

Quantum computing and cybersecurity: Exploring implications, potential threats and future directions

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International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2025, 16(01), 890-900

Publication history: Received on 03 June 2025; revised on 08 July 2025; accepted on 11 July 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijjsra.2025.16.1.2046>

Abstract

Instead of following traditional computing, quantum computing will grant faster solutions to some mathematical issues that regular computers cannot solve. While the new technology can help improve pharmaceutical and materials science logistics, it also exposes current cybersecurity structures to greater risk. There is concern that quantum algorithms such as Shor's and Grover's will breach the standards that keep modern messages, payments, and data secure. This article highlights ways quantum computing may affect cybersecurity, discusses risks in existing cryptography systems, and analyzes what is happening in post-quantum cryptography. It also examines the political, moral, and defense-related issues caused by quantum threats and evaluates the latest methods, such as running quantum keys and pairing them with ordinary ones. The study reveals that information systems must be protected through diverse teams in the era of quantum computing by using current trends and projecting what will happen in the future.

Keywords: Quantum Computing; Cybersecurity; Post-Quantum Cryptography; Cryptographic Vulnerabilities; Quantum Key Distribution

1. Introduction

How do we handle it when one computer can overcome the strong cryptography used by global banks, governments, and private societies? This scenario might play out sooner than you imagine due to new technologies in quantum computing. Different from classical computers that deal with bits (0 or 1). Due to this, quantum machines can perform specific jobs at rapid speeds, such as factoring big numbers or searching massive and unsorted databases. Such advances in drug research, climate study, and artificial intelligence have badly endangered the computer security foundation on which the Internet relies. Algorithms like Shor's algorithm, which are used in quantum computers, can easily crack the RSA and elliptic-curve cryptography that secure most communications and information exchanges today. This article explores the relationship between quantum computing and cybersecurity. It investigates the most important features of quantum technology, examines how this technology may impact current encryption techniques, and reviews the world's action against it. To explore how governments, experts, and business developers are preparing for the rise of quantum computing, the discussion examines post-quantum cryptographic standards.

2. Understanding quantum computing

Information is processed differently in quantum computing than it is on classic computers because it relies on the laws of quantum mechanics. Quantum computing relies on qubits, which can exist in both states simultaneously instead of just two separate states. This feature allows quantum systems to deal with much more information than similar systems of classical materials. It is called quantum entanglement when the states of particles change together uncannily, without them ever being close. When entangling two or more qubits, complex operations can be executed quickly, allowing many

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problems to be handled faster. Physics, engineering, and computer science have led to moving quantum computing from theories to actual experiments.

Top technology firms are leading the way in artificial intelligence. IBM has made superconducting qubit systems that can be used on the cloud through the IBM Quantum Experience. In 2019, Google attracted attention by saying it achieved quantum supremacy, showing "Sycamore," a quantum processor, could complete a task in 200 seconds that would take a regular supercomputer over 10,000 years. Leveraging trapped ions, Ion has produced quantum computers with improved accuracy and durability, allowing more people to use and rely on quantum computing. The main difference between the two computing types is how tasks are carried out in parallel. Unlike quantum computers, classical computers process bits of information one after the other or in a few parallel strands, thanks to superposition. As a result, calculating specific numbers (integer factorization) and querying databases can be done much faster. However, achieving a quantum advantage depends on the problem being solved and might not be applicable everywhere.

Table 1 Key Differences Between Classical and Quantum Computing

| Feature | Classical Computing | Quantum Computing |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Basic Unit of Information | Bit (0 or 1) | Qubit (0, 1, or superposition of both) |
| Information Processing | Sequential | Parallel (via superposition) |
| Communication Mechanism | Classical logic gates | Quantum gates (unitary operations) |
| Entanglement | Not applicable | Enables non-local correlations |
| Computational Power Growth | Linear | Exponential (for specific problems) |

Since quantum computing is different from conventional, classical processors, we can focus on examining how its use affects cybersecurity and exploring significant opportunities and threats.

3. Current cybersecurity landscape

Currently, cybersecurity relies on cryptographic services and technology to protect the confidentiality, integrity, and authenticity of digital data. It supports communication, finances, and privacy around the world. At the same time, it faces some difficulties and is increasingly challenged by improving cyber threats.

