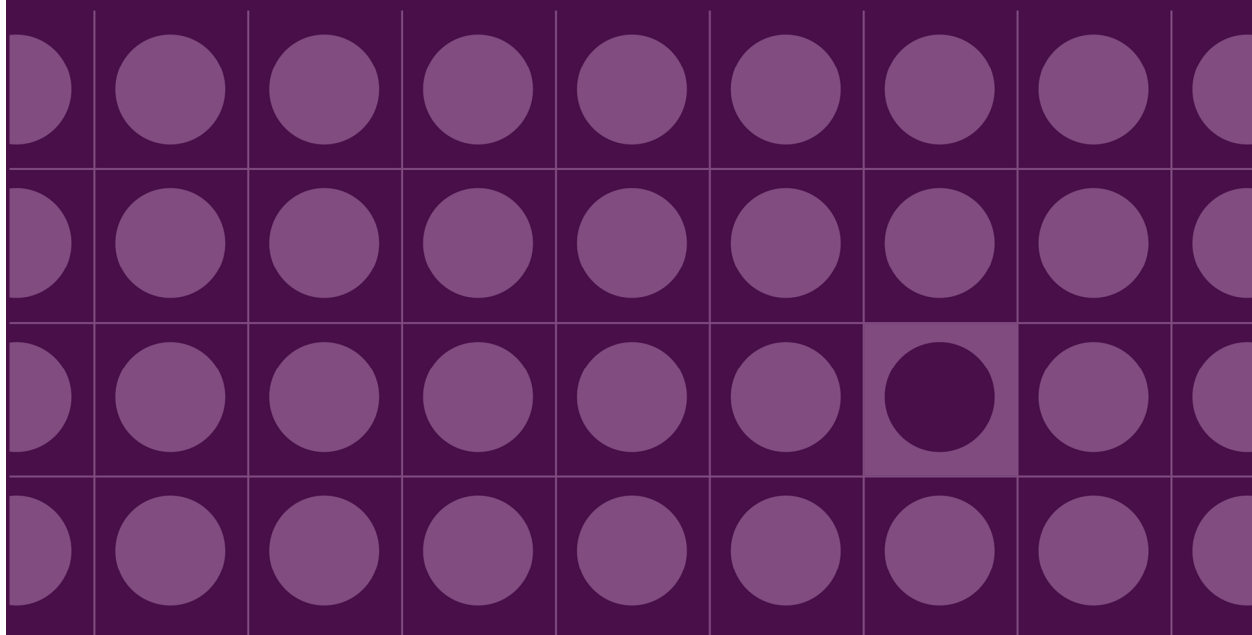


CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS
International Scientific Conference

SQUARING THE CIRCLE: THE NEW GLOBAL DYNAMICS

**Ivona Lađevac, Stefano Valente,
Erin Carlin (Eds.)**



Belgrade, May 20-21, 2026



DIPARTIMENTO
DI SCIENZE POLITICHE
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State University

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THE NEW GLOBAL DYNAMICS
Conference Proceedings
International Scientific Conference**

Belgrade, May 20-21, 2026

**Ivona Lađevac, Stefano Valente,
Erin Carlin (Eds.)**

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A NEW FACTOR OF POWER IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THE UNITED STATES – CHINA CASE STUDY¹

Dejan Vuletić²

Contemporary international relations are undergoing rapid transformation driven by technological advancement, with artificial intelligence occupying a particularly prominent role as one of the key drivers of change. In an era of digitalization and global interconnectedness, the capacity to develop and apply advanced technologies has become as important as traditional sources of power. From a theoretical perspective, this shift can be understood as an expansion of the concept of power beyond material capabilities toward technological and informational resources, thus reinforcing the relevance of structural and relational dimensions of power in international relations.

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence has introduced profound changes in the structure and dynamics of international relations. Traditionally, power in the international system has been understood through military capabilities, economic strength, and political influence. However, the emergence of AI as a strategic resource has significantly expanded this framework, positioning technological capacity as a central determinant of global power distribution. In this sense, AI is not merely an additional instrument of power, but a transformative factor that reshapes the very nature of power itself.

AI represents a unique form of power due to its dual-use nature, scalability, and capacity to transform multiple sectors simultaneously. In the military domain, AI enhances intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities, enabling faster and more precise decision-making processes. The integration of machine learning into command and control systems improves situational awareness and operational effectiveness, while autonomous systems and predictive analytics increasingly shape the character of contemporary warfare. At the same time, AI

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strengthens cyber capabilities, allowing states to conduct both offensive and defensive operations with unprecedented precision and adaptability.

Economically, AI has become a key driver of innovation, productivity, and global competitiveness. States that dominate AI development benefit from technological leadership and increased influence over global value chains. The ability to collect, process, and exploit large volumes of data has emerged as a critical source of economic advantage, creating a feedback loop in which economic strength further accelerates technological progress. As a result, AI is increasingly embedded in national development strategies and industrial policies, reinforcing its role as a central element of long-term geopolitical competition.

The competition between the United States and China clearly illustrates the central role of AI in contemporary power politics. The United States maintains a significant advantage in innovation ecosystems, research institutions, and leading technology companies, particularly through the role of private sector actors in driving technological progress. Its model emphasizes openness, global integration, and market-driven innovation. In contrast, China has adopted a state-centric approach, combining strategic planning, large-scale investments, and regulatory control. Through initiatives such as the “Next Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan,” China seeks to achieve global leadership in AI, relying on extensive data access and the integration of civilian and military sectors. This technological rivalry is also reflected in critical domains such as semiconductor production, data governance, and military applications of artificial intelligence.

A key concept emerging from this competition is digital sovereignty. States increasingly seek to control technological infrastructure, data flows, and digital ecosystems in order to protect national security and political autonomy. This process contributes to the fragmentation of the global digital space, often described as the “splinternet,” characterized by competing technological standards and governance models. The United States and China thus represent two distinct visions of digital order: one based on openness and liberal market principles, and the other on centralized control and state authority.

In addition to states, technology corporations have emerged as influential actors in international relations. Their control over data, platforms, and algorithms provides them with a form of structural power that can, in certain aspects, rival that of states. These corporations shape global communication, economic processes, and even political outcomes, often operating beyond traditional regulatory frameworks. Consequently, the interaction between states and technology companies has become a critical dimension of power in the contemporary international system.

The rise of AI also presents significant challenges for global governance. Existing international institutions and legal frameworks remain insufficiently adapted to regulate the development and use of advanced technologies. Issues such as autonomous weapons systems, algorithmic bias, data protection, and cyber security require new forms of international cooperation. However, geopolitical tensions, particularly between the United States and China, limit the prospects for comprehensive regulatory solutions and contribute to increasing fragmentation of global governance mechanisms.

Furthermore, the uneven distribution of AI capabilities contributes to a widening gap between technologically advanced and less developed states. Countries lacking sufficient technological infrastructure and expertise risk becoming dependent on external providers of AI technologies, thereby reducing their strategic autonomy. In this context, AI not only redistributes power among major actors but also deepens structural inequalities within the international system.

In conclusion, artificial intelligence has emerged as a transformative factor of power in international relations, fundamentally reshaping both the instruments and the structure of global politics. The case of U.S.-China competition demonstrates that AI is becoming a central axis of strategic rivalry, economic competition, and competing governance models. As technological development accelerates, AI will not only intensify competition among states but also define the rules and hierarchies of the emerging international order, confirming its role as one of the most significant determinants of power in the 21st century.