

Artificial Intelligence in International Society: A Reappraisal of Realism, Rationalism, and Revolutionism

Monica Marchelina Iskandar^{1*}, Hamdan Nafiatur Rasyida¹, Hafid Adim Pradana¹

¹Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia.

Correspondence*:

Address: Jl. Raya Tlogomas No. 246, Malang, East Java, Indonesia.
e-mail: marchelinamonica@gmail.com

Abstract

This study analyzes the influence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the dynamics of the international order and its implications for inter-state relations and global governance, understood as the system of rules, norms, and institutions that regulate state behavior beyond national boundaries. The rapid adoption of AI has generated new challenges in security, economic competition, and international norms, defined as shared expectations that shape cooperation and restraint among states. This study employs a qualitative approach using literature review of academic journals, reports from international institutions, and policy documents. The data are analyzed through discourse analysis to identify patterns of state interaction, normative change, and emerging regulatory mechanisms related to AI development. The findings indicate that AI functions as a strategic tool that enhances state power while simultaneously deepening technological inequality between developed and developing countries. AI also challenges traditional notions of state sovereignty by blurring jurisdictional boundaries, complicating international law enforcement, and reshaping global governance arrangements. These dynamics highlight the need for a more adaptive and collaborative governance framework that balances national interests, global rules, and ethical principles. The study provides insights into how international society can manage AI in a more inclusive and sustainable manner amid evolving global power relations.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; global issues; international security; international society; technology governance



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Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a global phenomenon that generates both opportunities and risks in international relations. In the economic sphere, AI accelerates automation, increases productivity, and creates new industries, enabling states to enhance their competitive position in the global market. At the same time, AI poses security challenges through its use in cyber operations, autonomous weapons systems, and large-scale information manipulation. As a synthetic agent, AI reshapes how power, agency, and decision-making are understood in world politics. Beyond economic and military domains, AI presents significant challenges for global governance, particularly in areas such as cybersecurity and data privacy. Cross-border data flows, algorithmic surveillance, and cyber-enabled influence operations blur jurisdictional boundaries and complicate regulatory oversight. Existing governance mechanisms remain fragmented, as national regulations often fail to address transnational risks such as data breaches, algorithmic bias, and cyber escalation. This fragmentation exposes the limits of current international cooperation in managing AI-related threats (Martinhu et al., 2025).

AI also challenges global ethical standards and the distribution of power. (Voitovych et al., 2021) emphasize that AI shifts power balances among states, intensifies technological competition, and opens new forms of cooperation, while simultaneously creating dilemmas for international legal norms. (Tallberg et al., 2023a) underline the need to combine normative and empirical approaches to AI governance so that technological development can be aligned with shared international interests. In the field of International Relations, these dynamics require analytical frameworks capable of capturing both power competition and normative change (Burton, 2023b). AI is therefore not merely a technical issue but a core political concern that affects diplomacy, foreign policy, and global security. Recent practices illustrate this shift. The United States has increasingly integrated AI into autonomous and semi-autonomous defense systems, while China has expanded AI-driven surveillance technologies for both domestic governance and external security objectives. In diplomacy, the use of AI-supported data analysis and automated communication tools has begun to reshape diplomatic engagement and strategic signaling. These developments demonstrate how AI directly influences international policy decisions and state behavior.

Existing international legal frameworks struggle to keep pace with these changes. International humanitarian law, data protection regimes, and cyber norms were not designed to regulate autonomous decision-making systems or algorithmic governance. The rapid diffusion of AI technologies challenges principles of accountability, attribution, and state responsibility, raising questions about how international law can adapt to technological acceleration without undermining state sovereignty or global stability. Previous literature recognizes AI as part of global governance and the formation of international norms in cyberspace. (Ramich & Piskunov, 2022) show that English-language scholarship tends to emphasize global governance perspectives, while Chinese-language literature prioritizes national interests and domestic policy. (Sullivan & Wang, 2023) further demonstrate how China's AI governance model reflects concerns over cyber sovereignty and resistance to Western normative dominance. These studies highlight persistent debates on sovereignty, responsibility, and ethical authority in the AI era.

Recent scholarship also confirms the continued relevance of the English School for analyzing international order. Studies apply this approach to issues ranging from intra-state conflict and human rights to intelligence cooperation and institutional change, showing its capacity to address emerging security phenomena, including AI (Basu-Mellish et al., 2023). The English School's focus on norms, institutions, and shared practices offers a useful lens for examining structural change in a high-technology context. Despite this progress, research on AI in International Relations remains fragmented, with dominant attention to security, ethics, or economic efficiency. Few studies systematically connect AI development to core International Relations theory. By integrating the three traditions of the English School Realism, Rationalism, and Revolutionism this study addresses that gap. It explains how AI strengthens material capabilities, reshapes norms and institutions, and opens possibilities for structural transformation within international society.