3.1. Modern Cryptographic Methods

Cryptographic algorithms play crucial roles in ensuring the security of online and offline information. Because of asymmetric cryptography, public and private keys are needed to safeguard communication with other parties and provide digital signatures. RSA uses factoring big composite integers to ensure the strength of this public-key cryptosystem. Companies and individuals use ECC for the same security as other cryptography, as it lets them use smaller key sizes that cost less energy. Symmetric encryption algorithms use just one key for both encryption and decryption. Governmental, business, and private sectors use the Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) as their primary symmetric cipher. Thanks to the 128, 192, and 256 bits available in AES, different levels of encryption can be used.

Table 2 Overview of Key Cryptographic Algorithms Used in Modern Cybersecurity

| Algorithm | Type | Key Size | Security Basis | Typical Use Cases |
|-----------|------------|----------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| RSA | Asymmetric | 2048–4096 bits | Integer factorization problem | Secure email, digital signatures |
| ECC | Asymmetric | 256–521 bits | Elliptic curve discrete logarithm problem | Mobile apps, secure communications |
| AES | Symmetric | 128–256 bits | Substitution-permutation network | File encryption, VPNs, HTTPS sessions |

3.2. Security Infrastructure

Our data and messages are secure and can be trusted in communications systems, including cryptographic algorithms. To achieve security in web communication, HTTPS utilizes TLS for encryption and to ensure that the server is genuine. RSA and ECC are important algorithms for ensuring the messages or software you receive are correct and unchanged. Data flowing through a Virtual Private Network (VPN) is safe from interception since it passes within an encrypted tunnel. While blockchain was created for decentralized cryptocurrencies, it can be applied to cybersecurity in many ways. A distributed ledger makes Service reliability possible, ensuring data is unchangeable and can be confirmed.

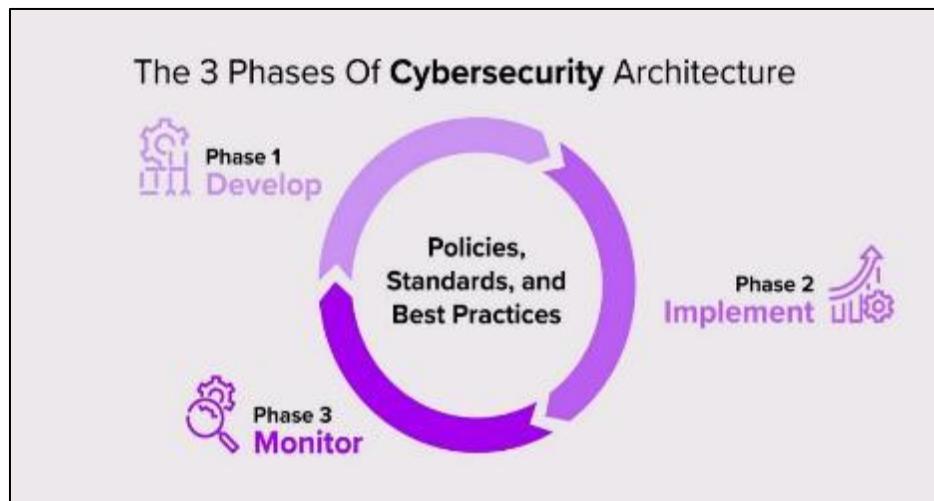


Figure 1 Cybersecurity Architecture

3.3. Vulnerabilities and Attack Vectors

Even with significant improvements in cryptography, today's systems remain at risk of being attacked. These issues also happen because of faulty programming, mistakes while configuring systems, and when people are tricked by social engineering. If certificate validation fails to work correctly, a MITM attack could impact the exchange of security keys. By leaking electric or electromagnetic signals, side-channel attacks acquire the keys that a cryptographic device must protect. Moreover, phishing and credential stuffing attacks often work since they target people and rely on old passwords, making it easy to get past strong encryption.

"Defense in depth" describes layered security used to address these threats. Examples are point protection, attack detection, limiting who can access, and routine monitoring. Applying software updates and enabling MFA play a significant role in reducing risk. Nevertheless, since global cyberattacks are becoming more advanced and frequent, cybersecurity should continue to evolve. Here, we introduce the basics of today's cybersecurity and the obstacles it faces, so that we can understand how quantum technologies may soon impact them.

