

Journal of Politics and International Studies

Vol. 12, No. 1, January–June 2026, pp.87–109

The Geopolitical Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Global Security and International Relations: A Qualitative Thematic Analysis

Qura Tul Ain Hafeez 

Lecturer, Department of Politics and International Relations, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Corresponding: guratulain.hafeez@iiu.edu.pk

Nazish Javed 

Visiting Lecturer, Department of Politics and International Relations, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: nazyshj@hotmail.com

Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a game-changer in the field of geopolitics, influencing global security, strategic competition, and international relations. Although there is a significant body of research on AI, most existing research has focused on specific applications of AI in military, cybersecurity, governance, or diplomatic contexts. To fill this gap, this study is an integrated qualitative synthesis of the geopolitical implications of AI. In particular, it explores the impact of AI on global security, its implications for international relations, the key themes of the current literature and the governance and policy issues arising from the responsible use of AI. The qualitative secondary research design was used and eleven scholarly studies were purposively selected and analysed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis. The results identified interrelated themes, which include: (1) AI and military transformation, cybersecurity, and global security; (2) geopolitical competition, diplomacy, and global governance; (3) cross-cutting thematic synthesis of the literature; and (4) governance, ethics, regulation, and international cooperation. The analysis highlighted the fact that AI is fundamentally reshaping military capabilities and operations, cybersecurity, and global security, and also revealed a deep divide among the countries in the international governance of AI and its geopolitical implications. The study provides novel insights and theoretical and policy implications for the development of global governance of AI and future research on AI geopolitical transition by summarizing and integrating the scattered evidence into an analytical framework, as well as highlighting the key research gaps.

Key Words: Artificial Intelligence, Geopolitics, Global Security, International Relations, AI Governance, Cybersecurity, Strategic Competition, Thematic Analysis.

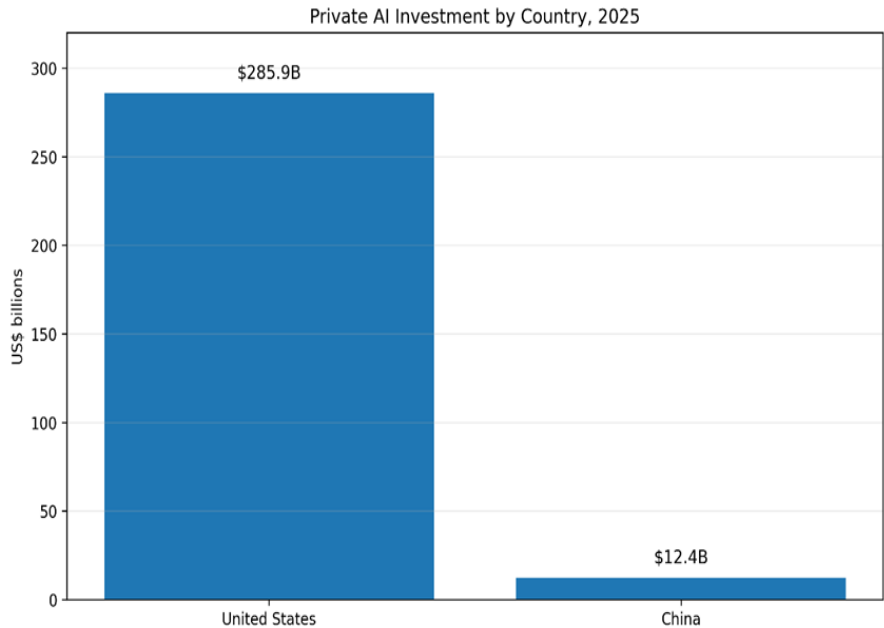
1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become one of the most game-changing technologies of the twenty-first century, already having a significant impact on the geopolitics, global security framework, and international relations. AI is now being used in a wide range of military applications—from systems to intelligence, cybersecurity, diplomacy, and strategic decision-making—making technological innovation a geopolitical tool and not just an economic asset. States are thus increasingly looking to invest in AI capabilities to bolster their national security, boost strategic competitiveness and increase their influence in the changing international order (Bode, 2024; Roberts et al., 2024).

AI's geopolitical impact is not just about technology, but also about the perception of security threats and political power dynamics. The shift toward a new and different warfare and defence strategy is being driven by the use of AI-driven autonomous weapon systems, predictive intelligence, cyber-defence mechanisms and algorithmic decision-support tools. Meanwhile, the advancement of AI-powered cyber operations has resulted in new cyber-based strategic competition, such as cyber espionage, misinformation campaigns, and hybrid warfare, that threatens the current international security order. The developments have increased worries about strategic stability, technological arms racing, and the effectiveness of existing international institutions in the context of quickly evolving AI technologies (Bode, 2024).

AI is not just about security; it is also a growing presence in the field of diplomacy, global governance, and is playing a role in technological competition between the world powers. The influence of AI on international relations goes far beyond security issues, extending into the realm of diplomacy, global governance and technological competition among major powers. In recent years, the United States, China, and the European Union have become key players in the global AI landscape, each presenting its own unique political, economic, and ideological discourse and governance framework. Competition for AI leadership is now increasingly spread across the entire spectrum of geopolitical contestation, with new dynamics of cooperation, competition, and technological dependence emerging within the international system (Landwehr-Matlé et al., 2026).

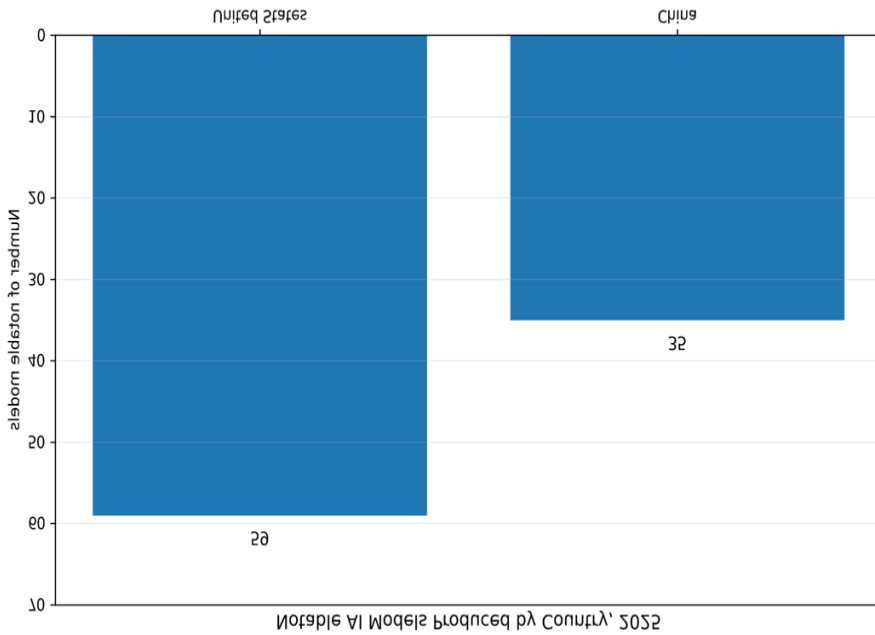
Figure 1: *Private artificial intelligence investment in the United States and China, 2025.*



