: from mass unemployment to strategic blackmail, from digital surveillance to existential propaganda. To protect themselves, states would likely mobilize – accelerating their own AI development, forming alliances or treaties, and hardening defenses against cyber and covert attacks. The global order would be profoundly tested: issues of digital sovereignty, equitable governance, and international law would rise to the forefront. Without strong international cooperation (which historical precedent shows is hard in times of rivalry), the world risks a fracturing into AI-powered blocs or a digital "feudal" hierarchy where the AGI leader dominates. Policymakers and strategists are thus urged to plan now – drawing on lessons from past technological revolutions – to mitigate threats and steer toward a more stable, balanced outcome.

Sources: Analysis synthesizes insights from think-tank and academic reports on AGI security and policy[cirsd.orgrand.orgrand.orgcirsd.orgrand.orgchathamhouse.orge-ir.infochathamhouse.orgcarnegieendowment.orgrand.org], including RAND Corporation, Carnegie Endowment, and Chatham House studies, as well as related strategy literature.

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