**Thumbnail Image:**

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# Negotiating with Algorithms: The Future of AI-Powered Diplomacy [1]

Technology changes everything—our way of life, our thinking, our behaviors, our verbal and non-verbal communication, and even the very flow of information that shapes modern societies. Recently, while attending the Artificial Intelligence Expo in Washington, DC, organized by the Special Competitive Studies Project (SCSP), I witnessed firsthand how these emerging technologies are not only reshaping personal and professional spheres but are also redefining the very instruments of national power: military, informational, diplomatic, financial, intelligence, economic, legal, and developmental.

The convention center buzzed with an electric energy that felt like a portal into the future. Tech industry leaders passionately discussed the extraordinary opportunities AI could unlock from revolutionizing healthcare and education to solving global crises, while senior defense officials discussed how the United States could maintain its military edge in the age of AI-powered warfare. As I wandered through the exhibits, drones hummed and soared above the crowd, AI-powered robotic dogs from Boston Dynamics showcased their agility with almost uncanny lifelike movements, and autonomous vehicles weaved seamlessly through the demonstration zones.

On stage, a diverse lineup of speakers delivered competing narratives. Some celebrated AI's boundless potential to advance human flourishing, describing breakthroughs that could redefine global prosperity and cooperation. Yet, as I walked through the exhibits, one display in particular caught my eye, a stark gray pillar with the question boldly painted on it: "Does AI help/harm civilians in war?" The words "HELP" and "HARM" crudely overlapping each other captured the unsettling duality of the AI debate in a single image. It sounded an unspoken alarm, hinting at a future where AI's unchecked power could just as easily exacerbate inequality, fuel misinformation, and destabilize global security as it could uplift humanity. The entire atmosphere pulsed with a strange mix of awe, ambition, and apprehension, an unmistakable sign that the AI revolution is no longer some distant future, but an unfolding reality demanding urgent reflection.

Standing amidst this swirl of innovation and AI debate, I couldn't help but reflect on AI's rapidly expanding role in one of the oldest yet most dynamic domains of statecraft: diplomacy. The conversations around national power, security, and ethics inevitably led me to consider how these same AI capabilities are beginning to influence the delicate art of international relations.

Recently, I had come across a study shared by the <u>USC Center on Public Diplomacy</u> that explores into the very intersection: <u>"The Role of Generative AI in Global Diplomatic Practices: A Strategic Framework,"</u> authored by Muneera Bano, Zahid Chaudhri, and Didar Zowghi. Their research stood out to me as one of the most comprehensive and forward-looking examinations of how Generative AI (GenAI) is not only entering the diplomatic arena, but actively reshaping its practices, possibilities, and pitfalls.

## "Diplomacy has always been about balancing power with principle; as AI becomes part of that equation, this balance becomes more delicate and more consequential than ever before."

The authors argue that GenAI can serve as a powerful tool in both bilateral and multilateral diplomatic negotiations. Its unparalleled ability to collect, process, and synthesize vast amounts of data allows diplomats to gain instant, data-driven insights that can shape negotiation strategies and outcomes with newfound precision.

Yet, as the authors emphasize, these immense capabilities come with equally significant risks. Diplomacy thrives on confidentiality, trust, and discretion. Introducing AI into these sensitive arenas raises concerns about data security and the potential for privileged information to be compromised. A single vulnerability could allow adversaries access to negotiation strategies, potentially altering the balance of power at the diplomatic table.

The authors' extensive review of 230 scholarly articles spans a wide range of diplomatic domains from public and cultural diplomacy to economic policy, crisis management, and conflict resolution. Their proposed framework not only showcases GenAI's extraordinary potential but also maps domain-specific risks. For instance, while GenAI can personalize public diplomacy messaging across diverse cultures, its misuse could amplify misinformation or oversimplify complex issues, leading to diplomatic tensions and misunderstandings.

One particularly striking insight from their study is the growing disparity in global AI adoption within diplomacy. The United States, China, India, and parts of Europe are at the forefront, while regions such as Africa, the Middle East, and Australia remain underrepresented. This imbalance risks creating a new diplomatic divide where technologically advanced nations expand their influence, while others risk being left behind. Bano, Chaudhri, and Zowghi stress the need for inclusive global cooperation and shared governance to prevent the monopolization of AI's diplomatic advantages.

Their framework also explores AI's role in crisis management, proposing real-time analytics, AI-powered simulations, and decision-support systems to guide leaders through unpredictable global emergencies. However, they wisely emphasize that AI cannot replace human judgment. In moments of crisis where cultural nuance, historical context, and ethical imperatives are crucial, over-reliance on AI could lead to unintended and even dangerous outcomes.

Another essential caution raised by the authors of this study is the risk of algorithmic bias. AI

systems are only as unbiased as the data they're trained on. In diplomatic contexts, where decisions can impact millions, even minor biases could distort outcomes, leading to skewed policies and escalating tensions.

Drawing the lesson from both the AI Expo and the study is clear: the future of diplomacy will not be determined by technology alone, but by the collective choices we make about how that technology is governed, shared, and regulated. As nations race ahead in developing AI capabilities, there is an equally urgent need for shared global frameworks that prioritize fairness, transparency, and ethical responsibility. Diplomacy has always been about balancing power with principle; as AI becomes part of that equation, this balance becomes more delicate and more consequential than ever before.

Ultimately, the question is not whether AI will transform diplomacy, it already is. The real question is: can we shape this transformation in a way that safeguards the very essence of diplomacy itself—mutual respect, trust, dialogue, and peace?