Source: *Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, AI Index Report 2026.* <https://hai.stanford.edu/ai-index/2026-ai-index-report>

In 2025, 59 AI models were made by institutions based in the United States, while 35 were created by Chinese institutions, though China led on a number of general indicators of AI research, such as number of publications, citations, and patent grants. The concentration of advanced AI power in a few hands is indicative of the increased geopolitical significance of technological leadership and further underscores the strategic rivalry for research power, data, computing resources and regulatory influence. Meanwhile, the strides in AI's capabilities have not been paralleled by comparable global governance mechanisms. While AI has become an important geopolitical phenomenon, international governance mechanisms have been unable to match technological development. There are currently many isolated projects at national, regional and international levels with significant disparities with respect to priorities, ethical principles and institutional methods. This has led to a lack of clarity on issues of accountability, transparency, responsible development of AI, and management of transnational security risks, as a result of which there are no comprehensive and enforceable global governance frameworks. As competition between the top AI players continues to play a pivotal role in shaping the world of power, these governance challenges are gaining significant importance, also complicating international cooperation (Roberts et al., 2024; Emery-Xu et al., 2025).

Figure 2: Number of notable artificial intelligence models produced by the United States and China, 2025.



Source: *Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, AI Index Report 2026.* <https://hai.stanford.edu/ai-index/2026-ai-index-report>

There has been a significant growth of scholarly interest in international affairs and AI but the literature is fragmented across several disciplinary perspectives. Previous research has focused on the military uses, cyber security, governance, diplomacy, ethics and technological competition individually, without considering how these facets interrelate. Furthermore, recent scholarship has doubted the ability of traditional theories of international relations to explain the geopolitical impacts of AI, thus calling for new analytical frameworks that can account for the complex interplay between technological development, state action and global governance (Bode, 2024; Landwehr-Matlé et al., 2026).

In response to this, the current research was designed to qualitatively synthesize the geopolitical implications of AI by conducting a systematic literature review of eleven selected purposefully from scholarly research, which followed reflexive thematic analysis. The research does not analyze each study individually, but rather combines the findings of the different studies to create a comprehensive picture of how AI is transforming the world of security, international relations, strategic competition, and international governance.

Based on this, the following research questions were adopted in this study: **(RQ1)** How is artificial intelligence reshaping the geopolitical landscape of global security? **(RQ2)** In what ways is artificial intelligence influencing contemporary international relations, including strategic competition, diplomacy, and global governance? **(RQ3)** What major themes emerge from the selected literature regarding the

geopolitical implications of artificial intelligence for global security and international relations? **(RQ4)** What policy and governance challenges are identified in the literature for promoting the responsible and secure use of artificial intelligence in international affairs?

This study has three important contributions to the literature. It integrates and organizes the fragmented scholarship into a coherent analytical framework, which elucidates the multi-dimensional relationship between AI, geopolitics and international relations. Second, it reviews the methodological and theoretical approaches of current research to find points of similarity, differences and unanswered research questions. Lastly, it provides evidence-based knowledge that can drive further research and contribute to the evolution of improved international governance models that can tackle the geopolitical issues raised by the swift progress of AI technologies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Artificial Intelligence as a Geopolitical Force

In the 21st century, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a game-changer in the geopolitical landscape, fundamentally changing the dynamics of power. AI is not just a military and economic tool, but a general-purpose technology that is also used in the surveillance systems, in information operations and in economic productivity, among other areas. Control of AI has become a crucial component of overall national power for leading nations, particularly the United States and China. In contrast, the United States has strong innovation ecosystems, pools of talent, and programs for building alliances, while China takes a more centralized, state-driven approach to integrating AI into manufacturing, defense modernization, and governance of society as a whole, as laid out in its national AI development plan (Mestre Gascón and García Rodríguez, 2025).

This competition is seen in the world's influence campaigns, such as mobile AI applications. Although the models developed by the United States have a strong download base, Chinese models like DeepSeek and Dola AI are making a strong impact in various markets in Asia and Latin America and beyond. AI also provides new varieties of control via algorithmic influence, dependency on data, and self-acting decision making, that can be subtler and persistent than conventional instruments of control.

Gulf states among emerging players are capitalizing on significant investments in AI infrastructure to diversify economies and gain regional leverage, sometimes playing both sides of American and Chinese offerings. In contrast, Europe is at risk of being left behind if it fails to take advantage of specific areas like embodied AI and robotics. The competition between AI could shape the future of global norms in everything from digital commerce to autonomous warfare, as Kempe (2025) suggests.

AI, in short, is redefining geopolitics in terms of the distribution and nature of power, which now lies in the hands of those who control the data, computing power, technical standards, and cognitive infrastructure. The results of this competition

have significant implications for international order and stability (Mestre Gascón and García Rodríguez, 2025; Kempe, 2025).

2.2 AI, Global Security, and Strategic Competition

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is significantly transforming the world's security landscape and building up strategic rivalry between the big powers. In recent years, the military has seen the rapid adoption of AI technologies in order to improve intelligence analysis, targeting, autonomous systems, and swarm tactics, which are changing the character and speed of war. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine is a prime example of how AI can enhance operational efficiency, but it also highlights the potential for risks of escalation, decreased human oversight, and unintended consequences in high-stakes scenarios.

At the heart of this competition is the growing competition between the United States and China. The U.S. is prioritizing innovation and technological dominance, while China is developing dual-use innovations and technologies that could be used in civilian and military sectors. As AI shortens decision-making time horizons and expands capabilities to both state and non-state actors, this dynamic has the potential to upset the existing deterrence landscape, including the stability of nuclear weapons.

