TRANSCRIPT

Event

Exploring Global AI Policy Priorities Ahead of the India AI Impact Summit

Welcoming Remarks and Keynote Speech

DATE
Friday, January 30, 2026 at 8:40 a.m. ET

FEATURING
Romesh Wadhwani
Founder and Chairman, SymphonyAI

CSIS EXPERTS
John J. Hamre
President and CEO, and Langone Chair in American Leadership, CSIS

CSIS | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Dr. John J. Hamre: OK. I think we're – I hope we're getting close. I hope the team can help see if we can get Dr. Wadhwani. Let me – so but you've all been – you've all come. You've gone through these icebergs, climbing over the barriers. You know, it's just been awful here. And you've all done that. And so it's embarrassing to me to hold you up. So I want to get started here please. Please move in because we've got plenty – we've got plenty of room.

You all – you all know what this is about today, because you're here, but let me just highlight what I think is the significance of it. You know, the AI revolution is a revolution, I mean, what it poses. But the question is how do we manage the benefits as well as the risks associated with it? You know, when Alexander Graham Bell, when he demonstrated the telephone for the first time, it was in 1876. It wasn't until 1927 before the Congress passed legislation, you know, that regulated – the first telecommunications act. And it was pretty rudimentary and not well crafted. And so the real foundational policy structure for telephones in this country was produced in 1934. This is 50 years, 60 years after the technology had been demonstrated.

We're living in a time now where it's moving too fast. You know, and – and now – back then – well, don't – like, well, I can't – I wasn't there then. People think I was. But we have a very fractured Congress now. And so, you know, we've never, for example, been able to come up with a coherent privacy standard, you know, for cyberspace, for example. We just were struggling. So what's happening is countries are starting to mobilize ideas to think about these problems. And it started over in the U.K. There was the first one of these global AI summits. And then Korea picked up the next one. And then last year, it was a joint conference, France and India. And you know, not without its, you know, complexities and even some controversy.

You know, the U.K. and the U.S. refuse to sign on to – you know, to the concluding, you know, documents. They were statements, goals. And so, this is not without controversy but it's a process we have to have and we're coming up on the next one.

Again, this is going to be in India. France is also co-sponsoring it and that's why later we're going to – we're going to hear from the French ambassador and from the Indian ambassador to talk about, you know, how they're thinking about structuring it and that's why you're all here. And so, I know that you will – you will benefit greatly from that.

We're also – we're going to start this conference with – by hearing from Romesh Wadhwani. Dr. Wadhwani is on the CSIS board but he has been a pioneer in AI. He was doing AI before people knew what AI was.

You know, he was bringing it into his powerful set of products that he has used to create a remarkable ecosystem under the label of Symphony, but – you know, about three years ago he called me. He said, this thing is moving so fast and Washington ain't moving at all – I want to do something about that, you know, and so he created the Wadhwani Center here at CSIS so that we can help advance the goal of developing sensible policies, you know, for this to capture the benefit and to manage the risks.

And so, when we asked, you know, both the Indian ambassador and the French ambassador would they come here to give us a foreshadowing of what this conference is going to be – I think it's in February. I think it's the second and third – second week – third week of February I think – we're going to have some insights into how they're approaching it and they'll be with us – with us shortly.

Do we have Dr. Wadhwani? Is he – he's connected? Oh, my goodness. Romesh, here you are. I'm, like, the warmup act for Jay Leno. I've been trying to keep this audience alive and you're here.

Now, it is 5:00 in the morning, you know, where Romesh is. So thank you, Romesh, for your diligence to join us. I have – what I've said is that you've been pioneering AI in practical applications for many years, and you've been driving us to now work on AI from a policy framework a standpoint and I think you're going to share some of that with us today.

And just a word – the Wadhwani Foundation has been just doing pioneering work in India to help bring India – the modern technology to India and to help promote India's development and it's very, very impressive, but he's also a member of our board and he's going to join us today.

