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Rethinking Diplomatic Negotiations in the Age of AI [1]

“Will the next peace treaties be negotiated not by diplomats but by artificial intelligence?”

It’s an intriguing question that started somewhere between bites of hummus and sips of coffee during our campus lunch breaks with my co-author, Dr. Waks. Our conversations kept circling back to the rising influence of artificial intelligence (AI) in diplomacy, especially through the lens of human-machine communication. What started as casual academic chat around AI quickly turned into a more interesting commentary.

So, we began by reflecting on how AI is already quietly shaping diplomacy behind the scenes: sorting intelligence reports, analyzing public opinion, and even nudging policy decisions through predictive analytics. But as AI grows more powerful and more autonomous, we found ourselves grappling with a much bigger question: “Could peace treaties, the very agreements that end wars and resolve conflicts between nations one day be crafted not by human diplomats, but by AI itself?

These AI systems wouldn’t just follow simple rules. They would be trained using huge amounts of information: everything humans know about politics, negotiation, history, psychology, and past conflicts. The idea is that AI could learn how humans have made compromises and solved conflicts for hundreds of years and use that knowledge to negotiate deals on behalf of countries, just like a human diplomat does today.

In short: Could AI one day take over the job of negotiating peace deals between countries, using its vast knowledge to find solutions, instead of humans sitting around a table?

As academics trained to observe the present while anticipating the future, these questions set the wheels in motion. Our lunch-hour debates soon evolved into a deeper exploration: how might AI redefine the art of negotiation itself? Could Artificial intelligence, grounded in data and logic but detached from emotion and cultural intelligence, eventually take on roles once reserved for seasoned diplomats? The implications, we realized, reach far beyond the realm of technology, touching the very heart of how nations manage conflict, cooperation, and compromise in the 21st century. Interesting, right!

To understand what’s at stake, let’s step briefly into the world of diplomatic negotiations themselves, a world that often unfolds far from cameras and headlines. At its heart, diplomacy is less about grand speeches and more about quiet, methodical conversations behind closed doors. Before any agreement is reached, diplomats spend months, sometimes years, preparing, gathering intelligence, understanding cultural nuances, and defining what’s negotiable and what is not.

The process is like assembling a complex puzzle: setting the agenda, making opening offers, exploring areas of common ground, and slowly navigating toward compromise. Every word in

a draft agreement is weighed carefully; every gesture across the table can carry meaning. And even after signatures are inked, implementation brings its own delicate balancing act. Beneath it all lies a constant dance of trust, calculation, and intuition qualities that, until now, have made diplomacy a distinctly human craft.

At their core, negotiations seek not only to advance national interests but to find resolutions to conflicts, to mediate between clashing narratives, and to create space for peace. Introducing AI into this profoundly human choreography raises many questions. Today, AI is already being deployed at the edges of diplomatic negotiations not as autonomous negotiators, but as powerful support tools. Negotiation support systems (NSS), powered by AI, assist diplomats in real time by modeling bargaining scenarios, forecasting potential outcomes, and simulating adversary or ally positions based on historical data. These systems tackle vast datasets from past treaties and public statements to voting patterns and economic indicators far beyond any individual negotiator's cognitive limits.

A recent NPR investigation highlights how U.S. institutions are moving into this space. According to NPR, the Center for Strategic and International Studies' Futures Lab is experimenting with Pentagon funding in using AI platforms like ChatGPT and DeepSeek to craft peace agreements, help prevent nuclear escalation and monitor ceasefires.

And it's not limited to U.S. initiatives: the UK is exploring AI for scenario planning in diplomatic contexts. Even Iranian researchers are studying comparable applications, according to NPR.

These developments raise an increasingly urgent debate within diplomatic circles and far beyond. Is the growing role of AI in diplomacy a bold step toward more rational, data-driven negotiations, or a dangerous gamble that risks stripping diplomacy of its uniquely human wisdom and compromise data privacy?

Supporters argue that AI's ability to analyze vast amounts of data, identify patterns, and simulate countless scenarios can help negotiators avoid blind spots, reduce costly miscalculations, and bring clarity to complex international conflicts. They see AI as a tool that complements human diplomats, helping them navigate negotiations that now involve not just political factors, but economics, climate models, demographic trends, and even real-time public sentiment all operating at overwhelming scales.

Skeptics, however, caution that diplomacy is not simply a matter of technical optimization. The most difficult negotiations hinge on trust, cultural nuance, and unspoken communication that algorithms may struggle to recognize, let alone replicate. Some fear that overreliance on AI models could oversimplify complex human realities, entrench existing biases hidden in data, and lead to decisions that lack accountability or democratic legitimacy.