Literature Review

The concept of International Society within the English School refers to a community of sovereign states bound by shared norms, institutions, and practices that regulate their interactions. Classical works by Bull and Wight emphasize diplomacy, international law, great power management, and sovereignty as core institutions sustaining order. Recent scholarship shows that this concept has evolved significantly. (Doğrul, 2024) argue that the English School has shifted from a Eurocentric and historically grounded framework toward a Global IR perspective that incorporates non-Western experiences and institutional change. This evolution is particularly relevant for analyzing AI, as technological governance increasingly reflects tensions between global norms and national regulatory preferences (Tallberg et al., 2023b).

A central debate in the literature concerns the gap between global governance aspirations and national interests in AI regulation. While international organizations promote universal standards, states continue to prioritize strategic autonomy, security, and economic competitiveness. Scholars note that this divergence has slowed the development of binding AI regulations at the global level (Papagiannidis et al., 2023). The English School provides a useful lens for understanding this gap by conceptualizing international order as a negotiated outcome between power politics and normative commitments rather than a fully centralized system of governance (Roberts, Hine, et al., 2024). Wight's three traditions offer a structured framework for analyzing these dynamics. Hobbesian Realism views international politics as a realm of competition under anarchy, where states prioritize survival and relative gains. In the context of AI, this perspective explains technological rivalry, unequal access to advanced AI capabilities, and the emergence of digital divides between technologically advanced and less developed states (Díaz-Rodríguez et al., 2023). Realism also highlights how AI reinforces existing power hierarchies, as states with superior data infrastructure and computational capacity gain strategic advantages in security and economic domains (Vallor & Ganesh, 2023).

Grotian Rationalism complements this view by emphasizing the role of international law, norms, and institutions in moderating state behavior. From this perspective, AI governance emerges as a collective action problem requiring coordination, shared rules, and institutional oversight. Studies on global AI governance stress that without cooperative regulatory frameworks, risks such as autonomous weapons, cyber escalation, and transborder data misuse will intensify (Papagiannidis et al., 2023). Existing initiatives, including the OECD AI Principles and UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of AI, illustrate how states attempt to reconcile sovereignty with shared obligations through soft law mechanisms (Díaz-Rodríguez et al., 2023). These arrangements reflect Grotian assumptions that international society can sustain order through consent-based rules even in the absence of centralized enforcement. However, the literature also shows the limitations of Rationalism. Compliance with AI norms remains uneven, and enforcement mechanisms are weak due to the lack of coercive authority at the global level. Scholars argue that this governance gap reinforces the dominance of major powers and private technology firms, raising concerns about legitimacy and accountability in AI regulation (Vallor & Ganesh, 2023).

Kantian Revolutionism addresses these limitations by shifting the focus from state-centric order toward global moral responsibility and solidarity. Recent studies argue that AI challenges foundational assumptions of international law by introducing non-human agency and diffusing responsibility across states, corporations, and algorithmic systems (Green, 2021). From a Revolutionist perspective, AI governance is not merely about managing risks but about transforming international norms to reflect universal ethical principles such as fairness, transparency, and human dignity. This approach aligns with calls for global regulatory federations, transnational oversight mechanisms, and stronger roles for civil society and NGOs in AI governance (Ishkhanyan, 2025).

Empirical examples support this view. Initiatives such as the AI for Good Global Summit and UNESCO-led ethical frameworks demonstrate attempts to institutionalize global solidarity in AI development, particularly in areas like climate governance, public health, and education (Díaz-Rodríguez et al., 2023). Nevertheless, scholars caution that these efforts remain largely voluntary and are constrained by cultural differences and competing national priorities, limiting their transformative potential (Green, 2021). Overall, existing literature on AI in International Relations remains fragmented, often separating security, legal, ethical, and economic analyses. By integrating Hobbesian Realism, Grotian Rationalism, and Kantian Revolutionism, this study synthesizes these strands into a unified analytical framework. This approach clarifies how AI simultaneously reinforces power asymmetries, reshapes norms and institutions, and generates pressures for ethical and structural transformation within international society. Such an integrated perspective addresses the literature gap between global governance ambitions and national interests, offering a more comprehensive understanding of AI's impact on the contemporary international order (Doeser & Frantzen, 2022).

Method

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine the implications of Artificial Intelligence for international relations and global governance. A qualitative approach is appropriate because AI governance involves normative interpretation, institutional negotiation, and discursive constructions of power that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods. The research combines a systematic literature review with critical discourse analysis to explore how AI reshapes power relations, norms, and institutions within contemporary international society.