4. How quantum computing threatens cybersecurity

The security of traditional computer encryption depends on ideas that quantum computing can easily defeat. Because the computer is programmed differently, it processes mathematical algorithms that cannot be done easily on ordinary machines, making solving protected mathematical problems possible. Here, we look at how Shor's and Grover's quantum algorithms threaten online encryption and how hackers can process stolen data later to crack it.

4.1. Shor's Algorithm and the Collapse of Public-Key Cryptography

The discovery of Shor's algorithm by Peter Shor in 1994 marks one of the biggest dangers to cybersecurity. Factoring large integers and computing discrete logarithms quickly make RSA, DH, and ECC insecure schemes. Cryptographic protocols are secure when solving problems such as integer factorization and the discrete logarithm on an elliptic curve, which is challenging. Still, such issues can be rapidly solved using Shor's algorithm on a quantum computer.

RSA encryption keeps most internet connections secure by relying on the presumption that factoring a 2048-bit number takes a long time, even with the fastest algorithms. However, with a quantum computer and just a few thousand error-

corrected qubits, numbers used for confidentiality and authentication could be factored a fraction of the time, making RSA ineffective.

Table 3 Vulnerability of Classical Public-Key Cryptosystems to Shor's Algorithm

| Algorithm | Relies On | Threat from Shor's Algorithm | Current Usage |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| RSA | Integer Factorization | Broken (private key can be derived) | TLS/SSL, VPNs, Email encryption |
| DH | Discrete Logarithm Problem | Broken | Key exchange protocols |
| ECC | Elliptic Curve Discrete Logarithm | Broken | Mobile communications, IoT |

4.2. Grover's Algorithm and the Weakening of Symmetric Cryptography

Grover's algorithm does not destroy symmetric-key cryptography as Shor's algorithm does, but it dramatically reduces its strength. Because of Grover's algorithm, searching for a key in a brute-force manner becomes twice as efficient, meaning symmetric algorithms could be cracked with only half the number of operations. Thus, while it would take a typical computer 2^{256} steps to successfully execute a brute-force attack against a 256-bit AES key, a quantum computer could do the same with just about 2^{128} steps.

QRAP managers can consider AES-128 and similar algorithms insecure in a post-quantum environment, though AES-256 takes too many resources to break and is still considered quantum-secure. Consequently, the lengths of symmetric keys should be reviewed, and advanced or combined solutions might be needed.

Table 4 Impact of Grover's Algorithm on the Security Levels of Common Symmetric Algorithms.

| Symmetric Algorithm | Classical Security Level | Quantum Security Level (Grover) | Quantum-Safe? |
|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| AES-128 | 128-bit | ~64-bit | No |
| AES-256 | 256-bit | ~128-bit | Yes (tentatively) |
| SHA-256 (hashing) | 256-bit | ~128-bit | Yes (with caution) |

4.3. The 'Harvest Now, Decrypt Later' Threat Model

More people know that the "harvest now, decrypt later" (HNDL) approach quickly becomes a dangerous risk in the quantum age. They even store encrypted messages today, planning for quantum computers to unlock everything. This method could seriously affect the confidentiality of valuable files such as intellectual property, classified documents, and personal health and biometric data. Exposure to the HNDL threat is hazardous in fields where data collection goes on for many years (for example, in government, healthcare, and the military). Although quantum computers have not yet arrived, any data currently protected using insecure algorithms may become vulnerable when quantum tools are used. Because of this model, we are urged to adapt to quantum-proof cryptography in advance, to avoid issues after quantum computers have become available.

5. Post-Quantum Cryptography (PQC)

Assuming quantum computing becomes available, it will likely break the cryptographic systems now used for cybersecurity. PQC refers to algorithms designed to resist threats from ordinary and quantum attackers. While regular cryptography techniques may fall to Shor's algorithm and depend on number theory, PQC algorithms avoid such a danger and rely on other difficulties that are not known to respond to quantum attacks. PQC technology is made to develop tools that will secure data and documents in post-quantum times by ensuring confidentiality, integrity, and authentication.

