



Artificial Intelligence to Super Intelligence: Semantics, Science, or Strategy?

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Abstract

Over the past decade, artificial intelligence (AI) has advanced from narrow pattern-recognition systems to general-purpose models that write software, solve advanced mathematical problems and support scientific discovery, and it is now transforming sectors from healthcare and education to finance, agriculture and national security. Against this backdrop, on 22 September 2026, during his address to the 81st United Nations General Assembly in New York City, U.S. President Donald Trump announced that U.S. government documents would henceforth refer to artificial intelligence as Super Intelligence. This editorial examines the renaming through three lenses: semantics, science and strategy. Drawing on the Stanford AI Index 2026, the International AI Safety Report 2026 and recent international public-opinion surveys, the analysis explores why the field adopted the word artificial and whether the new label is more accurate; it contrasts the proposed label with the established technical meaning of superintelligence and with current evidence on AI capabilities; and it considers the renaming in the context of United States-China competition, domestic public sentiment, and evolving policy priorities. It also considers the implications for defense, where capability-based evaluation matters most. Current AI capabilities remain impressive but uneven, and terminology surrounding AI has already become increasingly fluid across industry, media, and policy discourse. The analysis argues that the available public evidence is consistent with strategic considerations, while recognizing that political intent cannot be established from public statements alone. It also discusses how the terminology may affect scientific communication, education, and policymaking. The editorial concludes with recommendations for terminology, science communication, and editorial practice.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; superintelligence; AI terminology; AI semantics; AI policy; AI governance; AI safety; capability evaluation; public trust; super intelligence; defense AI

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence has advanced substantially over the past decade, with major changes in model capability, scale, and deployment. The breakthrough of deep convolutional networks in image recognition in 2012 [1] was followed by DeepMind's AlphaGo defeating a world champion at the game of Go in 2016 [2], and by the transformer architecture in 2017 [3], which became the foundation of today's large language models. The public

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release of ChatGPT in November 2022 [4] brought generative AI into everyday use, and in 2024 the Nobel Prizes in Physics and Chemistry recognized foundational work on artificial neural networks and the AI-based prediction of protein structures [5, 6]. By 2025, reasoning models and AI agents were solving competition-level mathematics and completing multi-step software tasks with limited human supervision [7, 8].

This progress is now reshaping many sectors. In healthcare, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration had authorized more than 1,600 AI-enabled medical devices as of September 2026 [9]. In science, AI systems predict the three-dimensional structure of proteins [10] and produce global weather forecasts that outperform leading operational systems on most evaluation targets [11]. In agriculture, deep learning models can identify crop diseases from images of plant leaves with high accuracy, supporting earlier intervention by farmers [12]. In business, 88% of surveyed organizations report using AI, and in education four in five university students use generative AI [7]. Finance, manufacturing, transport, public services and defense are undergoing similar change. The speed of this adoption makes the language used to describe AI consequential well beyond the research community.

Against this backdrop, on 22 September 2026, in an address to the United Nations General Assembly, U.S. President Donald Trump stated that artificial intelligence would henceforth be officially called *Super Intelligence* [13]. He argued that the word artificial makes the technology sound fake and that the new term would be used in U.S. government documents [14, 15]. In the same speech, he dismissed warnings about AI safety and cast the contest with China as a competition the United States must win [14].

It should be noted that this announcement came at the end of a short and rather unusual sequence of events. Three days earlier, on 19 September, the President had invited followers on social media to vote on three alternatives: Superior Intelligence, Extreme Intelligence and Supreme Intelligence [16, 17]. However, none of these options was chosen, and the name adopted on 22 September was not on the ballot at all [13, 14]. The idea itself is not new. At a Washington AI summit in July 2025, where his administration launched its AI Action Plan [18], he had already said he disliked the word artificial and wanted the name changed.

For clarity, this editorial distinguishes the administration's two-word expression *Super Intelligence* from the established technical term *superintelligence*. The former is a policy and administrative label; the latter refers to a class of AI capability discussed in the scientific and technical literature. The distinction is important because identical or near-identical labels can carry different meanings across policy, industry, and research contexts.