Romesh, let me turn to you for the substance of this morning. Thank you for joining us. (Applause.)

Dr. Romesh Wadhwani:	Thank you, John, and welcome to Ambassador Vinay Kwatra and Laurent Bili representing India and France, and welcome to all our guests, and looking forward to a great conversation this morning. Just a little aside, as John was saying, I've been in AI for more than 50 years, before people knew that AI was going to be a thing. From the time I went to Carnegie Mellon University the first two professors of AI were there, so I was fortunate to learn from them, and then building my multiple companies over the long period of time in many of them I have used the then, I would say, super primitive versions of AI.

So, of course, when today's AI technology started to emerge, you know, just a few years ago I was, perhaps, among the most excited of the participants in this great journey that we've been on.

But I think all of you know that AI is going through explosive growth. You may not know the degree of explosiveness, if I can use that word, that we're about to see in the next five years. I'll talk about that.

But I think most of all, when you see this kind of disruptive technology change compressed into just a five-year timeframe as compared to previous technology revolutions that took 20, 30, or 50 years. The impact on society, on business, on government, is unprecedented. It's not something that we have seen before. And of course, it calls for a strategic policy response. So, I thought this morning I would focus on sharing some thoughts on that kind of strategic policy response from four different powers: the USA, China, Europe, and India. Perhaps some of the things I have to say are just, you know, personal impressions and personal sort of focus. You know, everyone – some of the –some of the thoughts I have everyone may not agree with. But I thought they are worth sharing so we can have a discussion and hopefully drive strategic policy forward.

Next slide.

So you use ChatGPT, I'm assuming, all or most of you in the audience. But I must tell you that what was breakthrough technology three years ago now seems kind of quaint. Just three years ago GPT became part of our vocabulary. Billions are using it. But the world is now shifting to a world of AI agents. And because that word, "AI agent" is much abused, people refer to any piece of code that has some connection with AI as an agent, I wanted to define a full function AI agent as something that is a software entity that knows its context, reasons, plans, executes, learns, and improves.

Now you're probably telling yourself, well, that sounds pretty much something like a human being. And the answer is, yes, there are obviously very large similarities between what an AI agent can do and what a human being can do. And a full function AI agent can augment, replace, or surpass human workers. And we will be in this journey from augmentation to surpassing over the next five years. And I'll talk about that.

Next slide.

The era of AI agents has arrived. And my projections are that last year, was 2025, there were less than 5 million AI agents. And their role was

primarily to assist and augment human beings. And, year by year, over the next five years, we will see 200 percent or greater compound annual growth in the number of AI agents and the capabilities of AI agents. So, as you see in this slide, AI agents this year will begin to collaborate and execute workflows autonomously, meaning no human intervention required. Then they will start replacing humans in many tasks. Then probably in two or three years there will be the emergence of artificial general intelligence for the enterprise. These AI agents will then start operating major processes autonomously.

And five years out somewhere between 1 billion and 5 billion artificial general intelligence, AGI, agents will be able to operate the entire business enterprise autonomously. Possible exception of the board of directors, the CEO, and, obviously, a certain, you know, important group of senior managers to keep everything shipshape. So that's a pretty remarkable journey. And it would be one thing for me to tell you, this is a, you know, future vision 50 years out, but this is a future vision five years out.

Next slide.

Now, in this context, AI policy will determine winners and losers. So, AI technology superiority will determine winners in geopolitics and national security. National adoption and a commitment to that will determine winners in economic and GDP growth. Massive deployment by enterprises will determine winners in business and exports. Regulation will determine the winners in scale and velocity of innovation – i.e., less regulation equals faster innovation, and vice versa. And reskilling and support for AI-displaced workers will determine the winners and social stability. So, you can see that there are at least five major dimensions of policy that need to be addressed, and different geopolitical powers are handling this in different ways.

Next slide.