5.1. Leading Algorithms in PQC

PQC consists of several algorithms, where every type relies on specific challenging mathematical problems. Many cryptographic systems rely on lattice-based, multivariate polynomial, hash-based, and code-based principles.

Researchers regard lattice-based cryptography as promising because it depends on how tough the job is to solve the LWE or SVP issues in high-dimensional lattices. Their classification is related to their security and has little impact on computer processing time. Multivariate cryptography relies on making it difficult to solve equations over a finite field, since this problem is challenging and secure against allies having access to quantum computers. By depending on cryptographic hashes, digital signatures via hash-based cryptography can be made strong and straightforward, but the signatures use more data. Decrypting random linear codes is tough, forming the foundation of code-based cryptography; the McEliece cryptosystem has successfully avoided being cracked for many years.

5.2. NIST's Standardization Efforts

After realizing the importance of preparing for a quantum attack, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) launched its Post-Quantum Cryptography Standardization Project in 2016. The initiative aims to assess, select, and set standards for quantum-safe cryptographic algorithms that many people use. NIST made a list of finalist candidates and alternates for cryptography public after extensive review and analysis by the public and experts. NIST has chosen CRYSTALS-KYBER and CRYSTALS-Dilithium as the main lattice-based alternatives for encryption/KEM and signing digital messages, respectively. Other multivariate and code-based functions are also considered to ensure that the algorithm contains many different techniques, which helps prevent risks from future cryptanalytic discoveries.

5.3. Challenges to Implementation

While PQC ideas seem strong on paper, some challenges stand in the way of using PQC in today's society. Considering the technical aspects, using these algorithms may be pricey for restricted devices and IoT systems because they require more computing power. Connecting with old systems also causes many difficulties. For PQC to be part of a system, technical protocols, hardware, and program libraries must be updated without affecting systems that still use older technologies. The transfer should be done carefully to avoid any problems with crucial services. Additionally, the cryptography community is challenged to make keys and signatures feasible because several PQC candidates require much larger values than classical cryptography, increasing bandwidth and storage space requirements.

Table 5 Overview of Leading Post-Quantum Cryptographic Algorithms

| Algorithm Family | Example Algorithm(s) | Underlying Problem | Hard | Strengths | Limitations |
|------------------|---------------------------|---|---|---------------------------|---|
| Lattice-based | CRYSTALS-KYBER, Dilithium | Learning With Errors (LWE), Shortest Vector Problem (SVP) | Strong security proofs, efficient implementation, and versatile | | Larger key sizes than classical RSA |
| Multivariate | Rainbow | Solving systems of multivariate quadratic equations | | Fast signature generation | Large public key sizes |
| Hash-based | XMSS, LMS | Security of cryptographic hash functions | Simple design, strong security | | Large signature sizes, stateful schemes |
| Code-based | McEliece | Decoding random linear error-correcting codes | | Proven long-term security | Huge public keys |

6. Future directions and global preparations

Since quantum computing is rapidly developing, we must implement an active cybersecurity strategy with research, updated cryptography, technology for quantum communication, and well-designed security laws and rules. In many countries, public bodies, colleges, and corporations are working harder to prepare for the dawn of quantum technology and earn rewards.

6.1. Research and Development (R&D)

Across the world, research on quantum computing and quantum-safe cybersecurity has received significant funding. Governments like the United States, China, the European Union, and Japan are spending billions of dollars advancing their quantum operations. Both universities and research centers encourage joint work by quantum physicists, cryptographers, and computer scientists. As an illustration, the U.S. National Quantum Initiative Act set aside over \$1.2

billion for quantum research at federal agencies and universities. Likewise, organizations such as the Quantum Flagship in the EU support international projects that handle all the steps in quantum technology.