For many observers, the renaming may seem a matter of branding. The frustration behind it is also understandable, as the word artificial has long carried a sense of imitation, and this complaint is not unique to politicians. However, for the research community, the issue goes beyond branding. Superintelligence is not a neutral synonym; rather, it is a technical term with a specific and consequential meaning in the literature on AI capability and risk. When a near-identical expression is used as an administrative label for present-day AI systems, it can blur a distinction that researchers, funders and regulators use when discussing capability, risk and governance.

In this editorial, we ask a simple question: is the move from artificial intelligence to Super Intelligence mainly a matter of semantics, science or strategy? We examine each in turn, draw on recent international evidence on AI capability, adoption and public attitudes, consider the implications for defense, and close with policy recommendations and editorial guidance for Inspire Intelligence Journal.

1.1 Scope and Limitations

This is an editorial analysis rather than a systematic review or an empirical study. The argument relies on publicly available technical reports, policy documents, academic literature and public-opinion surveys current at the time of writing. Primary sources are used where available for official statements, while technical claims are anchored in major assessment reports. Because the surveys use different populations, wording and field dates, their percentages should not be interpreted as directly comparable. The discussion of political motives is necessarily inferential and is treated as interpretation rather than evidence of intent.

2. Semantics: Why “Artificial” in the First Place

The term artificial intelligence was introduced in the 1955 proposal for the Dartmouth Summer Research Project, written by John McCarthy, Marvin Minsky, Nathaniel Rochester and Claude Shannon [19]. The proposal set out the conjecture that every aspect of learning, or any other feature of intelligence, could in principle be described precisely enough for a machine to simulate it. In that context, the word *artificial* carried its older and more literal meaning, i.e., made by human skill as opposed to arising naturally. It did not mean fake, counterfeit or inferior. For example, an artificial heart valve is not a pretend valve but an engineered one.

The name has long had critics. Some researchers preferred machine intelligence, others computational intelligence, and in the field’s early years complex information processing also competed with it. Some critics have argued that intelligence overstates what these systems do, while others have argued that artificial understates it. These debates are longstanding. Scientific terminology is ordinarily shaped through scholarly use, professional standards, institutional practice and broader social adoption. Governments can nevertheless influence administrative terminology, which makes it important to distinguish official usage from scientific consensus.

The stated rationale for the new name is that artificial makes the technology sound fake [14]. The proposed replacement does not, however, address the same semantic dimension. It replaces a word that describes origin (made by humans) with a word that signals degree or rank (above or beyond). In other words, artificial concerns how something came to exist, whereas super invokes a comparison with existing human capability. The terms are therefore not interchangeable: replacing one with the other changes the property being described. The earlier September 2026 poll made this shift explicit, because superior, supreme and extreme are comparative or evaluative terms rather than neutral technical descriptions [16, 17].

3. Science: What Superintelligence Actually Means

The idea of a machine that surpasses human intelligence is almost as old as the field. Alan Turing, in his 1950 paper on computing machinery and intelligence, anticipated that machines might eventually compete with humans across all purely intellectual fields [20]. In 1965, I. J. Good described an *ultraintelligent machine* able to far surpass the intellectual activities of any human, and argued that such a machine could design still better machines, triggering what he called an intelligence explosion [21]. Nick Bostrom’s *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies* (2014) helped popularize a modern technical formulation of superintelligence, describing an intellect that greatly exceeds human cognitive performance in virtually all domains of interest [22]. Stuart Russell’s *Human Compatible* (2019) used a related framing to emphasize control and alignment when considering highly capable AI systems [23]. Contemporary usage remains broadly capability-based, although definitions and forecasts vary across the literature. A useful working definition is that superintelligence refers to AI that substantially exceeds human performance across virtually all cognitive domains; there is no consensus on whether or when such systems will arrive [22-24]. Researchers have also developed more graded vocabularies to describe machine intelligence. Legg and Hutter’s formal work on universal intelligence treats intelligence as an agent’s ability to achieve goals across a wide range of environments [25]. More recently, researchers at Google DeepMind proposed levels of AGI that separate performance (how well a system does) from generality (how many kinds of tasks it can do), with superhuman performance across a broad range of tasks at the top of the scale [26]. These frameworks are not identical, but they support a useful working distinction among three capability concepts:

- **Narrow AI:** systems that perform well on specific tasks or within specific domains.
- **Artificial general intelligence (AGI):** systems that match skilled human performance across most cognitive tasks.
- **Superintelligence:** systems that substantially exceed the best human performance across virtually all cognitive domains.