So, these are the four powers we'll talk about: U.S., China, Europe, and India.

Next slide.

So I think of the U.S. with its focus on global dominance in AI technology as the land of the free – you all know that this is, you know, part of our American credo; we are the land of the free – but we will be the land of the free for AI agents and not just for humans. So in the U.S., AI sits at the center of national security and geopolitics. There are certainly some export controls which are changing, and potentially there will be a

requirement to register and report the performance of frontier models. But at least in the current year, regulation is light touch and there will be federal dominance of AI law and preemption of state laws. So this is current U.S. policy.

Next slide.

In Europe, I think of it, at least in terms of AI, as the land of regulation before innovation. So the AI Act was passed a year – more than a year ago, but its provisions kick in August of this year and they have a very high regulatory burden, which will certainly have some benefits for the citizens of Europe but for now the disadvantage of continuing to keep innovation at a much lower velocity than in other geographies. This law, for example, includes frontier model oversight, audits, incident reporting, risk mitigation, emphasis on consumer protection over industrial innovation. And failure to comply can lead to huge fines, as much as 7 percent of an enterprise's revenue.

Next slide.

China's focus is on tech competitiveness and political control. So I think of China in AI as the land of political control and mandatory adoption. Because of that, it will have the largest global adoption of AI agents in every sector of business and government because they simply won't have a choice. It'll be mandated. But in China, everything has to be kept under political control and aligned with the priorities of the CCP. China will be in a continuing battle or hostilities with the U.S. for competitiveness and co-leadership in AI technology. And there is a high probability that, using AI to a greater and greater degree, China will leapfrog all other countries in productivity and competitiveness in spite of the fact that it will have an extensive regulatory framework. Many elements of that framework are already in place. I have no doubt that more and more regulations will be added as the number and capabilities of AI agents continues to proliferate.

Next slide.

India's focus with AI is around economic growth. So, I think of India as the land of practical innovation using AI. I think there will be massive national-scale deployment of AI in government and enterprise, very high focus on innovation and reskilling, and combined with I would say relatively light regulation. There aren't any current major laws that slow down the practical innovation with AI. There could be some limited laws in the future. And there is a pretty strong data protection law in India, but best as I can tell it's not slowing down the adoption of AI in India.

Next slide.

India's strategy – and again, I want to be clear this is my interpretation. It's not that the Indian government has issued a strategy document that I am reading from. I just look at all the things that are happening in the Indian context in AI. And these are the seven aspects of India's AI strategy. First is, become one of the top three in AI, after U.S. and China. A lot of the emphasis of the Indian government is about making sure that they don't lose this moment.

Interesting side note here, as John mentioned, the Wadhwani Foundation's mission is to accelerate job creation in India and many other emerging geographies, emerging countries, through large-scale initiatives in entrepreneurship, in skilling, and in innovation. And in 2018, which is now, you know, six years ago, Wadhwani Foundation launched the Wadhwani Institute for AI for Social Good as a philanthropic initiative. And I invited the prime minister to come and inaugurate that Institute. He was very generous and flew from Delhi to Bombay, Mumbai, in February of 2018, again six years ago, to inaugurate the institute.

And I still haven't forgotten, he gave one of the most enlightened speeches about how AI could be used for the good of India and for the good of the world. And he said, in the end, while AI will cause disruption – again, this goes back six years – ultimately, the impact of AI, whether for good or for bad, will come down to human intent. And he said, if the human intent is good then all will be good with AI. And if human intent is bad, then I guess problems will emerge. So here we are, six years later, and those words are obviously prophetic. But he's been very engaged with AI ever since then. And certainly it's translated into many initiatives that have been launched and the desire for India to be in the top three.

Number two, I think India will become a leading innovator in AI applications, and not in capital-intensive frontier models or LLMs. The gigantic investments required to be a competitive player in building a frontier model or an LLM when the world already has half a dozen players who have built these core LLMs, seems like there's a better way that India's strategy can evolve. Certainly, I think India is going to have a sovereign LLM to support multiple languages and to become part of India's sovereign AI infrastructure. But a lot of the LLM technology that India will use will, in fact, be based on technologies that have already been developed over the last few years.