Table 6 Major Quantum Computing Research and Development Funding Programs Worldwide.

| Region | Funding Program | Estimated Budget (USD) | Focus Area | Key Participants |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| United States | National Quantum Initiative Act | \$1.2 billion | Quantum computing & cryptography | Universities, national labs |
| European Union | Quantum Flagship | €1 billion (~\$1.1B) | Quantum technologies | Multinational consortia |
| China | National Quantum Laboratory Project | Undisclosed (high) | Quantum hardware, cryptography | Government agencies, universities |
| Japan | Quantum Technology R&D Program | \$200 million approx. | Quantum communication | Academia, industry |

6.2. Hybrid Cryptographic Systems

Seeing how quantum computers could soon harm classical encryption schemes, experts suggest implementing a variety of approaches in cryptography. Hybrid systems use time-tested algorithms, along with those that are still being developed, to ensure protection against hackers. They effectively address risk factors brought by unknown post-quantum flaws and continue to work with current systems. Under this scheme, eavesdroppers must attack both encryptions to crack the system. According to specialists and industry standards, businesses should start with hybrid encryption now, simplifying future adoption of quantum-safe technologies.

6.3. Quantum Key Distribution (QKD)

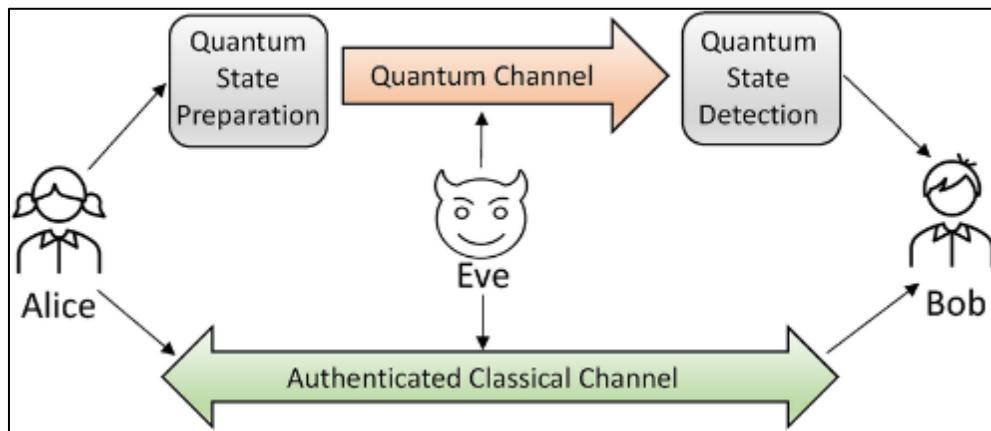


Figure 2 Schematic of a general quantum key distribution (QKD) protocol

Securing communication through QKD is possible using the no-cloning theorem and quantum entanglement as the main principles. Unlike other ways to exchange keys, QKD ensures security by allowing the two parties to make and use cryptographic keys in a way where any intruder trying to listen would inevitably be discovered. Both fiber-optic and satellite-based networks built using QKD are already up and running in China, Europe, and Japan. The use of QKD is limited by the costs of building the necessary infrastructure, distance restrictions, and how simple it is to interoperate with other networks. Yet, QKD is seen as merely a support for post-quantum cryptography and is primarily used for applications involving extremely sensitive information.

6.4. Policy and Regulation

Politicians, leaders, and organizations agree that technology alone cannot ensure information security in the quantum age. Different regulations and policies are being set up to ensure that adopting Blockchain is safe and addresses all relevant ethical and privacy concerns. Many nations are now including quantum readiness, setting standards, managing the security of their supply chain, and collaborating with private companies in their cybersecurity policies. NIST, located

in the U.S., guides government and businesses on standardizing new quantum-safe algorithms. Forums like the Quantum Security Alliance are playing a role in helping countries around the world harmonize their security policies. There is discussion on whether GDPR, along with other data protection regulations, is secure enough regarding how long data is kept and the dangers of saving so-called quantum-safe encrypted data now, with the option to decrypt it later. New laws are being created to tackle the risks that involve quantum advancements and the privacy or security of the nation. Here, it is emphasized that being prepared for quantum cybersecurity requires advancements, hands-on solutions, and well-organized rules.

7. Ethical and strategic considerations

When quantum computing was introduced, it opened up difficulties that affect politics, safety, international affairs, and personal rights. Settling these concerns often requires countries to secure their internet spaces from other countries while simultaneously trying to build up their quantum technologies to gain the upper hand. Like the previous arms race involving nuclear technologies, this competition appears in economic and technological fields and as a form of rivalry between nations. With better quantum technology, a country could lead global communications, play a role in forming global rules, and have the edge over other countries still developing in this area.