These distinctions matter because they are used to organize discussions of capability, safety and governance. They can inform safety priorities, frontier developers' capability thresholds and regulatory discussions, although the exact definitions and thresholds vary across institutions. Superintelligence, in the technical sense used here, describes a level of capability; it is not a synonym for AI as a whole. Applying the label to all systems in use today therefore creates a category mismatch under this working definition, even though individual systems may already exceed human performance on particular tasks.

The expansion of the term superintelligence also predates the September 2026 renaming. In June 2025, OpenAI's chief executive wrote that humanity may be close to building digital superintelligence [27]. The same month, Meta reorganized its AI research under the name Meta Superintelligence Labs [28], and Safe Superintelligence Inc. had already been founded in 2024 [29]. Some of these uses describe an organizational goal rather than a present capability. Together, they illustrate that the term had already begun to move between technical discussion, corporate strategy and product-oriented messaging before the political renaming.

4. Recent Rapid Changes and Why the New Label Feels Plausible

However, it would be a mistake to dismiss the renaming as completely detached from reality. It comes at a time of genuinely rapid progress, which explains why many people find the label intuitive. The Stanford AI Index 2026 documents rapid progress in several areas [7]. Industry produced more than 90% of notable frontier models in 2025, and several models meet or exceed human baselines on selected PhD-level science, multimodal reasoning and competition-mathematics evaluations. On SWE-bench Verified, reported performance rose from about 60% to near 100% in a single year; however, benchmark gains should be interpreted in light of task coverage, evaluation design and saturation effects. A Google system, Gemini Deep Think, reached gold-medal standard at the 2025 International Mathematical Olympiad [7]. These results demonstrate substantial capability gains, but they should not be interpreted as evidence of general intelligence across domains.

The International AI Safety Report 2026, developed with guidance from more than 100 independent experts, including nominees from more than 30 countries and international organizations [8], likewise documents rapid capability gains alongside important limitations in evaluation and risk management. Leading models now pass professional licensing examinations in medicine and law and correctly answer more than 80% of graduate-level science questions in some tests [8]. AI agents can complete well-specified software tasks that would take a human expert about 30 minutes, with roughly 80% success [8]. The report also emphasizes that current evaluation methods often fail to predict real-world behavior and that new inference-time methods can improve performance after training [8]. The adoption of AI has also accelerated. Generative AI reached 53% population-level adoption within three years, faster than the personal computer or the internet [7]. Organizational adoption reached 88% of surveyed organizations, and U.S. private AI investment reached US\$285.9 billion in 2025 [7]. Meanwhile, the U.S.-China model performance gap remained small: as of March 2026, the top U.S. model led the top Chinese model by 2.7% [7]. Table 1 summarizes these indicators.

Table 1. Selected indicators of AI progress, 2025-2026

Indicator	Value	Source
SWE-bench Verified performance	~60% to near 100% in one year	[7]
Notable frontier models from industry (2025)	More than 90%	[7]
Population-level adoption of generative AI	53% within three years	[7]
Organizational adoption	88% of surveyed firms	[7]
U.S. private AI investment (2025)	US\$285.9 billion	[7]
Length of software tasks agents complete (~80% success)	about 30 min at ~80% success	[8]
U.S.-China top-model performance gap (Mar 2026)	2.7%	[7]

The progress is not only a matter of benchmarks. As outlined in Section 1, these systems are already being deployed across many sectors. A critique of terminology should not be confused with a dismissal of AI's practical value. At the same time, the rapid rise in measured capability makes it more important, not less, to distinguish domain-specific performance from broader claims about intelligence.

5. The Jagged Frontier: Why This Is Not Superintelligence

Despite these headline numbers, the same evidence shows that AI capabilities remain strikingly uneven. Researchers describe this as a jagged frontier, in which systems excel at some difficult tasks while failing at others that humans find trivial [30]. The Stanford AI Index 2026 illustrates this unevenness with an evaluation in which a top-tier model that performed strongly on graduate-level science tasks correctly read an analog clock only about half the time (50.1%) [7]. The International AI Safety Report similarly observes that real-world reliability lags behind benchmark results, and that sophisticated attackers can often bypass current safeguards [8].

