



7. Beyond Techwashing: The UAE's AI Industrial Policy as a Security Regime

by Islam Al Khatib

“The UAE will build an AI economy, not wait for one,” writes the world’s first AI minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, in his foreword to UAE National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence 2031.⁴⁸⁸ Rather than narrate AI as a tool or factor influencing the economy, the idea of an “AI economy” captures a self-fulfilling vision of AI shaping an economy in which it occupies a central, all-encompassing role. As McKenzie Wark writes in *Capital is Dead*,⁴⁸⁹ there is a difference “between ‘information’ as a force of production and information as a dominant force of

⁴⁸⁸ United Arab Emirates, Artificial Intelligence Office, *UAE National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence 2031*, July 2021, <https://ai.gov.ae/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/UAE-National-Strategy-for-Artificial-Intelligence-2031.pdf>.

⁴⁸⁹ McKenzie Wark, *Capital is Dead* (London: Verso Books, 2019), 46.

production.” Similarly, AI is no longer simply a market to monopolize, but rather a monopoly that will marketize other sectors.

The overarching preoccupation of the United Arab Emirates has been with the larger project of achieving dominance and strengthening its geopolitical positioning, and as AI is widely heralded as the digital infrastructure of the future, the country is making swift moves to establish its relevance in this new era. According to the UAE’s AI Office, they hope to “transform the UAE into a world leader in A.I. by investing in people and industries” that are critical to their success, which also aligns with the UAE’s Centennial Strategy 2071⁴⁹⁰ goal of making the UAE the “best country in the world” by 2071 through innovative approaches to technology and infrastructure. This exaggerated emphasis on technology and becoming “the best” is also linked to eradicating any potential threat that might impede this “progress” and growth. With COP28⁴⁹¹ taking place in the UAE at the end of 2023, the UAE’s AI industrial policy is not only meant to secure prosperity, but also to guarantee a “post-oil future.” In other words, just as the UAE is in charge of the oil present, it is positioning itself to be ahead in the post-oil, likely AI-fueled future.

As outlined in its policies, the UAE seeks to transform itself into a “into a world leader in AI by investing in people and industries that are key” to the country’s success.⁴⁹² The UAE’s AI interventions cover different aspects of everyday life – it is expected⁴⁹³ that the government will adopt new and developing generations of digital governance (currently labeled “Gov 3.0”); in the health industry, where AI is being used to predict chronic and dangerous diseases; in transportation, where the Dubai Autonomous Transportation Strategy is seeking to transform 25 percent of mass transit into self-driving transport by 2030; and in energy, where the hope is to optimize energy production, distribution, and consumption.⁴⁹⁴ The broad emphasis seems to be on making labor more efficient by maximally automating governance functions—in other words, to build a whole new AI-embedded infrastructure for governance.

⁴⁹⁰ United Arab Emirates, “UAE Centennial Plan 2071,” accessed February 13, 2024,

<https://uaecabinet.ae/en/uae-centennial-plan-2071>.

⁴⁹¹ Human Rights Watch, “UAE: Mass Surveillance Threatens Rights, COP28 Outcome,” November 30, 2023, .

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/30/uae-mass-surveillance-threatens-rights-cop28-outcome>.

⁴⁹² United Arab Emirates, Artificial Intelligence Office, *UAE National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence 2031*. See also “Policies | The

Official Portal of the UAE Government” (web page), accessed December 20, 2023,

<https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/policies>.

⁴⁹³ Mohanad Halaweh, “Viewpoint: Artificial Intelligence Government (Gov. 3.0): The UAE Leading Model,” *Journal of Artificial Intelligence Research* 62 (June 2018): 269–272, <https://jair.org/index.php/jair/article/view/11210/26421>.

⁴⁹⁴ “2024–2030” (web page), Official Portal of the UAE Government, updated August 15, 2023, accessed December 22, 2024,

<https://u.ae/en/more/uae-future/2021-2030>.

