AI could be as dangerous as pandemics or nuclear war
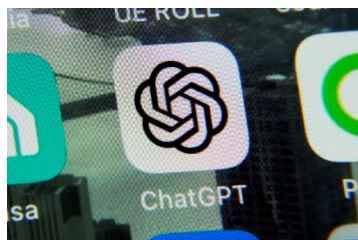
Adapted and abridged from the article published for le Monde on May 30, 2023 by <u>Alexandre Piquard</u>

A new petition is warning of the existential risks posed by artificial intelligence. Some see it as a diversion **amid** discussions on regulating the sector.

ChatGPT app displayed on an iPhone in New York,

"**Mitigating** the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war." This single sentence constitutes the entire content of a petition launched on Tuesday, May 30, by 350 leading figures in the AI sector. The initiative is calling for a "pause" in advanced research in the field, signed by over a thousand personalities, including industry leaders: Sam Altman, the CEO of OpenAI, creator of the ChatGPT chatbot, Demis Hassabis, CEO of Google-DeepMind, Eric Horvitz, chief scientific officer of Microsoft.

Why would the leaders of a booming industry call on the world's governments to consider their technology a major threat and regulate it accordingly? The initiative seems counter-intuitive, but it can be explained by going back to the beginnings of OpenAI: At the time, in 2015, Musk, one of the co-founders, had already been warning for several months about the risks of AI, **rightly deemed** "potentially more dangerous than nuclear bombs." Some argued that a "general artificial intelligence," superior to that of humans, could become hostile by design or by mistake. But that did not stop Musk from co-founding OpenAI, whose original aim was to bring about such an AI "in a way that benefits humanity."

Tuesday's petition continues an offensive launched by OpenAI in recent weeks, in particular, in favor of the creation of a new "global" regulation of AI: "Major governments around the world could set up a project that many current efforts become part of," it wrote in a recent blog post on the "governance of superintelligence." The reference brings to mind CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, a structure created in Switzerland by 23 member states. Altman also raised the idea of having the authorizations of major AI software verified by a structure "inspired by <u>the International Atomic Energy Agency</u> (IAEA)," responsible for inspecting nuclear sites.

Altman has repeatedly called for the industry to be "regulated." But a few days ago, he also expressed concern about the consequences for ChatGPT of the transparency and risk assessment obligations that will be imposed by the first attempt to regulate the sector: the AI Act, the European regulation currently under discussion.

While OpenAI and Google are calling for further "global discussions" on AI, what happens next will depend partly on the United States. Its leaders were due to meet their European counterparts on Tuesday and Wednesday as part of the Trade and Technology Council (TTC), a structure set up to bring the two sides of the Atlantic closer together on technology. On the American side, some voices consider important for the country to maintain its leadership position in the face of China.

Word list   **amid** : parmi; **mitigating** : réduire, attenuer ; **rightly deemed:** considéré à juste titre