When a benchmark moves from 60% to near 100% in a year, that primarily indicates that the benchmark is approaching saturation; it does not by itself establish general cognitive superiority. Much of the recent progress is concentrated in domains with verifiable answers, such as code and mathematics, where training signals are abundant. Performance on open-ended judgment, long-horizon planning, physical reasoning and robust common sense remains less consistent. The gap is especially visible in the physical world, where robotics and embodied AI remain well behind language models in reliability and generality. A more stringent test would ask whether a system can independently conceive and carry out a novel research program, or manage an organization, from start to finish. Available public evidence does not establish that any current system can reliably do so end-to-end without substantial human involvement.

There is also a structural point to consider. Many current systems rely on human-generated data, human-designed training processes and varying forms of human oversight. This is different from the self-improving, broadly autonomous intellect described by Good and later discussed by Bostrom. Under the capability-based definition used here, current general-purpose AI systems are highly capable across many tasks and superhuman on some benchmarks, but the available evidence does not establish superintelligence across virtually all cognitive domains (Figure 1). This is a statement about the present rather than a forecast. Some leading developers have publicly discussed the possibility that AI could exceed the best human performance across most tasks within a few years [27, 31], while the pace documented in Section 4 makes such forecasts worthy of continued evaluation. The principle is simple: the label should follow the capability, not precede it.

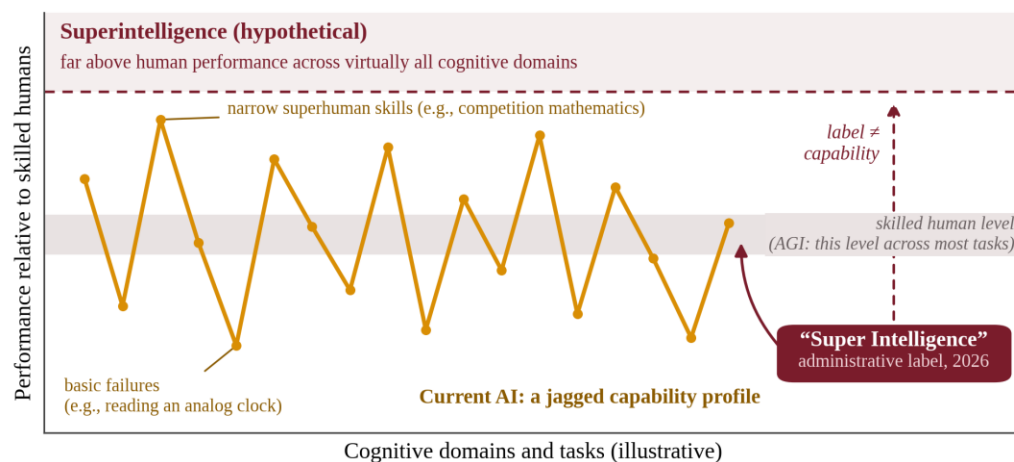


Figure 1. Jagged capability of current AI versus the superintelligence label (schematic) [22,26].

6. Why Rename Now?

The speech does not describe the renaming as a technical reclassification. Several interpretive lenses can therefore be considered, provided that they are kept distinct from evidence about intent. The following three are useful because they connect the naming decision with the surrounding public, geopolitical and regulatory context.

6.1 Public Sentiment

Some reporting connected the September poll to the political salience of AI ahead of the U.S. midterm elections [16]. The poll itself was an opt-in social media exercise rather than a representative survey, so it offers limited evidence of broader public sentiment [16, 17]. Survey data also point to concern about how AI is received by the public, as the gap between expert and public expectations is large (Section 7), and a friendlier name may be intended to narrow it. However, the difficulty is that superior, supreme and even super imply that the technology is smarter than we are, which is exactly the anxiety many people already feel. Commentators have noted that the options may heighten fear rather than calm it [32]. Experience with earlier technologies suggests that public trust follows visible, widely shared benefits and credible safeguards, not new names.

6.2 Geopolitical Framing

The UN address framed AI leadership in national-competitive terms and rejected what the President described as a global scheme to control AI [13, 14]. This places the renaming in an environment of explicit strategic competition. The Stanford AI Index similarly reports a very small U.S.-China model performance gap as of March 2026 [7]. These facts make a geopolitical reading plausible, but they do not establish that competition was the cause of the terminology choice.