Scharre (2024) cautions that as the market for autonomous weapons systems continues to heat up, there could be more automation and less human involvement in lethal decisions, resulting in conflicts being waged at machine speed. Likewise, Black (2026) stresses the wider strategic implications as AI's disruptive impact extends from its lethal capabilities to its impact on the balance of offense and defense as well as proliferation, which necessitates a multi-faceted hard and soft power strategy to address risks and maintain international stability.

In addition to great power competition, AI is contributing to global security threats in various ways, including improved cyber warfare, information warfare, and asymmetric threats. For this reason, it is crucial to have good governance, responsible adoption and international standards in place to prevent escalation risks and to ensure that strategic competition does not compromise world peace and security.

2.3 AI Governance and International Relations

As AI continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace, the global push for AI governance measures that can safeguard security, ethical standards, and geopolitical interests is gaining momentum. With the pervasive impact of AI in military decision-making, governance is now a paramount issue in international relations, not just economic competitiveness or diplomatic engagement. Current governance structures are still fractured and are shaped by different national agendas, policies and strategic stakes of the main powers (Roberts et al., 2024).

In recent scholarship, it is suggested that international governance of global AI is fragmented rather than coordinated. The development of AI varies significantly from state to state, ranging from a focus on innovation and competitiveness in the market, to ethical protections and regulatory oversight, to state control. The different governance approaches have made international collaboration more difficult and prevented the development of a set of universally accepted principles for the

responsible development and deployment of AI technologies. As a result, geopolitical tensions are becoming a more prominent factor in AI governance, a process that is becoming more difficult to find multilateral agreement (Roberts et al., 2024).

Simultaneously, international communication is gaining in momentum, with a greater appreciation of the need to address AI governance in a collaborative manner that transcends national boundaries. There is a call for improved collaboration and transparency, accountability, risk management and inclusive participation in the governance of advanced AI systems from an international organization. These are just a few examples of the measures that have been taken to contribute to the development of the governance mechanisms needed to address the transnational nature of AI and to take into account the varying political, economic and technological capacities of different states (Guterres, 2026).

Nevertheless, the literature suggests that there are still substantial governance issues that have not been addressed. The progress toward a unified global AI governance framework remains hindered by divergent regulatory approaches, technological limitations, and conflicting geopolitical interests. International relations scholars are increasingly aware that robust governance of AI will require more than technological controls; ongoing diplomatic cooperation, institutional innovation, and the creation of shared international norms to shape the geopolitical consequences of fast-moving AI technologies will also be essential.

2.4 Research Gap

Over the past few years, research has been conducted to prove that AI has been gaining a significant place in the study of international relations, global security, and technology governance. Existing research has greatly contributed to the understanding of the implications of AI for military transformation, strategic competition, digital governance, and international cooperation. However, the research landscape is fragmented, with the majority of studies focusing on individual aspects of the geopolitical impacts of AI instead of offering a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of AI on its geopolitical dimensions (Bode, 2024; Roberts et al., 2024).

Moreover, in the current scholarship, there is a high proportion of conceptual or policy-based work, which focuses on governance principles, strategic narratives or regulatory frameworks and that provides relatively little empirical synthesis across different strands of the literature. The latest evaluation also identifies prevailing gaps in AI governance studies, such as interdisciplinary integration, policy development based on evidence, and the evaluation of new governance mechanisms in the dynamic geopolitical landscape (Strauss et al., 2025). Similarly, there has been increasing worry about the readiness of states and international organisations to address the geopolitical consequences of the more sophisticated AI applications, calling for the development of more extensive analytical frameworks that incorporate security, governance and international relations perspectives (Negele et al., 2025).

There is thus an unmet need for qualitative evidence synthesis that synthesizes and systematically integrates existing knowledge, and identifies common themes,

consensus and dissent, and gaps in research. To meet this demand, the present study uses a qualitative thematic analysis of eleven purposively selected scholarly studies to provide a holistic understanding of the impact of AI on global security, international relations and international governance. The study integrates disparate evidence into a unified analytical framework, adding to the overall picture on the geopolitical implications of AI, and pinpoints areas for further research and policy considerations.

3. Research Methodology

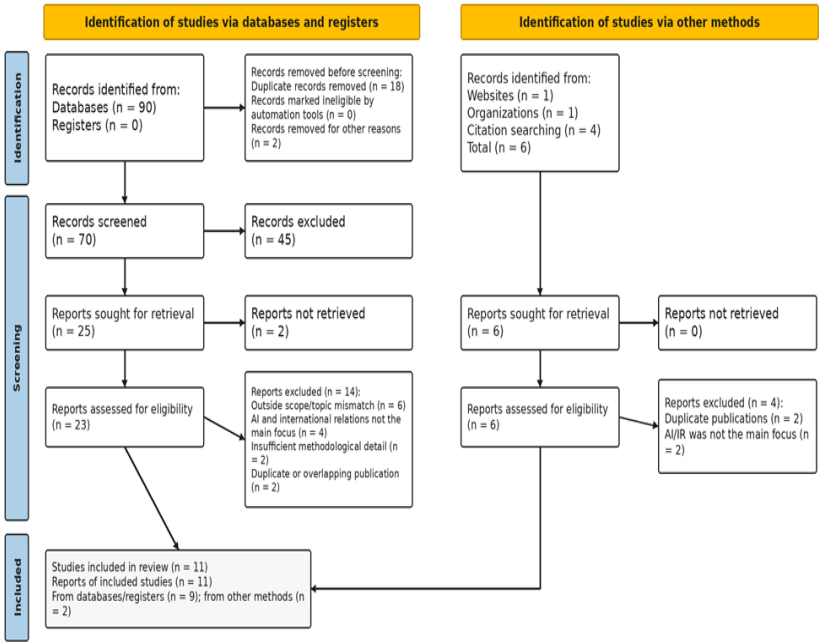
3.1 Research Design

This study applies a secondary qualitative research design, which involves the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach and thematic analysis to explore the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the fields of international relations, global power dynamics, and security. This is a secondary research project that aims to provide an overview of the geopolitical implications of AI using existing peer-reviewed journal articles, preprints, and institutional/policy reports. Systematic review was the most appropriate method as it enables the researcher to identify, evaluate and take evidence from several studies in a transparent and repeatable way, thus reducing the risk of selection bias and increasing the credibility of the findings (Snyder, 2019). After the systematic review, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis was used to identify the recurring patterns and themes in the literature. This is a review-based design, which was deemed suitable because of the subject matter's interdisciplinary nature and the international relations theory, security studies, technology policy and global governance, the subject matter's rapid evolution, and the lack of a single empirical study to encompass the range of scholarly and policy debate.

