Opinion – Intersectionality, Artificial Intelligence and International Relations

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TUSHARIKA DEKA, JUL 30 2025

The intersection of technology and International Relations (IR) is not a new concept. However, the growing influence of technology-led processes like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its intersection with IR is a relatively growing field of study. The role of technology in shaping identity and impacting global politics has long been acknowledged in the works of scholars like Benedict Anderson, who highlighted how print capitalism reshaped communities and Ernest Gellner, who argued that modern society emerged in response to transformative technological developments. The recent developments around AI and the race among different countries to lead in AI innovation reflect a deeper geopolitical interest in dominance, as states are competing with one another to bring out AI's potential.

AI-driven transformations are having a growing influence on decision-making in international systems. As Shoshana Zuboff writes in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, technology is the means (process or tool) and not the end (result). Technology cannot be an isolated aspect but rather has economic, political or societal trajectories. Hence, technology is implemented and used based on structural power, scope and interest. Today, AI is no longer viewed only as a tool of technical innovation; it is increasingly seen as a 'political actor'. In this piece, I am exploring three main areas where the intersection of AI with IR is crucial to analysis, mainly because it is reshaping the global power dynamics, policy and digital governance and global diplomacy.

The global race toward AI has not only become an indicator of technological advancement but has also intensified the global power dynamics. According to Stanford University's Human Centred Artificial Intelligence (HAI) Global AI Vibrancy Rankings, the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK) and China are the top three countries in AI ranking, followed by India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). India and the UAE are also the only two countries from the Global South within the top ten AI ecosystems. A report published in *Nature* shows that the US leads in AI research with about 40 international collaborations in the Nature Index AI research. While another research by the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation published by the European Union points out that China has taken the lead in AI-driven research, overtaking both the US and the EU. Just going by the numbers, the US, China, UK and a few other Western countries are still dominating the AI race. In contrast, many countries in the Global South (with the exception of India and the UAE) continue to remain at the periphery of this revolution as users and not creators of AI technologies. The Global South consist of 85 per cent of the world's population, and as per a report published by Aspen Digital, the Global South is no longer a 'passive adopter' of AI policies; rather, they are proactively shaping AI governance. However, this engagement often takes place within frameworks defined by the Global North. The biggest challenge here remains that the Global South is still not a producer of AI technologies. The global lead in AI development continues to be dominated by the United States and China, driven by their substantial investments in research, innovation and infrastructure. Both the U.S. and China are actively exporting their AI systems and governance models, establishing their values and strategic interests in the technological frameworks used globally. From a realist perspective, this eventually gives them disproportionate influence over the global power dynamic. This can be done mainly by controlling key data flows, creating dependencies and limiting the agency of countries with less advanced technologies.

One of the biggest challenges to the implementation of responsible AI is that there is no 'one' standard AI Ethics Policy. Although many of the tech companies are referring to the 12 Universal Guidelines for AI, their adoption

strongly depends on the country-specific laws like that of the US (the executive order issued during the Biden administration and the recent action plan by the Trump administration), regional policies like that of the EU AI guideline that adopted a adopted a risk-based AI regulation model or the African Union guideline that is tailored to local contexts, or international policies like that of the UNESCO guideline. However, these guidelines and efforts remain fragmented.

This emerging regulatory guideline raises questions around technological hegemony and digital sovereignty. In this regard, countries from the Global South are caught between competing AI frameworks of the Global North and their country-specific ones. These policy discrepancies have resulted in a division not only into technological infrastructure but also into who gets to shape the ethical guidelines for digital governance. The control over data flow and digital infrastructure provides disproportionate power in the hands of the dominant AI players in designing digital governance. Such discrepancies reinforce digital dependency. From an IR perspective, this challenges traditional notions of sovereignty and autonomy in a digital age. The ethical frameworks are not only best practices of policies, but also about the redistribution of global power in an increasingly AI-driven world.

AI's impact on global diplomacy and relationship with countries is a crucial aspect to study in IR due to its shifting nature. As the saying goes in IR, there are no permanent enemies, and no permanent friends, only permanent interests. Global diplomacy changes based on interest and motives. AI can become a powerful instrument through which national interests are pursued, alliances are reshaped, and strategic partnerships are built. This can bring a new form of cooperation and competition globally.

AI models are relevant to foreign diplomacy, particularly through the use of predictive analytics for economic forecasting and data-driven models for trade negotiations. Governments and international organisations are using AI to simulate global economic trends and monitor cross-border capital flows. AI is not just a tool for economic modelling or diplomatic efficiency; it is a strategic asset in global power competition. Additionally, AI can also support diplomatic actors in managing crises and negotiating treaties. However, the asymmetry in access to AI infrastructure and research raises questions about who gets to 'participate' in these diplomatic spaces. Countries with advanced and emerging AI capabilities are more likely to influence global politics and negotiate from a position of strength. A study at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies' Future Lab found that AI models have diplomatic bias. AI models reflected a bias towards cooperative diplomacy for Western countries. This particularly mirrors the traditional foreign policy, like that of the U.S. and U.K., but they overlooked the interest-driven realities of today's global power politics. AI is not only influencing the operational mechanics of diplomacy but also reproducing the values and power structures embedded in its training data. As Countries are exporting AI-based governance systems and integrating them into diplomatic frameworks, they are also reshaping the agents and norms of global interaction. The challenge for IR and IR scholars here is to interrogate whether these technologies are reinforcing existing hierarchies or offering new ways toward a more equitable, multipolar global order.

Conclusion

The race for AI dominance can be compared with the nuclear arms race or the space race, each representing significant moments in history where technological advancement became a measure of global power and stature. Like any new technology, AI also comes with challenges, like data misuse, the spread of misinformation and potential bias in decision-making. AI also comes as a great boon in research, education and for small businesses. However, unlike earlier nuclear or space races, the AI race involves an extensive range of state and non-state actors. This involvement of different actors at different levels raises questions about policy regulation, ethical use of AI and the global balance of power.

The intersectionality of AI and IR needs to go beyond technology and its advancement. It needs evaluation of how AI is developed, governed and implemented and how it intersects with the global order, ethics and power dynamics. AI is political and its future will be shaped by who participates and who 'gets' to participate in the conversation.

About the author:

Tusharika Deka has a PhD in International Relations from the University of Nottingham. Her work focuses on the intersectionality of International Relations, Conflict and Technology. She is also an Editor-at-Large at *E-International Relations.*