# An Airbus for AI

Teaser: Diane and her co-authors argue for a third way frontier lab for AI—built from existing national labs and national champions.

[airbus.jpg]

In the 1960s, Airbus was born from a recognition that no single European company could compete with the scale and dominance of Boeing. The solution, put together by the French prime minister and the German chancellor (and later their Spanish and British counterparts), was cooperation: a multilateral industrial consortium now known as Airbus. And today, Airbus isn't just competitive—it's the largest aerospace manufacturer in the world.

In AI, we face a similar landscape. A few U.S.-based companies dominate the frontier. China is building its own parallel ecosystem with full state backing. The rest of the world—Europe, Canada, Japan, Australia, Singapore—is investing billions of public funds into sovereign AI strategies but still struggling to achieve global relevance at the frontier.

We believe there is another path.

## A Third Way for AI

In a new policy brief, computer scientist **Joshua Tan**, product manager **Brandon Jackson**, policy thinker **Robin Berjon**, and economist **Diane Coyle** make the case for a *third way* in frontier AI:an international, public-private frontier lab built on democratic values, multilateral coordination, and open infrastructure.

They call it an Airbus for AI.

This isn't just a metaphor. The proposal outlines a concrete institutional model: a consortium made up of national AI labs, universities, public cloud providers, and mission-aligned companies from across several countries. The lab would be collectively governed and jointly funded. Its outputs—models, data, and tools—would be released as open infrastructure with appropriate safeguards and international oversight.

Critically, the lab wouldn't try to outpace Silicon Valley or Beijing on raw scale. Instead, it would pursue a differentiated strategy:

- **Training frontier models in the open**, with transparency by default
- **Prioritizing public and public sector use-cases**, from education to language preservation
- **Experimenting with governance and alignment** at the institutional level
- **Creating a long-term home for talent** working on public-interest AI

In short: a lab that treats AI not as a product to be sold, but as infrastructure to be shared. In other words: public AI.

## Why Now?

The timing is urgent. Across Europe and other middle-power countries, governments are spending heavily on national AI efforts—but coordination remains weak. Most funding goes to either small-scale startups or big-ticket industrial alliances, with little focus on creating shared, sovereign AI capacity.

Meanwhile, many open-source model developers are hitting walls. Training costs are rising fast. Compute access is uneven. Foundation model development is drifting toward opacity again. And many public institutions still feel sidelined from the frontier—either because they lack scale or because the dominant narrative says only Silicon Valley can lead.

This is a dangerous myth.

As the brief argues, the world needs alternatives. Not just for reasons of competition, but for legitimacy, resilience, and equity. A multilateral lab can provide that—by demonstrating that AI can be a public good, and that democratic countries can build together.

## Next Steps

The Airbus for AI proposal is already informing discussions with policymakers, national labs, and research coalitions. Public AI is now actively incubating the idea—supporting partners in designing the first concrete steps:

- a shared compute backbone across national labs
- open model development in public infrastructure
- joint procurement, co-funding, and alignment research across borders

It's early. But the momentum is real.
If you're a researcher, policymaker, or institution working in this space—we'd love to talk.
If you're curious, skeptical, or excited—read the brief and tell us what you think.

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📄 **Read the full policy brief:**

**Airbus for AI: A Third Way for Frontier AI**

By Diane Coyle, Magnus Sahlgren, Nick Vincent, and Joshua Tan

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