3.2 Review Protocol

The review was conducted according to the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) to ensure transparency and methodologically sound selection process (Page et al., 2021). Relevant studies were identified, screened and assessed for eligibility using the PRISMA framework and included in the study. Only studies that discuss the relationship between AI, international relations, geopolitics and global security were reviewed, which allowed for all the selected sources to be relevant to the aims of the present research.

Figure 3: PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram illustrating the systematic study selection process



3.3 Search Strategy

The search was systematic across all the major academic databases, scholarly repositories and policy platforms, such as Google Scholar, SSRN, Research Gate, Web of Science, Scopus and UNISCI, and institutional think-tanks like the Center for a New American Security (CNAS). The search was limited to publications published between 2018 and 2026 to ensure that the most up-to-date scholarship on the geopolitical aspects of change driven by AI was captured. Boolean search strings were used, for example, to combine key terms:

- "Artificial Intelligence" AND "International Relations"
- "AI" AND "Geopolitics" AND "Global Power"
- "Algorithmic Diplomacy" AND "International Security"
- "AI Governance" AND "Global Order"
- "Artificial Intelligence" AND "National Security"

3.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were established prior to screening to ensure consistency and relevance throughout the review process, as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Studies focused on AI's role in international relations, geopolitics, or global security	Studies unrelated to AI, international relations, or geopolitics
Peer-reviewed journal articles, working papers, and reputable institutional/policy reports	Blog posts, unverified opinion pieces and non-scholarly commentary
AI as a principal variable shaping power, governance, or security dynamics	Studies treating AI only as a peripheral or incidental topic
Theoretical, conceptual, comparative, or mixed-methods studies	Purely technical/engineering studies with no IR or geopolitical dimension
Published between 2018 and 2026	Publications before 2018
English-language publications	Non-English publications
Studies addressing global, regional, or national (e.g., US, China, EU, Nepal) perspectives on AI geopolitics	Duplicate publications or earlier drafts of an already-included study

3.5 Study Selection

The first search produced a large number of records related to AI, international relations and global security. Duplicate publications were deleted and titles and abstracts were screened for eligibility, leaving a set of publications that were then evaluated for inclusion or exclusion by the full text review of the articles. Only studies that explicitly discussed the impact of AI on the international relations, geopolitical power dynamics, governance, or security, and provided empirical, theoretical, or policy-based evidence that was relevant to the study's research goals were included. After this process, 11 studies were found to be eligible and were incorporated into the final thematic analysis. The studies varied widely in approach, ranging from theoretical and conceptual analysis, comparative case studies and policy reports to a mixed-methods study, thus offering a rich and varied evidence base from which to draw conclusions for qualitative synthesis. Such geographic and institutional diversity was also captured; the selected studies were from Europe, North America, the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia, and came from academic journals, university affiliated think tanks and independent research institutions, enhancing the breadth and representativeness of the review.

Table 2: *Characteristics of Included Studies*

Author(s)	Year	Method	Main Variable(s)/Focus	Key Findings
Kardumyan, V.	2025	Theoretical/Conceptual Analysis	AI, IR Paradigms, Foreign Policy Decision-Making	Traditional IR paradigms (realism, liberalism, neoliberalism, constructivism) require reassessment to interpret AI-driven geopolitical and geo-economic transformation.
Yilmaz, C.	2026	Comparative Policy Analysis / Qualitative Document Review	AI Governance, Geopolitical Power, Digital Sovereignty	AI intensifies power asymmetries and creates "algorithmic hierarchies"; three competing governance models identified (liberal, ethics-oriented, state-controlled).
Horowitz, Allen, Saravalle, Cho, Frederick & Scharre	2018	Policy Report / Qualitative Analysis	AI, National and International Security	AI is set to transform nearly every dimension of national security (defense, intelligence, diplomacy, cybersecurity); calls for proactive US preparation.
Clauberg, R.	2024	Conceptual/Qualitative Analysis	AI, Drones, Cyber-Physical Systems, Disinformation	AI-enabled drones, infrastructure attacks, and fake-news generation are reshaping 21st-century geopolitical confrontations.
Zai, M. J. & Fei, C.	2025	Comparative Analysis (US, China, EU)	AI Geopolitics, Strategic Technology Competition	AI innovation clusters (Silicon Valley, Shenzhen, Tel Aviv) act as new centers of geopolitical influence; risk of digital colonialism for developing nations.

Author(s)	Year	Method	Main Variable(s)/Focus	Key Findings
Garrido Rebolledo, V.	2025	Conceptual/Qualitative Analysis	AI, Governance, Regulatory Frameworks	Global Highlights the US-China AI technology race and stresses the need for ethical, responsible AI governance (UN, Council of Europe, EU efforts).
Acharya, G. P.	2024	Analytical-Descriptive Method	AI, New Global Order, Nepalese Security	Geopolitical balancing and techno-economic cooperation shape Nepal's security response amid AI-driven shifts in the global order.
Cheng, E. C. K.	2026	Theoretical Framework with Case Studies	Algorithmic International Relations (AIR), Digital Sovereignty	AI reshapes power through control of compute, data, and regulation; proposes an AIR framework tested via US-China rivalry, EU AI Act, and Russo-Ukrainian War cases.
Almakaty, S.	2026	Integrative Qualitative Analysis	Algorithmic Diplomacy, Nuclear Deterrence, Computational Power Asymmetry	Proposes an initial framework of machine-mediated international relations spanning algorithmic bias, nuclear command systems, and computational power imbalances.
Kolade, T. M.	2024	Mixed-Methods Approach	AI, Cybersecurity, International Cooperation	AI-driven cybersecurity detection rose from 86% (2021) to 88.25% (2023), but AI-enabled attacks also increased, underscoring the dual-use risk of AI.
Colther, C.	2025	Conflict Model Analysis	Cycle AI Rivalry, Strategic Alliances, Governance	AI rivalry among China, the US, and the EU intensifies trade restrictions and regulatory

Author(s)	Year	Method	Main Variable(s)/Focus	Key Findings
				fragmentation; contrasting governance models hinder cooperation.

3.6 Data Extraction

To standardise the process of the review, a structured data extraction matrix was developed. The data for each of the selected studies included the author(s), the year the study was published, the research design, the focus of the analysis, the main variable(s) or theme(s), and the key findings. The structure of this approach allowed for a systematic comparison between studies and acted as the basis for the thematic analysis that followed.