Third strategy is massive deployment of AI in enterprise and government. And in fact, the AI economic summit that is about to begin in the next couple of weeks will focus – and, in fact, if you look at the agenda topics for that summit, very strong focus on the use of AI in enterprise and government. Number four, I talked about India building a sovereign LLM, or multiple of them in multiple languages. Number five, I think India can and will become a leader in domain-specific reasoning models applied to specific needs in government or business or consumer. India does have a very strong commitment to transforming the workforce for AI readiness through massive reskilling and, as I mentioned, light regulatory touch. So basically, India's strategy is to become the go-to AI geopolitical and applications leader for other emerging countries.

Next slide.

These are India's key initiatives. I'm not going to go into details on each and every one of them, but India launched the AI Mission back in 2024 basically to democratize access to AI and build sovereign AI infrastructure. India launched a compute infrastructure initiative as a public-private partnership, again, to strengthen AI infrastructure and accelerate startups and enterprises, academia, and government in using AI. India has launched a number of workforce AI readiness programs. A lot more to do, by the way, because the impact, as you can see in the next few slides, is going to be pretty enormous. Well begun; a lot more to do. Multiple national initiatives in health care, in agriculture, in education, and citizen services. Again, I am anticipating a lot more will be coming.

What's interesting is that the Indian states themselves have now picked up the baton and are driving ahead with AI experiments and AI initiatives. I would say none of them is at a large enough scale yet to have major impact on the performance of the state or performance in the state, but experiments have begun. And I would certainly anticipate this growing rapidly, particularly since Indian states are very competitive with each other. When one state succeeds at something or one state is doing something innovative in AI, I'm guessing that many other states will follow.

Next slide.

Now let's talk about the potential impact of AI on GDP and jobs in India. So, two caveats.

First is these are, I would say, projections based on reasonably good data, but anyone who tells you he can project five years ahead in terms of what AI's impact is actually going to do – is going to be is

overstretching. And I don't mean to do that, so I just want to treat this as a framework rather than for you to take these numbers with any kind of precision.

I also want to tell you that this is – these are not numbers put out by the Indian government. This is simply my opinion.

So, best guess, India's GDP growth augmentation specifically due to AI over and above India's baseline GDP cumulatively over the next five years will be around 1 (trillion dollars) to $1.5 trillion, starting at about $100 billion of incremental GDP in 2026 and climbing year by year to 500 billion (dollars) in 2030. So looking at India's GDP in 2030, if the baseline was going to be 6.5 trillion (dollars), nothing to do with AI, it has the potential to be around $8 trillion, 1.5 trillion (dollars) more than the baseline.

Now, what's the job market impact? Again, best guess – my guess, over the next five years cumulative job growth due to AI, 14 million plus new kinds of jobs created with AI. Unfortunately, offsetting that will be 20 million job losses in IT, in BPO, in knowledge workers, in enterprises, in particularly entry-level jobs. There will be a lot of job dislocation.

So, the good news is compared to many other geographies there will be net job gains and not net job losses, but the net job gains won't be as big as the full potential that AI provided because it will be offset by dislocations also caused by AI. So round numbers, personal guess only, 20 million plus net new jobs created due to AI sitting on top of India's baseline, you know, job sort of foundation.

Next slide.

I want to just share a couple of thoughts with you about the Wadhwani Foundation. As I mentioned, our mission is to accelerate job growth in the emerging economies and, by doing that, changing lives. Our goal for the next five years is to create 2.5 million new jobs and to skill 10 million students for placement in jobs in the next five years. You might ask, well, you talk about AI; what's Wadhwani Foundation doing using AI?

So, next slide.

