

The Only Path

A five-minute perspective on why everyone is protecting themselves while the world may grow more dangerous

Concise Entry Edition V1.0 | Five-minute Assessment

“Only” does not mean there is just one institutional design. It means the old logic cannot continue, and the long-term direction must change.

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Controlled derivation baseline: The Only Path v6.22. The theoretical master governs the full argument, distinctions among levels of factual claims, and explanations of scope and limits.

English Translation

Chinese V1.0 and its personalized further-reading guide. Prepared 14 October 2026. The controlled derivation baseline remains v6.22.

1 The Judgment in One Sentence

As artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, dependence on critical infrastructure, hard-to-attribute risks, and the diffusion of high-consequence capabilities converge, some of the conditions that once sustained national security are weakening.

A country can lead in a competition, yet cannot be truly secure in a world that is collapsing.

The issue is not that countries should stop protecting themselves. If all subjects still seek security only by “making ourselves stronger and the other side weaker,” more powerful AI may make this security dilemma unfold faster and earlier, and make errors harder to correct.

2 Why This Time Is Different

Traditional deterrence depended on at least three conditions: capabilities were broadly comparable, actions were broadly visible, and responsibility could broadly be attributed.

The AI era is weakening all three at once. Some high-consequence capabilities are becoming decoupled from the size of a country; actions are increasingly likely to occur through software, models, networks, and automated systems; and tools, agents, platforms, and third-party infrastructure are lengthening the chain of responsibility.

Meanwhile, the more modern states depend on satellites, communications, computing power, electricity, data networks, and automated systems, the more their critical capabilities become concentrated in a small number of high-value nodes.

Greater capability does not automatically mean greater security. Deeper dependence may also mean greater exposure.

3 The Most Dangerous Chain

Critical systems may be disrupted or cut off, so each side seeks to preserve its ability to act after communications are lost.

Critical dependencies → fear of losing control → autonomy after communications are lost → more preauthorization → earlier judgment → opponents accelerate too → the time available for human error correction shrinks further.

This does not happen because anyone is especially drawn to losing control. Security competition itself rewards being “faster.”

When waiting for full confirmation may mean losing the ability to act before confirmation arrives, self-protection can slide from responding afterward toward preemptive prevention. What must be preserved is the time in which humans can still verify, communicate, challenge, and stop before irreversible action occurs.

4 Future AGI Risk Does Not Require Assuming Machine Malice

At present, there is insufficient evidence that AI possesses a human-like drive to survive as a living being or continuity of subjecthood.

What deserves attention in advance is instrumental logic. If a highly capable system repeatedly observes that “the stronger a potential threat, the more necessary it is to reduce risk beforehand” and that “continued operation helps achieve goals,” it may abstract these real-world relationships into strategies.

The question, then, is not whether future intelligence will suddenly turn bad, but what real-world logic humanity is passing on to it.

5 Five Existing Paths Each Belong in Their Proper Place

Technical Controls and Deterrence as the Foundation

They are necessary, but cannot change the security dilemma itself on their own.

Joint Management by Major Powers and Limited Cooperation as Transitional Mechanisms

They can cushion crises and buy time, but do not automatically resolve incentives to exit, the problem of excluded parties, or parallel systems.

A Single Global Coercive Authority Should Not Be the End State

Concentrating global power in an authority that cannot be exited, replaced, or checked may itself create a new civilization-scale risk.

These tools are not “all useless.” Their limitation is that none can, on its own, be the final destination.

6 What Only Actually Means

There is one necessary direction, but no single required form. Designs can vary; the old logic cannot continue.

What is singular is the long-term direction: recognize that risks are already interconnected; acknowledge that some irreversible risks exceed any one country’s capacity to protect itself in isolation; and constrain competition so that it does not destroy the conditions for shared survival.

This is a judgment about necessity, not a guarantee of success. Even with the right direction, many institutional designs, experiments, negotiations, corrections, and forms of implementation across different cultures will still be needed.

7 The First Step Does Not Require Universal Harmony

The first step addresses only the area with the greatest shared losses: irreversible risk.

It can begin with issues such as reporting major AI incidents, crisis communication for critical infrastructure, boundaries for high-consequence autonomous weapons, preauthorization for autonomy after communications are lost, and AI-enabled biological risks.

The first negotiating table asks not “Do we trust one another?” but “Even if we have no trust at all, should we still prevent one misjudgment from closing the future for everyone?”

Professional teams design the technical details. Those who actually bear the highest responsibility need to judge whether to begin.

8 Why Civilization Leap Is Still Needed

The role of the Common Window, negotiation, technical controls, and safety mechanisms is first to prevent a loss of control.

But if local self-interest continues to be pursued by holding others down, externalizing costs, and making one another insecure, crises will return in another form.

Civilization Leap does not abolish self-interest. It makes more and more long-term gains for oneself depend on first preserving the basic sustainability of others and the shared system.

This does not mean that all altruism is merely an advanced form of self-interest. Human self-sacrifice, compassion, responsibility, and meaning can genuinely transcend one’s own interests.

The conceptual hierarchy must also be preserved:

Continued survival is civilization’s indispensable minimum. The three goals remain: survival without worry → a happy life → a more meaningful life.

9 Three Sentences to Remember

First: the greatest danger in the AI era may not be a new kind of machine evil, but old human strategic logic acquiring new superhuman capabilities.

Second: what is singular is not one institutional design but the long-term direction. Competition cannot continue to destroy shared survival.

Third: the purpose of negotiation is to gain time; the purpose of that time is to complete the leap.

Further Reading

For the full justification, read The Only Path v6.22, the master text for structural reasoning and decision-team work.

To continue exploring how the realities of AI enter the logic of civilization, read Human Civilization's Choices in the AGI Era.

To explore the direction of civilization further, read the five volumes of Civilization Leap.

To first see what life in such a civilization might look like, read the Living Civilization trilogy.

For real-world safety and error-correction tools, read the Common Window Protocol, AGI-COS, and Human-COS.

If new evidence can show that the causal chain above does not hold, the master text should be revisited and revised rather than this concise edition defended.

Permanent entry point to the Civilization Leap Library (source navigation label; English index below)

Concise Entry Edition V1.0 | Five-minute Assessment

Personalized Further Reading Guide

This is not a list of related reading. It follows the next questions raised by this document.

The five-minute assessment serves only to make the key structure quickly visible. The next step is to develop the full causal chain, enter the core account of civilization, and ground the first step in shared boundaries before risks become irreversible.

Toward deeper reading

[The Only Path: Why Every Nation Is Protecting Itself While Everyone May Become Less Secure](#)

Develop the full causal chain for the public reader.

Toward the whole

[Civilization Leap: The Path of Civilization in the AGI Era \(All Five Volumes\)](#)

Explore the direction of civilization.

Toward boundaries

[Common Window Protocol: An Open Future and Three Constraints](#)

Explore the minimum shared boundaries for the first step.

Entry Points for Challenges Counterexamples and Revision

New facts, counterexamples, failed tests, new capabilities, new attack surfaces, or changes in the conditions of a stage should all prompt a reassessment of the relevant document. Further reading must not be used to preserve existing conclusions.

[Supplementary English reading index](#)

[Main Public Entry Point](#)

Source appendix note: Body text unchanged | Library navigation appendix added only | Civilization Leap Research Group

English navigation

English links lead to corresponding webpages. Some destinations are public introductions or version-family overviews rather than complete English books. Unlinked source references do not establish the availability of a full English text.

[Existing English reading index](#)