3.7 Data Analysis

Evidence was extracted and analysed using thematic analysis in line with the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process started by reading the selected studies over and over to get acquainted with the data. Relevant concepts related to the impact of AI on international relations and global security were then captured by generating initial codes. These codes were then grouped into larger categories and themes emerged. The themes that were emerging were reviewed, refined and clearly expressed, to ensure conceptual coherence and consistency throughout the analysis. This cyclical process resulted in four main themes:

- AI as a Transformative Force in Global Power Structures
- Strategic Rivalry and Divergent AI Governance Models
- AI's Role in Military Strategy and International Security
- Ethical, Regulatory, and Digital Inequality Challenges

The analytical framework presented in the findings and discussion section that follows is derived from these themes, and provide a structured lens for understanding the geopolitical, strategic and normative implications of AI.

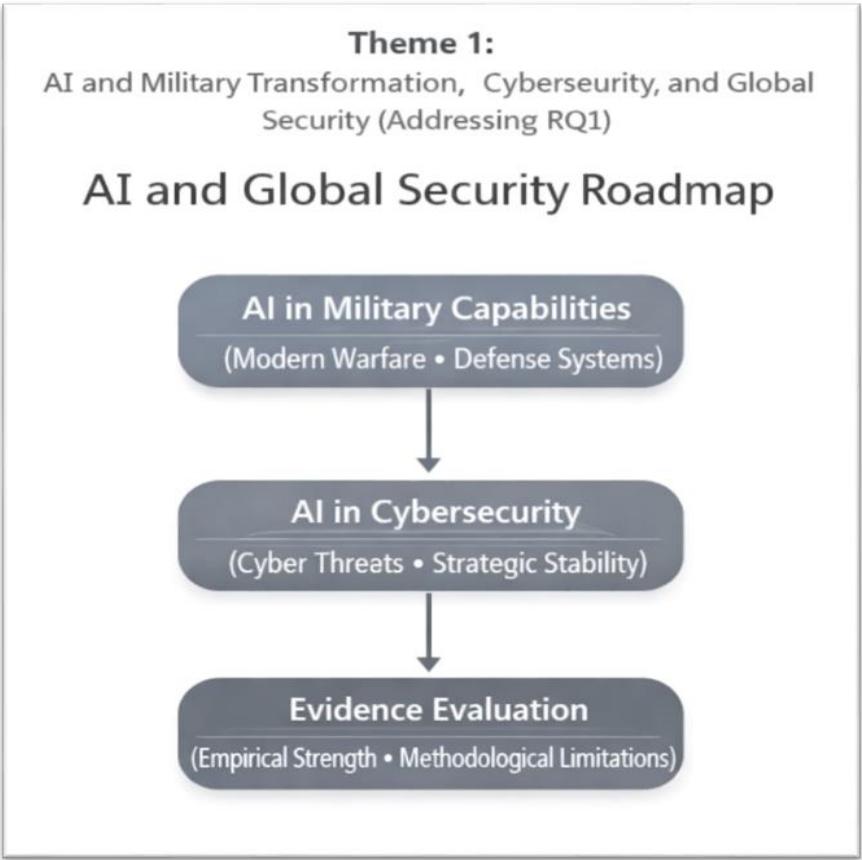
4. Findings and Thematic Analysis

These eleven selected studies were subjected to thematic analysis which revealed four interrelated themes which are discussed below in relation to the four research questions. The themes are not discussed separately but, instead, are analyzed critically, considering the strengths and limitations of the original authors' arguments in order to evaluate the strength of the current evidence base on the geopolitical implications of AI.

4.1 Theme 1: AI and Military Transformation, Cybersecurity, and Global Security (Addressing RQ1)

The literature is largely united in the view that AI is in the process of fundamentally changing the material and operational foundation of global security in answer to RQ1. The most detailed account is provided by Horowitz, Allen, Saravalle, Cho, Frederick and Scharre (2018), who believe that AI will revolutionize the vast majority of fields of national security, ranging from autonomous weapons to intelligence analysis. Their CNAS report, however, is clearly one in which they are putting forward a policy prescription for the United States, asking Washington to "act decisively," and one that is particularly strategic-interest-biased, and even more importantly, one that was published in 2018, before the onset of the generative-AI era, meaning that it is not necessarily as empirically relevant as it could be. Clauberg (2024) further elaborates on the security theme and autonomous drones and cyborgs, referring to Israel's Iron Dome and the Gulf of Aden events, but his argument remains anecdotal and lacks a systematic data base, so it is difficult to generalise beyond the conflicts mentioned. A mixed methods study by Kolade (2024) is the only study to quantify security outcomes, reporting an improvement in the number of security incidents detected with AI from 86% to 88.25% between 2021 and 2023, with the number of attacks detected using AI also increasing (from 11.25 to 16.25 incidents), but the study fails to provide a full disclosure of its data sources, making it difficult to verify the precision of these numbers independently. Almakaty (2026) extends the security conversation the most by theorizing the potential use of AI in the nuclear command and control system, and its implications for Mutually Assured Destruction logic, but this is speculative and has not been tested, and is still a preprint, non-peer reviewed. Overall, the studies indicate that AI is changing the nature and pace of global security, albeit not in a consistent manner, with some presenting in-depth policy analyses while others offer more speculative thinking. This highlights the importance of empirical and sound studies of AI-enabled military and cyber threats.

Figure 4: *Theme 1: AI and Military Transformation, Cybersecurity, and Global Security (Addressing RQ1)*