Data collection is conducted through purposive and criteria-based selection of scholarly articles, policy reports, and official international documents published between 2019 and 2024. Academic sources are drawn from peer-reviewed journals in International Relations, Global Governance, and Science and Technology Studies, while policy documents are collected from major international organizations such as the United Nations, OECD, UNESCO, and the European Union, as well as selected national AI strategies. Sources are selected based on their relevance to AI governance, engagement with debates on sovereignty and norms, representation of both global and state-centric perspectives, and academic credibility.

Data analysis uses thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis. Thematic analysis identifies recurring patterns such as technological competition, data sovereignty, international

law, ethical responsibility, security risks, and global cooperation, which are then mapped onto the English School traditions of Realism, Rationalism, and Revolutionism. Critical discourse analysis examines how AI is framed in global and national policy debates, with particular attention to narratives of power, responsibility, and authority. This combined analytical strategy ensures a coherent and replicable framework for assessing how AI influences international order and global governance.

Results and Discussion

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has evolved into a transnational issue that directly shapes global economic competition, security dynamics, and diplomatic relations. The expansion of large-scale models, cross-border data infrastructures, and cloud-based platforms has transformed AI into both a strategic asset and a governance challenge that exceeds the capacity of individual states (Roberts, Cows, et al., 2024). This dual-use character situates AI at the intersection of power, norms, and ethical responsibility, reflecting core debates within international society (Dauvergne, 2022).

AI as a Global Issue in International Politics

Table 1. Comparative Models of Global AI Governance

	OECD AI Principles	EU AI Act	UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI
Primary objective	To promote trustworthy and responsible AI grounded in shared values.	To control AI related risks and protect fundamental rights within the European Union.	To safeguard human dignity, human rights, and ethical values in AI development and use.
Policy focus	Transparency, fairness, accountability, and human rights.	Risk based regulation and classification of high risk AI systems.	Ethics, inclusivity, sustainability, and human oversight.
Regulatory nature	Soft law. Non binding normative principles.	Hard law. Legally binding regulation.	Soft law global recommendation.
Global relevance	Establishes minimum global standards and functions as a norm setting framework.	Provides a formal regulatory model for managing dual use AI technologies.	Offers a universal ethical framework applicable across diverse cultural contexts.

Source; Author, 2025.

AI's transnational character is evident in how data flows, algorithmic decision-making, and platform governance operate beyond territorial boundaries. Issues such as data privacy breaches, algorithmic bias, and cybersecurity incidents increasingly generate cross-border political consequences. For example, large-scale data harvesting practices by multinational technology firms have prompted diplomatic disputes between the European Union and the United States regarding data transfers and regulatory jurisdiction, highlighting the limits of purely national AI regulation (Rudschies, 2023). The dual-use nature of AI further intensifies governance challenges. Civilian applications in healthcare, education, and urban management coexist with military uses such as autonomous weapons systems, predictive surveillance, and cyber operations. This duality makes AI governance inseparable from global security concerns. Risk-based regulatory approaches, as adopted in the EU AI Act, attempt to classify AI systems according to their potential harm, offering a more proportionate governance model than blanket regulation (Dauvergne, 2022).

However, global AI governance remains fragmented. While initiatives such as the OECD AI Principles, the EU AI Act, and UNESCO's Ethics of AI Recommendation promote responsible AI, they differ significantly in scope and enforceability. The OECD framework relies on voluntary compliance and soft-law mechanisms, prioritizing flexibility and innovation. In contrast, the EU AI Act introduces binding legal obligations, sanctions, and market-based enforcement, making it more effective in regulating high-risk and dual-use AI systems. This divergence illustrates first-order cooperation problems among states and second-order institutional weaknesses within global governance structures (Roberts, Cows, et al., 2024).

AI and Hobbesian Realism

From a Hobbesian realist perspective, AI intensifies competition in an anarchic international system. Major powers treat AI as a critical component of national power, shaping military capabilities, economic influence, and diplomatic leverage. The strategic rivalry between the United States and China exemplifies this dynamic. China's extensive use of AI-driven surveillance technologies, including facial recognition and predictive policing systems, has strengthened domestic control while raising international concerns about human rights and digital authoritarianism. (Williams, 2025) These practices have influenced diplomatic relations, contributing to normative contestation between China and liberal democracies regarding privacy and governance standards.

Similarly, the United States' investment in military AI, including autonomous targeting systems and decision-support tools, reflects realist priorities of maintaining technological superiority. While these capabilities enhance deterrence, they also create escalation risks and normative uncertainty in armed conflict. The deployment of AI in military contexts reinforces power asymmetries and deepens technological inequality between advanced and developing states, reaffirming realist assumptions that security and survival drive state behavior (Lavazza, 2023). AI thus functions as both an instrument of power and a domain of geopolitical contestation. States with superior data access, computational infrastructure, and technological ecosystems gain disproportionate influence over global

standards and governance processes. This dynamic demonstrates how Hobbesian realism remains relevant in explaining AI-driven international competition and structural inequality.