"Which version of history will the machine learn? Whose grievances will it recognize as legitimate? Whose narrative will it encode as “truth”? Without vigilant oversight, these systems may unintentionally hardwire existing power imbalances into their recommendations, subtly shaping negotiations in ways that remain invisible and unaccountable."

While the challenges of integrating AI into diplomacy are significant, the potential opportunities are equally striking. Some of the most promising experiments in AI-assisted diplomacy are already taking shape in global climate negotiations perhaps the most complex diplomatic arena of our time.

At the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), negotiators have begun tapping into machine learning models to project the global consequences of national carbon reduction pledges. These AI systems don’t just crunch emissions numbers; they model how individual country commitments ripple across interconnected systems energy markets, economic growth, political stability, and regional security. In effect, they serve as real-time policy simulators, allowing diplomats to adjust their bargaining positions with far greater awareness of unintended consequences, potential trade-offs, and downstream effects. AI doesn’t replace the delicate art of diplomacy, but it equips negotiators with sharper tools to navigate the immense complexity of multilateral climate talks.

AI is also quietly inching closer to the front lines of conflict diplomacy. As highlighted in the NPR report, researchers and think tanks are experimenting with AI-powered monitoring tools in the ongoing war in Ukraine. By integrating satellite imagery, real-time data streams, and natural language processing, these systems promise to track ceasefire violations with a level of accuracy and objectivity that traditional human monitors may struggle to achieve. In highly fragile ceasefire environments, where trust is scarce and accusations fly easily, AI may offer a more neutral source of verification potentially reducing disputes over violations and creating stronger foundations for peace enforcement.

Beyond climate and conflict diplomacy, some nations are using AI to build entirely new forms of diplomatic influence. A striking example is emerging in the United Arab Emirates, particularly in Dubai, where AI is not only a tool but a cornerstone of its global soft power strategy. In 2017, the UAE became the first country to appoint a Minister of State for Artificial Intelligence, signaling its ambition to place AI at the center of its national vision. Dubai now regularly hosts high-level gatherings such as the World Governments Summit, where AI's role in global governance and diplomacy takes center stage. At the same time, UAE-backed research institutions have developed advanced AI models like Falcon, an open-source large language model designed to compete globally. Through partnerships with international tech giants and the development of AI infrastructure, the UAE is positioning itself as both a diplomatic broker and technological hub. Rather than replacing human negotiators, Dubai's model shows how AI can become a form of "tech diplomacy" using innovation itself as a platform for dialogue, collaboration, and international influence.

Yet even in these cutting-edge diplomatic experiments, an important caution remains. AI systems are only as good as the data they are fed. And in the world of international negotiations where history is contested, facts are filtered, and narratives often conflict; AI carries the risk of not just reflecting biases but amplifying them. Which version of history will the machine learn? Whose grievances will it recognize as legitimate? Whose narrative will it encode as "truth"? Without vigilant oversight, these systems may unintentionally hardwire existing power imbalances into their recommendations, subtly shaping negotiations in ways that remain invisible and unaccountable.

Diplomatic decisions require not just accuracy but accountability. AI systems, particularly those built on complex deep learning architectures, often offer little visibility into how they arrive at their conclusions. For negotiators and policymakers, unexplained recommendations are unacceptable especially when national security or international trust is on the line. Diplomacy is built on persuasion; negotiators must justify their positions to both their counterparts and their domestic constituencies. A black-box AI output is no substitute for a transparent rationale.

Perhaps most troubling is the risk that advanced AI capabilities may widen existing inequalities between states. Wealthier nations and major powers, with greater access to data, computing infrastructure, and technical expertise, may be able to deploy far more advanced AI tools in negotiation preparation. This could tilt the balance of power further, giving technologically advanced states unseen advantages in bilateral or multilateral talks.

Despite these challenges, my co-author and I do not envision a future in which AI replaces diplomats. Instead, we foresee 'augmented diplomacy', a model where AI serves as a sophisticated assistant, expanding diplomats' analytical horizons while leaving the ultimate decisions to human judgment.

As we write this piece, our conversation has not concluded; it has only just begun, as we continue to explore both the promises and the perils of bringing AI into the diplomacy. The role of AI in negotiations is no longer a distant prospect; it is already quietly taking shape behind closed doors and across virtual networks. The real task before us is not to resist its inevitable presence, but to guide its integration with wisdom, care and responsibility to make sure that when these technologies remain anchored to diplomacy’s most enduring mission: the peaceful resolution of conflict, upheld by the irreplaceable qualities of human wisdom, empathy, and judgment.