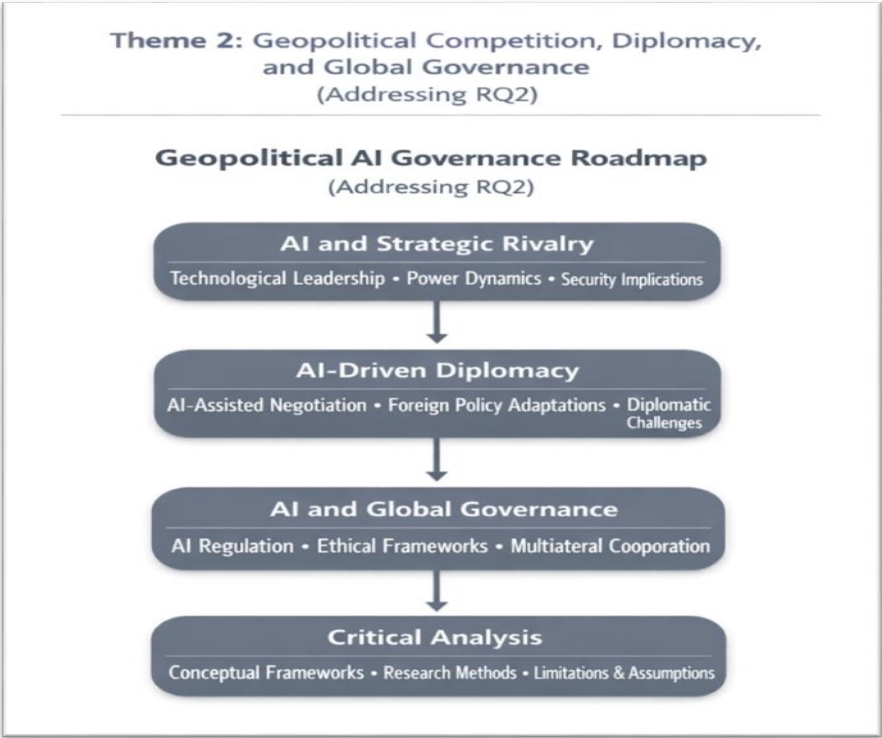


4.2 Theme 2: Geopolitical Competition, Diplomacy, and Global Governance (Addressing RQ2)

Studies of strategic competition and diplomatic practice are most directly relevant to RQ2. Yılmaz (2026) distinguishes between three competing paradigms of AI governance: liberal (innovation-focused), regulatory (ethics-focused), and authoritarian (state-controlled); and suggests that AI generates "algorithmic hierarchies," which further embeds global South dependence. Although elegant in its analysis, this tripartite typology may have the danger of flattening out significant internal differences in blocs, assuming a more uniform member state in the EU than exists, or a more uniform provincial tech ecosystem in China. Zai and Fei (2025) also describe Silicon Valley, Shenzhen, and Tel Aviv as new "clusters of geopolitical power" and "new 'digital colonialism,'" but do not provide any dependency indicators or trade statistics to support this argument. Cheng (2026) is the most theoretically ambitious, proposing an 'Algorithmic International Relations' (AIR) framework, which is applied to the US–China rivalry, the EU AI Act and the

Russo-Ukrainian War. But if a general IR framework is tested on just three cases (mostly in the West), there is a concern about external validity and case-selection bias. The analysis by Colther (2025), however, is descriptive policy commentary rather than a rigorously tested causal model, and it explains how beliefs, conflicts, responses, and repercussions fuel Chinese, American and European competition in the field of AI. These studies collectively show that AI has emerged as a key theme of strategic rivalry and a disruptive force in diplomacy and governance, but is still largely conceptual rather than empirical.

Figure 5: Theme 2: Geopolitical Competition, Diplomacy, and Global Governance (Addressing RQ2)

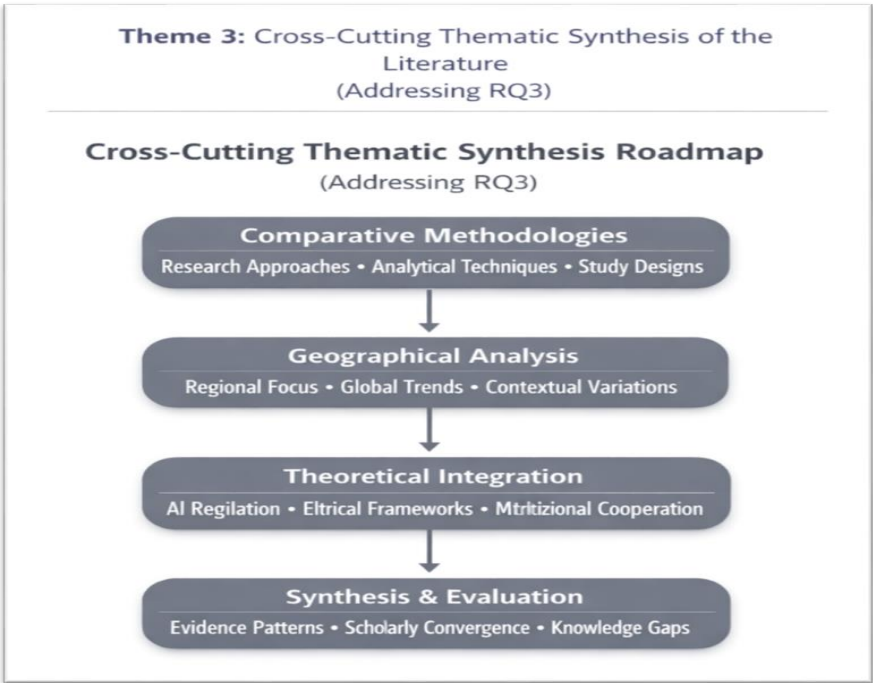


4.3 Theme 3: Cross-Cutting Thematic Synthesis of the Literature (Addressing RQ3)

RQ3 is what are the main themes present throughout the literature, and the synthesis shows convergence and fragmentation. In all eleven studies, it is generally agreed that AI is not a side effect or a tool, but an infrastructural element that is changing the dynamics of state power, in line with the argument put forward by Cheng (2026) that AI operates differently than previous technological revolutions. The corpus, however, is methodologically uneven, as theoretical papers (Kardumyan 2025; Garrido Rebolledo 2025) are based on conceptual reasoning and secondary literature, whereas only Kolade (2024) provide quantitative indicators, and Yilmaz (2026), Zai and Fei (2025), and Cheng (2026) use qualitative comparative case analysis. Such a disproportion implies that the field's statements on "algorithmic hierarchies," "digital colonialism," and "technopolar order" are more interpretative

than empirical, and it is only implicitly recognized by those who have published in the field, like Almakaty (2026), whose preprint status reflects a provisional status. There is also a geographic asymmetry, with the majority of studies focusing on the US, China, and the EU (Yılmaz, 2026; Zai & Fei, 2025; Garrido Rebolledo, 2025), and the experiences of most Global South states being under-theorised, with only Acharya's (2024) case study from Nepal being sufficiently large. Another cross-cutting tension is that while the experiences of most Global South states are frequently cited as being highly vulnerable, they are not sufficiently theorised, with the exception of Acharya's (2024) case study from Nepal. The question Kardumyan (2025) poses at the very beginning of the paper—whether the existing paradigms of IR are still relevant or not—echoes through the entire corpus, indicating that the literature is not yet unified, but is still looking for a common theoretical language. The substantive effects of AI on geopolitics are thus well described, but they are thin on the theoretical front and even more so on the empirical. Conceptual innovation has outpaced empirical testing.