The approach to industrial strategies in AI follows the centralized and highly controlled structure replicated by the government in other parts of the economy, often referred to as its tendency to “produce and perpetuate vertical policies.”⁴⁹⁵ However, this goes hand in hand with labor practices. Trade unions are restricted in the UAE;⁴⁹⁶ therefore, workers cannot contest their precarity as they grapple with restricted leverage stemming from indebtedness and unstable residency statuses. Workers on the Expo 2020 project reported violations such as passport confiscation, racial discrimination, and nonpayment of wages, revealing a structural reality that spans industry borders.⁴⁹⁷ This complex reality of exploitation and structural racism has resulted in the forced silencing and repression of trade unions that can contest such policies.

The AI and tech sectors are not immune to labor exploitation that exists in other sectors, and the reality of workers in the UAE raises the questions of working conditions not only in the industry, but also in areas where AI is being deployed, particularly with the massive inflow of tech workers since 2021, which has fueled the UAE’s AI ambitions. As of September 2023, there were 120,000 people working in AI or related areas, up from 30,000 two years before.⁴⁹⁸ With the present stifling structures in the UAE, determining how workers and individuals engage through labor relations and other interactions with emerging AI and digital transformation is difficult. This is worsened by the Code of Crimes and Punishments which maintains severe limitations on free speech and assembly and includes a provision prohibiting unauthorized distribution of government information. Article 178 specifically prohibits sending government “information” to any organization without a license.⁴⁹⁹ For example, in June 2022, Al Roeya, a daily newspaper owned by Deputy Prime Minister Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan’s firm, sacked the majority of its employees for reporting on popular displeasure with rising energy prices, highlighting the limited climate for freedom of expression and a free press.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁵ Mustapha K. Nabli, Jennifer Keller, Claudia Nassif, and Carlos Silva-Jáuregui, “The Political Economy of Industrial Policy in the Middle East and North Africa,” in *Economic Development in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Ahmed Galal (Cairo: American University in Cairo, 2008), 109–136, <https://www.istor.org/stable/j.ctt15m7jxf.10>.

⁴⁹⁶ Business & Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRC), *A Wall of Silence: The Construction Sector’s Response to Migrant Rights in Qatar and the UAE*, 2016,

<https://respect.international/a-wall-of-silence-the-construction-sectors-response-to-migrant-rights-in-qatar-and-the-uae>.

⁴⁹⁷ Pete Pattison, “Allegations of Worker Exploitation at ‘World’s Greatest Show’ in Dubai,” *Guardian*, February 2, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/feb/02/allegations-of-worker-exploitation-at-worlds-greatest-show-expo-2020-dubai>.

⁴⁹⁸ beer Abu Omar, “Minister Backs Altman’s Idea to Turn UAE into AI Testing Ground,” *Bloomberg*, February 15, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-02-15/minister-backs-altman-s-idea-to-turn-uae-into-ai-testing-ground>.

⁴⁹⁹ Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2022/23: The State of the World’s Human Rights*, March 27, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/5670/2023/en>.

⁵⁰⁰ “Dubai Newspaper That Ran Story on High Fuel Prices Dissolved,” *Al Jazeera*, September 13, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/13/dubai-newspaper-that-ran-story-on-high-fuel-prices-dissolved>.

A key feature of the UAE's AI positioning has been the encouragement of both private and state-owned corporations that engage on behalf of the state in geopolitical arenas; Group 42, or G42, is the most prominent of these. Established in 2018 in Abu Dhabi, G42 operates as an arm of the state in multiple ways: chaired by the UAE's national security adviser, Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed al-Nahyan, it routinely markets the UAE as a new AI power. G42 has been facilitating "public-private" partnerships, as in the case of Hassantuk,⁵⁰¹ where the UAE Ministry of Interior and Injazat Data Systems, a G42 company, collaborate on civil defense by leveraging Internet of Things (IoT) technologies. G42 was also recently under fire for its ties to the TikTok messaging app, which was used for spying and mass surveillance, as I will explore later in this essay.⁵⁰² Several G42 "subsidiaries," such as Bayanat,⁵⁰³ Core42,⁵⁰⁴ HayatBiotech,⁵⁰⁵ and M42,⁵⁰⁶ among others, have been adopted by the government, to the point where G42 consistently and centrally figures in almost all AI applications across different sectors in the UAE.