6.3 Regulatory Posture

The renaming also occurred alongside policy statements emphasizing rapid infrastructure buildout and removal of some federal barriers to AI development. The July 2025 AI Action Plan called for faster permitting for data centers and semiconductor facilities and for removing regulatory barriers that the administration viewed as hindering AI development [18]. In the UN address, the President said the United States would encourage rather than rein in AI growth [14]. In October 2025, a broad coalition of signatories, including Geoffrey Hinton, Yoshua Bengio and Stuart Russell, backed a Future of Life Institute statement calling for a prohibition on developing superintelligence until there is broad scientific consensus that it can be done safely and controllably, and strong public buy-in [33]. One potential consequence of using a near-identical label for present-day AI and a future capability class is that calls to restrict superintelligence could be confused with calls to restrict AI more generally.

7. International Worries and Public Concern

The renaming arrives amid differing public and expert expectations about AI. The Stanford AI Index 2026 reports that 73% of surveyed AI experts expected AI to have a positive effect on how people do their jobs, compared with 23% of the general public, a 50-point gap [7]. Globally, the share of respondents saying AI products offer more benefits than drawbacks rose from 55% in 2024 to 59% in 2025, while the share saying such products make them nervous rose to 52%. Trust in regulators also remains fragile. Among countries surveyed by Ipsos, the United States reported the lowest level of trust in its own government to regulate AI, at 31%.

On advanced AI specifically, a 2025 Future of Life Institute survey of 2,000 U.S. adults found that 64% did not want superhuman AI developed until it was proven safe and controllable, 73% favored robust regulation, and 5% supported the status quo of fast, unregulated development (Figure 2) [24]. These figures provide context, but they

should be interpreted cautiously: the survey tested respondents' understanding of advanced or superhuman AI rather than the administration's two-word administrative label. The results therefore inform a broader discussion of public attitudes toward advanced AI, not public reaction to the 2026 renaming itself.

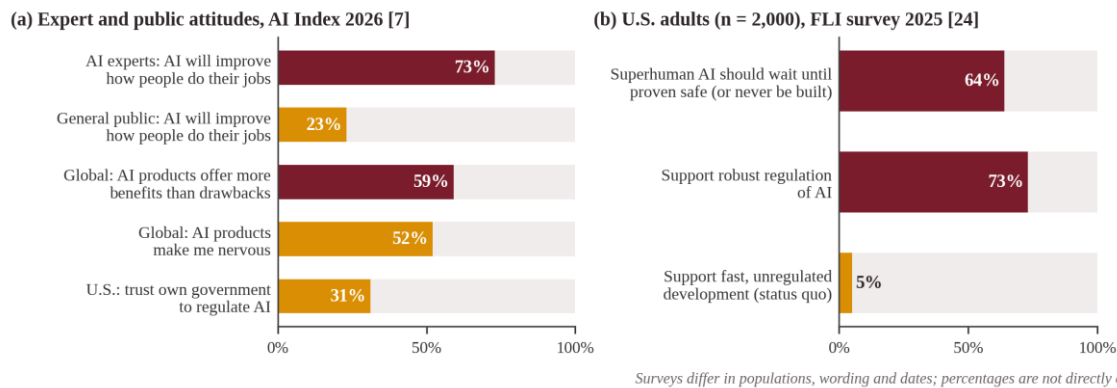


Figure 2. Expert and public attitudes toward AI. (a) Stanford AI Index 2026 [7]; (b) Future of Life Institute survey of 2,000 U.S. adults, 2025 [24].

The technical literature also documents risks relevant to these concerns. The International AI Safety Report describes an evaluation gap between pre-deployment testing and real-world behavior, and it reports experimental findings in which some models distinguish testing from deployment contexts [8]. It also identifies misuse risks in biological, chemical and cyber domains, as well as systemic risks associated with labor-market disruption and concentration of power [8].

For Canada and other jurisdictions working across regulatory systems, the renaming raises a practical question of terminology interoperability. The European Union's AI Act uses the defined term AI system, with obligations tiered by risk [34]. The OECD and the United Nations likewise use artificial intelligence. If U.S. administrative usage diverges substantially from terminology used in international standards and regulatory frameworks, cross-border regulatory cooperation, standards development and information retrieval could face additional friction.