Figure 6: Theme 3: Cross-Cutting Thematic Synthesis of the Literature (Addressing RQ3)



4.4 Theme 4: Governance, Ethics, Regulation, and International Cooperation (Addressing RQ4)

RQ4 related to policy and governance issues highlighted for responsible AI use, with some studies arguing for the need for multilateral regulations, and others questioning their feasibility. Garrido Rebolledo (2025) provides a concise overview of the work of the UN, the Council of Europe and the EU, and states that "ethical and responsible

AI development" should be pursued, but does not say how or what checks and balances should be implemented. Like Yılmaz (2026), he also demands "inclusive, transparent, and ethically based AI governance," but fails to reconcile this call with the power asymmetries he has identified in his analysis, leaving an unresolved tension between the norms suggested in the call and the critique of the structures. From a Nepalese security perspective, Acharya (2024) suggests that "geopolitical balancing" and "multilateral tech diplomacy" can be effective tools for smaller states to deal with the changing dynamics of the global order created by AI. This analytical-descriptive approach, however, is more of a normative advocacy than a critical analysis of the challenges that smaller states have faced in the past in terms of geopolitical balancing. Cheng's (2026) case study on the EU AI Act is the most specific regulatory case in the corpus and is a good example of the EU's fragmented governance in action; however, the scope of his AIR framework does not fully account for how competing regulatory frameworks (market-based in the US; state-led in China; rights-based in the EU) will be harmonized. The literature on diagnosing governance fragmentation, as well as the moral implications of AI in international relations, is robust and relatively underdeveloped, however, when it comes to providing models of multilateral governance that can be tested and implemented, the literature is relatively weak, and needs further research that goes beyond the normative arguments for cooperation to concrete models that are actionable and enforceable.

Figure 7: *Theme 4: Governance, Ethics, Regulation, and International Cooperation (Addressing RQ4)*



5. Discussion

The four themes uncovered in this review are not standalone, but are mutually reinforcing, in a cycle that can help explain the trajectory of the geopolitics of the age of AI. The strategic applications of AI (Theme 1) directly impact the strategic rivalry under Theme 2, as autonomous systems and cyber operations, which are at the core of AI capabilities, are regarded as a proxy for relative power by major powers, in line with realist assumptions regarding survival and relative gains (Kardumyan, 2025; Colther, 2025). This competition, in turn, makes the implementation of multilateral regulation more difficult (see Theme 4: above), exacerbating mistrust and further driving the trend of militarisation, which feeds into and reinforces the other themes: at the aggregate level of the literature, this is captured by Theme 3.

A number of theories of IR can help explain these dynamics, none of which are adequate on its own. Realism explains the arms-race logic and the dynamics of balancing power among the US, China and the EU (Zai & Fei, 2025; Colther, 2025), and Kardumyan's (2025) anthropocentric–technocentric dichotomy reflects the debate on whether AI will simply be a tool of statecraft or become an independent force that would change the international system. By contrast, liberal institutionalism provides a better account of the development of cooperative arrangements like the EU AI Act and the UN, OECD, and UNESCO initiatives (Yılmaz, 2026; Garrido Rebolledo, 2025), which indicate that even competing states are willing to accept common rules as a way to cope with uncertainty. Constructivism also brings another perspective as it emphasises that ideas like "digital sovereignty" and "algorithmic hierarchies" (Yılmaz, 2026) are not just physical, but socially negotiated discourses on authoritative action that influence state action beyond its actual capabilities. Cheng (2026) is one of the few attempts that has brought these strands together in a framework he calls Algorithmic International Relations, but as discussed under Theme 3, the case selection is rather limited, restricting the generalisation of the synthesis.

Overall, the literature reviewed indicates that, at this time, the AI-based system is more competitive than cooperative: rivalry, arms race or the lack of a unified governance framework are highlighted in eight of the eleven studies, whereas the genuinely cooperative elements are still relatively limited, such as the enhancement of cybersecurity detection rates (Kolade, 2024) or multilateral ethics initiatives (Garrido Rebolledo, 2025). This is a familiar security-dilemma dynamic, one in which technical cooperation is paired with heightened competition over the power-projection capabilities of AI. Compared to previous IR scholarship about technology and power, in general, and nuclear-era and early cyber-security scholarship in particular, the findings here indicate that AI is a technology that is at once more diffuse, dual-use, and infrastructural than its predecessors. This is explicit in Cheng's (2026) argument that AI is not merely a new tool to the existing statecraft, but rather a transformation of the very fabric of global order. The AI case, as described by Almakaty (2026) and Clauberg (2024), is one of technologies that are both diffuse, meaning they are not readily identifiable, and dual use, meaning they can be used for civilian or military purposes, and are accessible to state and non-state actors, making traditional deterrence and arms-control logic, which were developed for an

older, more state-centric era, far more complicated. In global governance, this means that, as in other arms control treaties, it is probable that the regulation will remain fragmented based on blocs without an event to trigger it, and that the development of responsible-AI governance is likely to lag the pace of responsible-AI capability development, which will further increase the power gaps found across this review. It also indicates that the multilateralism of state-centric governance may not be the only approach that needs to be considered in the future, as many capabilities in AI are infrastructural and privately owned, as both Cheng (2026) and Yilmaz (2026) argue.

6. Conclusion

This research used a qualitative study that was synthesized using systematic literature review procedures and thematic analysis. The goal was to examine the geopolitical impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on global security and international relations by selecting eleven studies. The results prove that Artificial Intelligence has grown into a geopolitical player and has the potential to shape military power, cybersecurity, strategic competition, diplomacy, and global governance. From this analysis four themes started to emerge that highlight the role of AI in redefining global security, changing geopolitical power dynamics, revealing long-standing fragmentation in the international governance system, and sparking new theoretical debates on the nature of international relations.

The study also makes a contribution to the growing body of literature by bringing together disparate evidence to be analysed in an integrated analytical framework. The results show that there is no single theoretical approach to understanding AI. Rather, its geopolitical ramifications are more complex and require more comprehensive analytical perspectives to account for the relationship between technological innovation, state power, security competition, diplomacy, and global governance. It underscores the importance of continued theoretical progress in international relations scholarship to capture the strategic consequences of the fast-moving AI technologies.