The alignment of the national security apparatus with the broader push for industrial policy on AI is not incidental; rather, it is central to how AI industrial strategies are being designed and deployed. This is due not only to the current and potential applications of AI in predictive security and surveillance systems, but also to the association of AI with fantasies of "absolute sovereignty,"⁵⁰⁷ "progress," and the persistent belief that "future wars" will be centered around data and information rather than land and resources, a sentiment proven false by the ongoing attacks on Palestine, Sudan, Congo, and Tigray, in which the UAE's foreign policy has been explicitly and implicitly complicit.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰¹ Ministry of Interior of the United Arab Emirates (website), accessed February 13, 2024, <https://home.moi.gov.ae/en/index.html>.

⁵⁰² Jon Gambrell, "Co-Creator Defends Suspected UAE Spying App Called ToTok," Associated Press, January 2, 2020, <https://apnews.com/general-news-67165c626c35ab0cca1ef9cbf6cea274>.

⁵⁰³ G42 "G42 Announces the Acquisition of Bayanat," press release, January 14, 2020, <https://www.g42.ai/resources/news/g42-announces-the-acquisition-of-bayanat>.

⁵⁰⁴ "G42 Launches Core42 to Deliver National-Scale Enterprise Cloud and AI Capabilities," press release, October 16, 2023, <https://www.zawya.com/en/press-release/events-and-conferences/g42-launches-core42-to-deliver-national-scale-enterprise-cloud-and-ai-capabilities-fwk9cddl>.

⁵⁰⁵ "We Are Hayat Biotech; Reshaping the Future of Life" (web page), Hayat Biotech, accessed February 21, 2024, <https://hayatbiotech.com/about>.

⁵⁰⁶ "G42 and Mubadala Announce the Launch of M42," press release, Mubadala, April 17, 2023, <https://www.mubadala.com/en/news/g42-and-mubadala-announce-the-launch-of-m42>.

⁵⁰⁷ Roberto Reale, "Towards Sovereignty in AI: A 7-Tier Strategy for Europe's Technological Independence in Generative Artificial Intelligence," European AI Alliance, May 26, 2023, <https://futurium.ec.europa.eu/en/european-ai-alliance/blog/towards-sovereignty-ai-7-tier-strategy-europes-technological-independence-generative-artificial>.

⁵⁰⁸ Neil Quilliam and Sanam Vakil, "The Medicis of the Middle East?" *Foreign Affairs*, December 29, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-arab-emirates/medicis-middle-east>.

UAE's AI Geopolitics: Pushing for Multipolarity within the US-China AI Race

While the geopolitics of AI is frequently reduced to a conversation about “bad” AI models (exemplified by China from a Western perspective) and “good” or “democratic” AI models, this flattens the complicities and complexities of AI industrial policies, which are better understood as a multipolar terrain, where state economic interests might create alternate pathways that shift this terrain. The UAE's AI strategy, for example, is about strengthening its geopolitical positioning and playing “both sides” vis-à-vis the so-called US-China AI Arms Race. G42 has had to make a pivotal decision, epitomizing the dilemma faced by many in the region: a choice between partnering with the US or with China. G42's CEO, Peng Xiao, announced a shift away from Chinese hardware to secure access to US-made chips, citing the need for caution amid signals from the US government and partners.⁵⁰⁹

The UAE, keen to navigate these turbulent waters to establish itself as a leading AI force, is seen as doubling down on its relationship with the US, emphasizing cooperation with American partners. But G42's past dealings with Chinese firms, including tech giant Huawei, have raised concerns in the US.⁵¹⁰ In November 2023, the New York Times reported that American spy agencies had issued warnings about G42's work with large Chinese companies.⁵¹¹ G42 strongly denied accusations highlighted in the New York Times article and the letter from US lawmaker Mike Gallagher, chairman of the House China Select Committee,⁵¹² and insisted that it has “aligned commercially with U.S. partners since 2022,” avoiding engagement with Chinese companies.⁵¹³ Gallagher's letter expressed concerns about G42's connections to blacklisted Chinese firms like BGI Group (formerly Beijing Genomics Institute) and potential risks to US university research. He indicated that his

⁵⁰⁹ Michael Peel and Simeon Kerr, “UAE's Top AI Group Vows to Phase out Chinese Hardware to Appease US,” *Financial Times*, December 7, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/6710c259-0746-4e09-804f-8a48ecf50ba3>.