Table 7 Leading Nations in Quantum Computing Development and Their Strategic Objectives

| Country | Quantum Focus | Investment | Strategic Objective | Estimated Quantum Workforce (2025) |
|----------------|---|------------|---|------------------------------------|
| United States | Commercial quantum computing, PQC | | Maintain technological leadership and cyber defense | 12,000 |
| China | Quantum communication, quantum internet | | Achieve global information dominance and secure communications | 15,000 |
| European Union | Standardization, algorithms | PQC | Foster interoperable, secure infrastructures and economic competitiveness | 8,000 |
| Canada | Quantum algorithms and materials | | Support innovation ecosystems and privacy protection | 3,500 |

Source: Compiled from recent governmental and academic reports.

Quantum computing can affect cyberattacks since it may allow the decryption of secure information. Quantum algorithms like Shor's algorithm pose a risk to preventing hacking of communication data, stealing secret information, and damaging digital signatures used for authentication. With this new way to use quantum, concerns about deterrence and defense in international relations are increasing. Governments and security departments should forecast that because of quantum cryptography, adversaries might seriously disrupt crucial infrastructure, influence financial systems, and block communication during conflict. It requires adding new doctrines to our response strategies and more effective technology.

Surveillance and privacy raise similar complex issues due to how quantum technologies are distributed around the globe. Should quantum advantage remain limited to a few countries or companies, information inequalities might further increase, making it simple for them to spy on more people and exploit overwhelming quantities of information. Unapproved use of quantum-based decryption makes it possible to access private, business, or government data that was never before part of the threat. Also, due to the secrecy and skills involved in quantum attacks, clarifying who has committed them is challenging for laws regulating nations and other actors. If we do not prevent a quantum divide, it could enable those who control quantum to watch and control people with little or no checks on their authority.

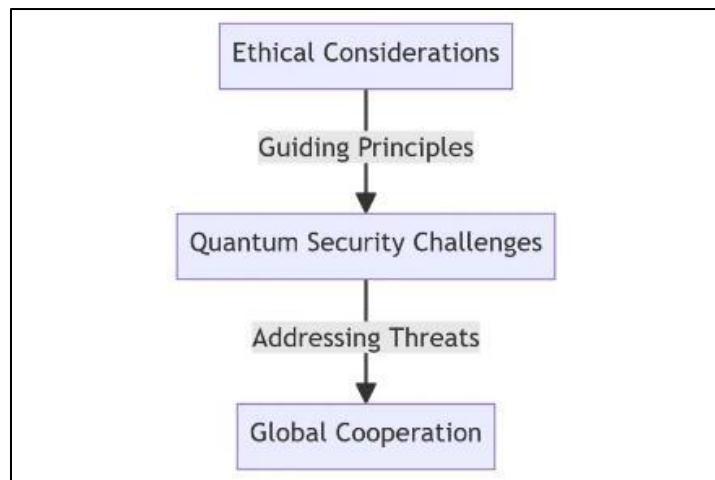


Figure 3 Conceptual Framework of Quantum Computing Ethical and Strategic Challenges

As these issues and problems are urgent, countries need to cooperate globally. International agreements about quantum technology can address the threats linked to rapid development in this field and privacy concerns. Ensuring that all research is open, everyone can benefit from quantum-safe advances, and that authority over quantum technology is strong will make quantum advances safeguard safety and the rights of ordinary people.

8. Conclusion

When quantum computing becomes a reality, it ushers in significant changes to computing, creating many new threats in cybersecurity. Advances in quantum computing are making it easier to attack RSA and ECC, which might threaten the secure, accurate, and available use of critical digital data. Since a quantum threat is approaching fast, the cybersecurity community needs to increase the development and use of quantum-resistant algorithms. At the same time, shifting to post-quantum cryptography is not easy or fast; it requires teaming up people from multiple fields, standardizing the process, and joining efforts from all relevant organizations. Along with innovations, strong global strategies and international efforts are needed to handle the pertinent issues related to cyber systems in quantum physics. As quantum computing advances, society must pay special attention to cybersecurity to avoid any threats it may pose. The digital world can only be defended by ensuring proper research today, flexible cybersecurity ahead of time, and strong rules in place.

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