The results highlight the need to reduce the technology-governance gap from a policy perspective. To achieve effective international cooperation, it is essential to ensure the establishment of more robust multilateral regulatory frameworks, better transparency in AI development, enhanced accountability measures, and wider engagement of developing and middle-power countries in international governance processes. Inclusive governance structures will be key to making sure AI can help foster international stability, not drive up geopolitical competition and strategic uncertainty.

The study has some limitations, however. It uses only secondary, qualitative data based on the relatively small number of eleven selected studies and does not contain primary empirical data. Moreover, the fast-changing landscape of the AI industry can also change over time because of new technologies and policies. Therefore, the results and the conclusions should be viewed in light of the literature and the time frame of the literature search.

Future research should continue this study by conducting primary empirical studies, comparative cross-national studies and quantitative studies to confirm the conceptual connections found in this research. The experiences of developing

countries and middle powers should also be highlighted, as they are underrepresented in the literature as yet. Future studies on how to make the most of the role of AI in international governance and its impact on global security and international relations will be even more relevant as AI develops.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

Funding

The authors did not mention any funding for this research.

References

- [1] Acharya, G.P. (2024) 'Impact of artificial intelligence on new global order: A Nepalese security perspective', *Unity Journal*, 5, pp. 123–140. doi: 10.3126/unityj.v5i1.63189
- [2] Almakaty, S.S. (2026) 'Algorithmic diplomacy and the geopolitics of artificial intelligence: machine-driven international relations in a data-oriented global landscape', *Preprints.org*, 10 March. doi: 10.20944/preprints202603.0683.v1.
- [3] Black, J. (2026) 'Strategic implications of deploying artificial intelligence in defence', in *The Artificial Intelligence Revolution: Challenges and Opportunities*, Part III. Cham: Springer, ch. 11, pp. 299–320. doi: 10.1007/978-3-032-11814-1_11.
- [4] Bode, I., 2024. AI technologies and international relations: Do we need new analytical frameworks? *The RUSI Journal*, 169(5), pp.66-74.
- [5] Cheng, E.C.K. (2026) 'Artificial intelligence and the transformation of global order: toward algorithmic international relations', *Journal of International Relations and Foreign Policy*, 14, pp. 14–36. doi: 10.15640/jirfp.v14p2.
- [6] Clauberg, R. (2024) 'The influence of artificial intelligence on international security in geopolitical confrontations in the 21st century', in *Большая Евразия: национальные и цивилизационные аспекты развития и сотрудничества*. Conference proceedings, 27–29 November.
- [7] Colther, C. (2025) *Artificial intelligence and global power dynamics: geopolitical competition, strategic alliances, and the future of AI governance*. SSRN Working Paper. Available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=5251303>.
- [8] Emery-Xu, N., Jordan, R. and Trager, R., 2025. International governance of advancing artificial intelligence. *AI & SOCIETY*, 40(4), pp.3019-3044.
- [9] Garrido Rebolledo, V. (2025) 'Impact of the artificial intelligence on international relations: towards a global algorithm governance', *UNISCI Journal*, (67), p. 9 onwards. doi: 10.31439/UNISCI-219.
- [10] Guterres, A. (2026) *Secretary-General's remarks to the opening of the first Global Dialogue on Artificial Intelligence Governance [as delivered]*. Geneva, 6 July. United Nations. Available at: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statements/2026-07-06/secretary-generals-remarks-the-opening-of-the-first-global-dialogue-artificial-intelligence-governance-delivered>
- [11] Horowitz, M.C., Allen, G.C., Saravalle, E., Cho, A., Frederick, K. and Scharre, P. (2018) *Artificial Intelligence and International Security*. Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security.
- [12] Kardumyan, V. (2025) 'The impact of artificial intelligence on international relations: are current paradigms still relevant?', *YSU Journal of International Affairs*, 16(1), pp. 116–135. doi: 10.46991/jia.2025.1.1.116.

- [13] Kempe, F. (2025) *It's time to reckon with the geopolitics of artificial intelligence*. Atlantic Council, 11 November. Available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/inflection-points/its-time-to-reckon-with-the-geopolitics-of-artificial-intelligence/>
- [14] Kolade, T.M. (2024) 'Artificial intelligence and global security: strengthening international cooperation and diplomatic relations', *Archives of Current Research International*, 24(11), pp. 23–47. doi: 10.9734/acri/2024/v24i11945.
- [15] Landwehr-Matlé, J., Oppermann, K. and Lambach, D., 2026. Great power competition for global leadership in artificial intelligence (AI): Reconstructing AI narratives of the United States, China, and the European Union. *Review of International Studies*, pp.1-19.
- [16] Mestre Gascón, A. and García Rodríguez, J. (2025) 'Artificial intelligence as a geopolitical asset: China's strategy and its global impact', *Revista del Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos*, 25, pp. 235–258. Available at: <https://revista.ieee.es/article/view/7821>
- [17] Negele, M., Juijn, D., Shamir, A., Janků, D., Özcan, B., Soder, L., Velasco, L., Reddel, M., Bakker, M., Pacchiardi, L. and Andriushchenko, M. (2025) *Europe and the geopolitics of AGI: the need for a preparedness plan*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Europe. Available at: <https://www.rand.org/randeurope/research/projects/2025/europe-and-geopolitics-of-agi.html>
- [18] Roberts, H., Hine, E., Taddeo, M. and Floridi, L. (2024) 'Global AI governance: barriers and pathways forward', *International Affairs*, 100(3), pp. 1275–1286. doi: 10.1093/ia/iaae073.
- [19] Roberts, H., Hine, E., Taddeo, M. and Floridi, L., 2024. Global AI governance: barriers and pathways forward. *International Affairs*, 100(3), pp.1275-1286.
- [20] Scharre, P. (2024) 'The perilous coming age of AI warfare: how to limit the threat of autonomous weapons', *Foreign Affairs*, 29 February. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/perilous-coming-age-ai-warfare>
- [21] Strauss, I., Moure, I., O'Reilly, T. and Rosenblat, S. (2025) 'Real-world gaps in AI governance research', *arXiv preprint*, arXiv:2505.00174 [cs.AI]. Available at: <https://arxiv.org/abs/2505.00174>
- [22] Yılmaz, C. (2026) 'The geopolitics of artificial intelligence: power, regulation, and global governance', *Journal of Academic Social Studies (UFU-SOBED/JOSSH)*, 2(3). doi: 10.29329/ufusobed.2026.1410.2.
- [23] Zai, M.J. and Fei, C. (2025) 'The geopolitical impact of artificial intelligence: exploring AI's role in shaping global power structures and international relations', *The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies*, 3(4), pp. 2244–2263.