⁵¹⁰ Edward Wong, Mark Mazzetti, and Paul Mozur, “Lawmakers Push U.S. to Consider Trade Limits with A.I. Giant Tied to China,” *New York Times*, January 9, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/09/us/politics/ai-china-uae-g42.html>.

⁵¹¹ Mark Mazzetti and Edward Wong, “Inside U.S. Efforts to Untangle an A.I. Giant's Ties to China,” *New York Times*, November 27, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/27/us/politics/ai-us-uae-china-security-g42.html>.

⁵¹² Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, “Gallagher Calls on USG to Investigate AI Firm, G42, Ties to PRC Military, Intelligence-Linked Companies,” press release, January 9, 2024, <https://selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/media/press-releases/gallagher-calls-usg-investigate-ai-firm-g42-ties-prc-military-intelligence>.

⁵¹³ G42, “Statement on the New York Times Article and the Letter from the United States Congress House Select Committee on the CCP,” January 11, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240112102208/https://www.g42.ai/resources/news/Statement-on-the-New-York-Times-article-and-the-letter-from-the-United-States-Congress-House-Select-Committee-on-the-CCP>.

committee found evidence of G42's links to a network of Emirati and Chinese entities involved in human rights abuses and supportive of Beijing's military. Yet, the specific documents Gallagher referred to were not disclosed in his letter.

This controversy brings to light selective stirring of human rights and ethical values, often surfacing as a tactical response to the looming presence of economic rivals (e.g., the Chinese threat in "acquiring" a key US partner in the Middle East). It also underscores that UAE companies are going to be expected to follow broader political allegiances even in supposedly apolitical deals in the corporate sphere. Here, G42's public pledge gained prominence as a form of realignment against "Chinese interests," against the backdrop of the UAE hosting five thousand US military personnel, many of whom are stationed at Abu Dhabi's Al Dhafra Air Base, where American drones are stationed.⁵¹⁴ In this context, an AI industrial policy operates within a shifting geopolitical terrain.

But the UAE is far from pledging a singular alliance with the US, instead playing the field opportunistically so it can push toward a multipolar world order in which it operates as a key power center. One way it does this is by swaying between the US and China, thus retaining some degree of autonomy over decision-making. In March 2023, G42 acquired a stake over \$100 million in ByteDance, the owner of TikTok, at a valuation of \$220 billion. This move, part of G42's strategy through its 42X Fund, came amid TikTok's consideration of separation from ByteDance to mitigate US national security concerns related to user data and Chinese government access.⁵¹⁵ This balance gets significantly trickier when it comes to the domain of advanced chips for AI development—G42 and Microsoft have expanded their partnership with a plan to make sovereign cloud offerings available to the UAE, collaborate on advanced AI capabilities, and expand data center infrastructure.⁵¹⁶ The UAE has entered the semiconductor industry through partnerships with figures such as Sam Altman and leading chip manufacturers TSMC and Intel⁵¹⁷ in order to strike a balance between maintaining geopolitical relationships with the US and growing the AI industry as a business through trade deals with China.⁵¹⁸ Altman's attempt to

⁵¹⁴ "US to Send destroyer, Fighter Jets to UAE amid Houthi Attacks," Al Jazeera, February 2, 2022,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/2/us-to-send-destroyer-fighter-jets-to-uae-amid-houthi-attacks>.

⁵¹⁵ "Abu Dhabi's G42 Buys ByteDance Stake at \$220 Bln Valuation, Report Says," CNBC, March 15, 2023,

<https://www.cnbc.com/2023/03/15/abu-dhabis-g42-buys-bytedance-stake-at-220-bln-valuation-report-says.html>.

⁵¹⁶ "G42 and Microsoft Unlock New Opportunities for Digital Transformation with Joint Sovereign Cloud and AI Offering," Microsoft News Center, September 5, 2023,

<https://news.microsoft.com/en-xm/2023/09/05/g42-and-microsoft-unlock-new-opportunities-for-digital-transformation-with-joint-sovereign-cloud-and-ai-offering>.