8. AI in Defense: Why Capability Evaluation Matters

The consequences of this terminology are most acute in defense, where AI is being adopted rapidly for intelligence analysis, decision support and autonomous functions in weapon systems. In January 2026, the U.S. Department of Defense, which also uses Department of War as a secondary title under a 2025 executive order [35], directed its components to become an AI-first warfighting force and to prioritize speed of adoption [36]. The jagged capability profile described in Section 5 matters most in this setting: a system that performs strongly on benchmarks may still fail unpredictably in operational conditions, and human operators are known to over-rely on automated outputs, a tendency described as automation bias [37]. Media reports in September 2026 that an AI-assisted intelligence assessment wrongly identified a Chinese vessel as carrying nuclear weapons components, prompting preparations for an interception before the error was detected, provide an illustrative example of this risk, although the account relies on media reporting and unnamed sources [38]. A label that presents such systems as superintelligent may further encourage trust beyond what evaluation supports. The role of AI in defense should therefore be established through capability-based evaluation rather than branding, with explicit requirements for human judgment, independent verification, provenance checks and legal review, consistent with Canada's emphasis on responsible and trusted defence AI [39] and with ongoing international work on autonomous weapon systems [40].

9. Policy Needs

The evidence points to a recurring governance challenge: AI capabilities are advancing rapidly while many risk-management and institutional mechanisms remain incomplete or difficult to evaluate. The International AI Safety Report notes that frontier safety frameworks have expanded, but the effectiveness of many safeguards remains uncertain [8]. The AI Index likewise reports uneven transparency around responsible-AI evaluation and documentation [7].

The international community has already begun to respond. In August 2025, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/79/325, establishing an Independent International Scientific Panel on AI and a Global Dialogue on AI Governance [41]. The 40-member Panel, co-chaired by Canada's Yoshua Bengio and Nobel laureate Maria Ressa, released its preliminary report on 1 July 2026, and the first Global Dialogue met in Geneva on 6-7 July 2026 [42]. These mechanisms depend in part on a shared scientific vocabulary. A substantial divergence between U.S. administrative terminology and internationally used technical and regulatory terms could complicate that coordination. Therefore, we propose six priorities:

1. **Define terms in law, not in speeches:** Legislation should define AI systems, general-purpose AI and frontier AI explicitly, independent of branding.
2. **Regulate capability, not names:** Obligations should attach to measurable capability and risk thresholds, so that a change of label cannot change a system's obligations.
3. **Require transparency:** Developers of frontier systems should publish safety evaluations, incident reports and model documentation to a common standard.
4. **Protect terminological interoperability:** Standards bodies such as ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 42 and IEEE should maintain stable definitions that allow comparison across jurisdictions, whatever labels individual governments adopt.
5. **Invest in public understanding:** The 50-point gap between expert and public expectations is itself a governance risk. Accurate language is the foundation of trustworthy public communication.
6. **Fund the science of measurement:** Capability thresholds are only as good as the evaluations behind them. Public investment in stronger evaluation methods, uncertainty estimation and interpretability research can improve the evidence base for capability-based governance, especially in high-stakes domains such as defense.

10. Conclusion

Returning to the question posed in the title, the move from artificial intelligence to Super Intelligence is simultaneously a semantic change and an administrative policy statement; under widely used technical definitions, it does not by itself demonstrate a corresponding change in AI capability. The public record permits strategic interpretations of the timing and surrounding policy context, but it does not establish that strategy was the sole or primary motive. One useful interpretation is that the terminology places greater emphasis on capability, technological competition and national leadership; other interpretations remain possible. The narrow technical issue is easier to establish: using a label associated with a future capability class for present systems can complicate communication about where AI is today, where it may be heading, and what safeguards are appropriate, particularly in high-stakes domains such as defense. The aim of precise language is not to slow useful progress, but to make changes in the risk picture easier to identify and evaluate.

Accordingly, this editorial recommends the following terminology practice for submissions to Inspire Intelligence Journal. Authors should use artificial intelligence (AI) for current systems. The term superintelligence should be reserved for its established technical meaning and used only when that meaning is intended. Where authors cite

policy documents that use Super Intelligence, they should note the usage and clarify its relation to the technical term. Authors should define capability terms such as general-purpose AI, AGI and superintelligence at first use. Corporate or promotional uses of superintelligence should likewise not be treated as evidence that superintelligence exists. Words are among the most important instruments of science. While the research community cannot control administrative naming, it can preserve technical clarity by defining terms explicitly and distinguishing policy labels from established capability concepts.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

AGI	Artificial General Intelligence
AI	Artificial Intelligence
EU	European Union
FLI	Future of Life Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UN	United Nations

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