Executive Summary

This thesis project answers the question of: How does the integration of AI in diplomacy impacts international relations, and what are the legal, technological, and geopolitical dimensions that shape it? Using a State-of-the-Art (SotA) methodology to summarize how the academic literature frames AI's impacts on diplomacy, describe historical progressions, identify its turning points, and propose a direction for its further development. Ultimately, this enhanced understanding aims to inform policymakers, diplomats, and scholars of the latest trends, challenges, and opportunities in the rapidly evolving field of AI and diplomacy. This research examines English-language academic articles from 2016 to April 2024.

The increasing integration of AI in different aspects of diplomatic practices makes it a phenomenon worth scholarly attention. As a tool, the rapid advancements in AI technologies have the potential to reshape traditional diplomatic methods and strategies. As a topic in the agenda, the surge in global policy discussions and initiatives —specially the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU)— addressing AI's ethical, legal, and normative challenges reflects growing international concern. The geopolitical impact of AI is a key driver in shaping diplomatic relations and security strategies —amidst systemic rivalry among major powers— by maneuvering strategic competitions and collaborations (Imbrie, Daniels, and Toner, 2023; Kurbalija, 2024). The EU's 2016 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was a critical international juncture for data processing related to AI (European Commission, 2016; Höne et al., 2019), explaining the start of the selected timeframe.

Departing from the categories of AI and diplomacy relationship proposed by the Elcano Royal Institute and DiploFoundation: AI as a topic in the international agenda, AI as a tool for diplomacy, and AI as a geopolitical factor (Bjola, 2019; Höne et al., 2019), and adding cross-cutting topics —ethical considerations, privacy concerns, and human rights implications—, the study provides a more holistic analytical framework. Additionally, the presented categories —each operationalized by specific sub-topics and challenges— derived from an extensive literature review. To synthetize the existing academic literature trends in these categories a SotA review has being used. The latter, being a narrative synthesis, traces the development of academic thought, focusing on contemporary issues to offer a nuanced perspective on emerging trends and methodologies (Barry, Merkebu, and Varpio, 2022; García-Peñalvo, 2022). Nonetheless, SotA's focus on recent developments can introduce temporal biases, potentially skewing the understanding of a field's evolution.

The inclusion criteria were limited to articles from 2016 to April 2024, published on Scopus and Web of Science databases, that contain the presence of keywords [detailed in the Appendix 2] in the title and/or in the abstract, and in the source keywords list.

Chronologically the topic gained interest in the second half of the studied period and mostly focused on geopolitical implications and secondly on AI governance. The 2023 has been an effervescent, with a peak in 2023 accounting for 34,8% of the whole academic production, and a high increase in governance-related articles in comparison to previous years. This year coincides with AI relevant events like the UK's AI Safety Summit (UK Government, 2024), or the US's first Enterprise AI Strategy (U.S. Department of State, 2023). Whereas articles addressing AI as a tool for diplomacy accounted for more than half of 2024's production so far. With the advancement of AI technologies

and normative productivity in the last couple of years, scholars delve into their different applications and risks for the national and international landscape.

Regarding, AI as a topic on the agenda, the scholarly analysis reveals discrepancies in the universal conceptualization and application of AI regulations, highlighting the varied approaches between AI powers and the significant influence of private actors in shaping policies. While substantial progress has been made in framing AI within diplomatic and governance dialogues, significant work remains to bridge the gap between policy intentions and their operationalization in diverse global contexts.

AI as a tool for diplomacy has gained interest, particularly in handling complex data and real-time analysis crucial for negotiation, decision-making and conflict management. However, the academic discourse reveals challenges in data reliability, ethical robustness, and the necessity for human oversight. These insights advocate for a balanced exploration of AI's capabilities and limitations, ensuring technological advancements support diplomatic practices without compromising ethical and security standards.

Within AI as a geopolitical factor, academic literature consistently emphasizes its impact on shifting global power structures, particularly highlighting the systemic —economic and military— competition between leading nations like the US and China. Challenges such as achieving digital sovereignty, managing technology dependencies, and the risks of protectionism are critical concerns that influence global diplomatic engagements.

The integration of AI into diplomacy accentuates cross-cutting topics such as ethical dilemmas, privacy issues, and human rights concerns. Scholarly work emphasizes the need for robust governance frameworks to navigate these issues effectively. Despite existing efforts to establish ethical guidelines, there remains a critical need for transparent, accountable AI applications that uphold human rights and promote global diplomatic equality.

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