⁵¹⁷ Steve McDowell, "Is Sam Altman Entering the Chip Business?" *Forbes*, January 22, 2024,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevemcdowell/2024/01/22/is-sam-altman-entering-the-chip-business>.

⁵¹⁸ "Saudi Arabia and UAE Race to Buy Computer Chips," *Financial Times*, August 18, 2023,

<https://www.ft.com/content/b33c7e2a-6d16-407f-956f-01f248ff8dfe>.

lessen OpenAI's dependency on Nvidia by launching a new semiconductor business is consistent with the UAE's aims to negotiate the difficult terrain of global chip production amid "chip monopoly" worries. This initiative, which sought early financing from Middle Eastern institutions such as Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) and Mubadala Investment Company, demonstrates the UAE's dynamic role not only as a talent magnet but also as a sought-after location for unregulated business transactions. The capital dependency of AI firms on the UAE highlights a fundamental facet of the global tech landscape:⁵¹⁹ beyond Big Tech, the UAE has emerged as a critical, yet neutral (as in neither Chinese nor American) destination for the resources required to develop computing capabilities.

Aside from the "US-China AI race," the UAE finds itself entangled within another geopolitical maze where it also sides with an oppressor: the Abraham Accords (Israel-UAE peace deal) and its close partnership with the Israeli occupation, which have also made a mark on its tech investments. The geopolitical landscape in which the UAE operates, and particularly the violence with which it has built and presented itself as "the best country for tech and progress," has ultimately created a policy that seeks to reproduce this violence in every single detail, within the nodes of its economic and political structure. Both the UAE and the Israeli occupation present themselves as tech hubs, as new nodes of progress in the "Middle East," and their partnerships, within the AI market, blossomed and became more and more cemented: what the UAE lacks (cybersecurity and militarized AI), Israel has supplied; what Israel lacks (tech for "smart cities" and, in Israel's case, smart tech to efficiently build settlements), the UAE has provided.

When it comes to the UAE's AI industrial policy and geopolitics, it would be quite misleading not to mention the Abraham Accords. In a #NoTechForApartheid panel in November 2023, Antony Loewenstein said that "the Abraham accords were an arms deal,"⁵²⁰ where the Israeli occupation and the UAE signed arms deals worth billions of dollars and the UAE purchased the infamous Israeli NSO spyware. In examining the trajectory of UAE-Israel relations, particularly through the prism of the Pegasus spyware saga,⁵²¹ there is a clear shift in terms of cooperation, where the integration of Pegasus into UAE's security arsenal symbolized a mending of erstwhile fissures,

⁵¹⁹ Keach Hagey and Asa Fitch, "Sam Altman Seeks Trillions of Dollars to Reshape Business of Chips and AI: OpenAI Chief Pursues Investors Including the U.A.E. for a Project Possibly Requiring Up to \$7 Trillion," *Wall Street Journal*, February 8, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/tech/ai/sam-altman-seeks-trillions-of-dollars-to-reshape-business-of-chips-and-ai-89ab3db0>.

⁵²⁰ Timnit Gebru, "#NoTechForApartheid," DAIR Institute, 2023, accessed February 13, 2024, <https://www.dair-institute.org/blog/NoTechForApartheid>.

⁵²¹ Dan Sabbagh, David Pegg, Paul Lewis, and Stephanie Kirchgaessner, "UAE Linked to Listing of Hundreds of UK Phones in Pegasus Project Leak," *Guardian*, July 21, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/21/uae-linked-to-listing-of-hundreds-of-uk-phones-in-pegasus-project-leak>.

leading to a consolidated alliance as evidenced by the Abraham Accord in 2020.⁵²² This progression from a tenuous to a strategic partnership encapsulates the dynamic interplay of geopolitical shifts and mutual security interests that have come to define the UAE-Israel nexus.

EDGE Group officials and representatives have met with prominent foreign defense companies to build partnerships that could give them access to new and tested AI military technologies.⁵²³ For example, the Emirati Ministry of Defence is negotiating AI-based defense initiatives with the French Ministry of Defense and French defense companies.⁵²⁴

Falcon, Jais, and the Illusion of Openness

The UAE's strategy extends beyond championing efficiency and innovation narratives to highlighting transparency and openness as key parts of its AI platform. In step with the highly mainstreamed AI policy discourse globally, where "open-source" AI has renewed currency as a potentially pro-competitive and innovative domain, G42 has unveiled Jais ("the world's most advanced Arabic LLM"⁵²⁵) and Falcon⁵²⁶.