Almost all of our major initiatives, and there are many of them, in India and in 10 other emerging economies such as Brazil and Mexico and the Philippines and Indonesia and countries in Africa, we are using AI in almost each and every one of our initiatives.

So, in entrepreneurship, we have the Wadhwani Entrepreneur Accelerate program for accelerating job growth at startups and SMEs. We have the Ignite program with an AI-powered self-service platform for democratizing entrepreneurship education.

In skilling, we have a Job Connect program for placing students with employability and vocational skills in jobs, and we have a Job Ready program, which is an AI-powered self-service program for democratizing employability skills.

In innovation and research, we have established the Wadhwani Innovation Network for driving the translation of research into new startups in multiple domains. Here again, we had the launch of the Innovation Network in Delhi in April of last year, and the prime minister, again, was very generous and he came and gave the – he did the inauguration and gave the keynote speech there.

We have Wadhwani AI innovation super hubs at IIT Kanpur in Bombay. We have a national AI platforms program where we are building the national jobs platform. We are building a citizen services platform, and then we have a variety of other transformation initiatives, a government transformation program for educating one million government officers in AI.

And we have the Wadhwani Genie platform which supports all initiatives. It's a very high-functioning, high-capability AI platform, plus a national mentor and consultant network, plus lots of knowledge and content as part of that platform for all foundation programs.

Next slide.

As John mentioned, three years ago I felt that there was a need in the U.S. for us to build on the capabilities, the long-standing, well-established, and highly respected bipartisan capabilities at CSIS to actually start providing inputs to policy makers in AI.

So, the mission of the Wadhwani AI Center is to provide actionable, grounded policy recommendations and analysis to shape the global AI conversation and make sure that AI benefits everyone. So the Center looks at economic impact. It looks at geopolitical impact. It looks at governance and safety, and the agenda and the topics that the Center focuses on keep evolving year by year to respond to the nature of the explosion in AI all over the world.

Next slide.

Of course, you all know that the India AI Impact Summit starts in about two weeks. I'm not going to go into all the details there because I'm sure all of you are familiar with what's coming, and other speakers today will be talking about this.

But just to summarize, this is the fourth in a series of global conversations, as John said. Began in the U.K., moved to Korea, then last year, Paris, and now this year in India. It's based on seven different focal areas that India calls chakras, and as you can see, science, human capital, resilience, inclusion for social empowerment, safe and trusted AI, democratizing AI, and AI for economic development and social good.

So, now if you go to the next slide. Thank you.

But before I leave, I would like to introduce both Ambassador Vinay Kwatra and Ambassador Laurent Bili.

Vinay, great to talk to you, and I look forward to our continuing conversations. Since assuming his post in Washington two years ago, the ambassador has brought with him 30 years of amazing diplomatic and policy experience. Most recently he served as India's foreign secretary, which is India's top career diplomat. And as you can see on this slide, he has been everywhere. He's been ambassador, permanent representative to the UNESCO, ambassador to multiple countries. And in the Indian Foreign Service he has served in leadership positions in Beijing, Nepal, you know, Switzerland, South Africa, you know, Pakistan, et cetera. And what's really exciting is that he has also served previously as India's ambassador to France. So, Vinay, welcome.

And Ambassador Laurent, we are delighted to welcome you back to CSIS. As a board member, I want to share that with you. You've, of course, you know, given us the preview in the past about what became the French AI Action Summit. So, we are really delighted that you are here today because, as you can see, it's like going from Paris to Delhi. And you too have had a long and distinguished career in the French Foreign Ministry, including Ambassador to China, Brazil, Turkey, and Thailand, and many other leadership roles. So we certainly hope that after completing your service in Washington, D.C., perhaps you will be the next French ambassador to India, which would be a wonderful way to close the loop in terms of the kind of discussion we are having today.

So welcome to both of you. And thank you to the audience. And I will now hand back to CSIS to continue the agenda. (Applause.)

(END.)