AI and Grotian Rationalism

In contrast, Grotian rationalism emphasizes cooperation through norms, institutions, and international law. From this perspective, AI governance represents a collective action problem requiring shared rules to prevent harm and stabilize international order. (Dauvergne, 2022) Global institutions such as the OECD, UNESCO, and the United Nations play key roles in articulating norms related to transparency, accountability, and human rights in AI development. Comparative analysis highlights important differences between governance models. The OECD AI Principles focus on consensus-building and policy coordination, making them accessible to diverse states but limited in enforcement. The EU AI Act, by contrast, operationalizes Grotian principles through binding regulation, risk classification, and penalties, offering stronger safeguards against misuse. (Roberts, Cowls, et al., 2024) While the EU model appears more effective in regulating dual-use AI, its regional scope limits global impact unless adopted or emulated by other actors. Nevertheless, applying Grotian norms faces persistent obstacles. State sovereignty, rapid technological change, and weak enforcement mechanisms constrain the effectiveness of international law. To address these limitations, scholars argue for strengthening institutional legitimacy through transparency, inclusive participation, and technical verification mechanisms such as algorithmic audits and reporting obligations (Sharma, 2024).

AI and Kantian Revolutionism

The Revolutionist tradition extends analysis beyond state-centric order toward global moral responsibility and solidarity. AI challenges existing legal and ethical frameworks by introducing non-human agency and diffusing responsibility across states, corporations, and algorithmic systems. Kantian approaches emphasize that AI governance should advance universal values such as human dignity, justice, and sustainability rather than narrow national interests (Coeckelbergh, 2025). Empirical initiatives illustrate this perspective. Global platforms such as the AI for Good Global Summit promote AI applications for climate mitigation, disaster response, and public health, framing AI as a global public good. UNESCO and WHO initiatives further reinforce solidarity-based governance by encouraging benefit-sharing, capacity-building, and ethical harmonization across regions (Strange & Tucker, 2024). However, these efforts remain largely voluntary, limiting their capacity to transform power structures and address inequality (Rudschies, 2023).

Toward Actionable Global AI Governance

To move from normative aspiration to practical governance, more concrete strategies are required. First, multilateral institutions such as the UN could establish a dedicated AI governance body responsible for norm coordination, risk assessment, and technical standard-setting. Second, the WTO could integrate AI-related issues into digital trade rules to address data flows, algorithmic transparency, and competitive fairness. Third, capacity-building

mechanisms should support developing countries in accessing AI infrastructure and regulatory expertise to reduce global technological inequality (Sharma, 2024). Integrating realism, rationalism, and revolutionism provides a comprehensive understanding of how AI reshapes international society. AI simultaneously reinforces power competition, necessitates cooperative regulation, and generates ethical pressures for systemic transformation. These dynamics demonstrate that AI governance is not merely a technical challenge but a defining issue for the future of international order.

Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a defining issue within contemporary international society, reshaping the relationship between state sovereignty, global governance, and international norms. This study demonstrates that AI cannot be understood merely as a technological innovation, but as a political and normative force that intensifies power competition, challenges existing regulatory frameworks, and generates demands for new forms of collective governance (Dauvergne, 2022). By applying the English School's three traditions, this article shows that AI governance reflects the interaction of Hobbesian realism, Grotian rationalism, and Kantian revolutionism. From a realist perspective, AI reinforces strategic rivalry and technological inequality among states, particularly between major powers competing for dominance in data, infrastructure, and military applications. From a rationalist perspective, international institutions and rule-based frameworks remain essential for managing AI's cross-border risks and dual-use nature through shared norms and regulatory coordination (Dauvergne, 2022). From a revolutionist perspective, AI introduces ethical pressures that extend beyond state interests, calling for global solidarity, universal norms, and the framing of AI as a public good serving human welfare (Ishkhanyan, 2025).

The findings indicate that effective AI governance depends on balancing national sovereignty with the need for coordinated international regulation. Fragmented national approaches risk deepening global inequality and destabilizing international order, while overly centralized governance models lack political feasibility. A multilevel and polycentric governance arrangement, including elements of digital federalism, offers a more realistic pathway by combining minimum global standards with flexible domestic implementation (Doeser & Frantzen, 2022). This study contributes to International Relations scholarship by reaffirming the analytical relevance of the English School in understanding emerging technologies. It shows that AI governance is not only a technical or legal challenge, but a test of international society's capacity to adapt its norms, institutions, and moral commitments in response to rapid technological change. Future research should prioritize empirical analysis of how AI-related norms are negotiated, diffused, and institutionalized across international organizations and policy arenas, as well as cross-institutional collaboration to enhance transparency, accountability, and legitimacy in global AI governance (Lavazza, 2023).

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