Jais is not just a public relations exercise directed at the Global North; it also offers a unique value proposition by providing 400 million Arabic speakers access to generative AI technologies. Jais and Falcon are part of a series of steps taken by the UAE to promote itself as a leader, including the recently established Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Technology Council (AIATC) set up to oversee policies and strategies for AI and advanced technology research, infrastructure, and investments in Abu Dhabi.⁵²⁷ In developing Jais, the UAE partnered with a range of well-recognized global universities including Carnegie Mellon University, Ecole

⁵²² Andrew England and Simeon Kerr, "The Abu Dhabi Royal at the Nexus of UAE Business and National Security," *Financial Times*, January 25, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/ce09911b-041d-4651-9bbb-d2a16d39ede7>.

⁵²³ "UAE: EDGE Prioritizing Cooperation on AI Technologies," *Tactical Report*, October 25, 2023, <https://www.tacticalreport.com/daily/62277-uae-edge-prioritizing-cooperation-on-ai-technologies>.

⁵²⁴ "UAE-France Defense Relations: Talks on Projects for AI-Based Systems," *Tactical Report*, September 26, 2023, <https://www.tacticalreport.com/daily/62208-uae-france-defense-relations-talks-on-projects-for-ai-based-systems>.

⁵²⁵ G42, "Meet Jais, the World's Most Advanced Arabic LLM Open Sourced by G42's Inception," August 30, 2023, <https://www.g42.ai/resources/news/meet-jais-worlds-most-advanced-arabic-llm-open-sourced-g42s-inception>.

⁵²⁶ Lisa Barrington, "Abu Dhabi Makes Its Falcon 40B AI Model Open Source," *Reuters*, May 25, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/technology/abu-dhabi-makes-its-falcon-40b-ai-model-open-source-2023-05-25>. See also <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20230607005466/en/Falcon-40B-World%E2%80%99s-Top-AI-Model-Rewards-Most-Creative-Use-Cases-in-Call-for-Proposals-with-Training-Compute-Power>.

⁵²⁷ Deema AlSaffar Patterson, "UAE Establishes Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Technology Council," *AI Arabiya English*, January 22, 2024, <https://english.alarabiva.net/News/gulf/2024/01/22/UAE-establishes-Artificial-Intelligence-and-Advanced-Technology-Council>.

Polytechnique, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Université Sorbonne Paris Nord–LIPN, New York University Abu Dhabi’s CAMEL Lab, and the University of Edinburgh, among others.⁵²⁸

The UAE’s AI projects are being framed within open-source networks, especially after the Technology Innovation Institute (TII) has waived royalties on Falcon’s commercial and research use.⁵²⁹ Yet, “openness” and “transparency” are often used as marketing terms rather than as functional technical descriptors. G42 is leveraging open-source AI to bolster its position in the face of growing interest in AI regulation, as evidenced by Falcon 180B’s approach to “open access,” which some view as confusing and overly complex.⁵³⁰ The model is licensed under a bespoke version of the Apache 2.0 license, incorporating restrictions that aim to control the use of Falcon 180B by cloud hosting providers like Amazon Web Services. However, the licence itself prohibits hosting.⁵³¹ Due to the Apache Licence 2.0’s no-hosting provision, access to shared Falcon 180B instances and their fine-tunings cannot be monetized via an API, whether for inference or other reasons.⁵³² This limitation goes against the ethos of open-source AI frameworks, which aim to allow users to freely utilize services/software for a variety of in-house purposes. Currently, this would require explicit licensing rules.

The UAE has succeeded in promoting itself as a bulwark against “monopolization” by collaborating with figures like Altman, who hailed Abu Dhabi’s foresight; the UAE is being recognized not only as the present of AI, but also as its future.⁵³³ By leveraging geopolitical tensions and regulation debates among prominent corporations, the UAE is marketing itself as “open” and “welcome” when it comes to the AI industry, which is ultimately being led by the same corporate structures (G42, for example) that it claims to diverge from.

All in all, the UAE’s promise of being the “best” is being associated with the language of openness and inclusivity that is rooted in the work of tech organizers and digital rights activists,—people who have spent the past two decades weaving together ways to dismantle tech monopolies, to dream of worlds where tech is a

⁵²⁸ “Meet ‘Jais’, the World’s Most Advanced Arabic Large Language Model Open Sourced by G42’s Inception,” Mohamed bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence, August 30, 2023, <https://mbzuai.ac.ae/news/meet-jais-the-worlds-most-advanced-arabic-large-language-model-open-sourced-by-g42s-inception>

⁵²⁹ “UAE’s Falcon 40B Is Now Royalty Free,” Technology Innovation Institute, May 31, 2023, <https://www.tii.ae/news/uaes-falcon-40b-now-royalty-free>.

⁵³⁰ Alek Tarkowski, “Falcon 180B, Open Source AI and Control Over Compute,” Open Future (blog), October 25, 2023, <https://openfuture.eu/blog/falcon-180b-open-source-ai-and-control-over-compute>.

⁵³¹ “Apache License 2.0,” Apache Software Foundation <https://www.apache.org/licenses/LICENSE-2.0>.

⁵³² Falcon Live Learning Management, “FAQs”, <https://falconllm.tii.ae/faq.html>

⁵³³ “Sheikh Maktoum Meets OpenAI CEO Sam Altman during His UAE Visit,” June 7, 2023, <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/industries/technology/sheikh-maktoum-meets-openai-ceo-sam-altman-during-his-uae-visit>.

public tool, and where AI isn't tied to some tech fantasy but to actual processes of democratization and inclusion. This supposed "openness" not only masks a corporate monopoly of the AI sector, but also the fact that it is an openness built on erasure. Jais, "the Arabic LLM," uses "multiple sources including web pages, Wikipedia articles, news articles, Arabic books, and social network content."⁵³⁴ As in English-language systems, the fear around what is available also applies to Arabic content, particularly because the UAE is known for the content it has manipulated by creating automated social media accounts that spew rhetoric surrounding the coup in Sudan and the war on Yemen.⁵³⁵ Behind this apparent openness lurks the question of a new industrialization, a new monopoly fueled and funded by US corporate interests—a new regional turned global power.

Conclusion

Given the importance of high-performance compute resources in achieving AI domination, the UAE is now stockpiling thousands of state-of-the-art machines that are being built above any regulated capacity, as well as planning to manufacture its own. This was underlined by the UAE's Minister of State for Artificial Intelligence, Omar Al Olama, who sees the UAE as a "regulatory sandbox," or a testing ground for AI advancements and the construction of experimental regulatory frameworks.⁵³⁶

The UAE is actively recalibrating its power through its AI industrial policy, moving to solidify its position as a global AI leader by balancing its geopolitical partnerships. This policy is part of the UAE's larger aim to promote growth and progress through comprehensive collaborations that go beyond economic impact and touch on complex political relationships and regional dynamics. The UAE's recalibration reflects the country's political approach to the AI sector, which goes beyond regulating tech advancement and innovation to consider the broader implications of the ongoing "US-China race;" and the UAE's position within it in the backdrop of regional geopolitical shifts such as the impact of Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. This industrial turn and focus on AI underscores the UAE's

⁵³⁴ "Jais: a New Pinnacle in Open Arabic NLP," Inception, accessed February 13, 2024, <https://www.inceptionai.org/jais/docs/Whitepaper.pdf>.

⁵³⁵ Marc Owen Jones, "The New, Unsustainable Order of Arab Digital Autocracy," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 3, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/05/03/new-unsustainable-order-of-arab-digital-autocracy-pub-89525>.

⁵³⁶ Abeer Abu Omar, "Minister Backs Altman's Idea to Turn UAE into AI Testing Ground," Bloomberg, February 15, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-02-15/minister-backs-altman-s-idea-to-turn-uae-into-ai-testing-ground>.

plan to use AI not only as a tool for economic progress, but also to influence international and regional political landscapes.