

The Geopolitics of Artificial Intelligence

Language

English

Mode

Online

Course content and objectives

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly becoming one of the defining forces shaping international politics, economic competition, and global security. Yet AI is not simply a technological innovation. Behind algorithms and intelligent systems lies a complex geography of power involving semiconductors, data centres, cloud infrastructure, energy resources, critical minerals, talent, capital, and the ability to set the rules that will govern the technology.

This course explores how the development and deployment of AI are reshaping the distribution of power among states, corporations, and other global actors, creating new strategic dependencies while intensifying competition over the infrastructures and resources that make AI possible.

Moving beyond the conventional narrative of a simple technological rivalry between the United States and China, participants will examine a more fragmented and interconnected global landscape, including the emergence of competing technological ecosystems, the strategic role of Europe, the ambitions of middle powers and the Global South, and the growing influence of private technology companies that increasingly control critical layers of AI infrastructure.

Summary of Topics

- The Political Economy of AI: understanding the resources, infrastructures, and economic forces that underpin AI development.
- The Geopolitics of Chips and Compute: examining the strategic importance of semiconductors, computing power, and global supply chains.
- Data, Cloud Infrastructure, and Strategic Dependency: exploring how access to data and digital infrastructure influences global power dynamics.
- AI and Military Power: analyzing the relationship between artificial intelligence, security, and defense capabilities.
- Global Competition for AI Governance: understanding how states and institutions compete to define the rules governing AI.
- Technological Sovereignty and the Future of Power: investigating whether AI is fostering a more multipolar world or concentrating unprecedented influence in the hands of a limited number of states and technology companies.

Lesson Plan

Lesson 1 – AI and the New Geography of Power: *From a technology race to a new architecture of global power*

- Introduces the conceptual foundations of the course and challenges the idea that AI can be understood merely as a technological race.

Lesson 2 – The Infrastructure of Intelligence: Chips, Compute and Energy: *The material foundations of artificial intelligence*

- Explores the often invisible infrastructure behind AI and asks why control over compute is becoming one of the most important sources of strategic advantage in the 21st century.

Lesson 3 – Cloud Empires, Data and Digital Sovereignty: *Who owns the infrastructure of the digital world?*

- Examines the growing geopolitical importance of cloud infrastructure and the concentration of digital capabilities in the hands of a small number of hyperscale technology companies.

Lesson 4 – The AI Arms Race: Military Power, Intelligence and Conflict: *From autonomous systems to algorithmic warfare*

- Examines the military applications of AI while moving beyond simplistic narratives of “killer robots”, focusing on how AI changes the speed, scale and decision-making architecture of conflict.

Lesson 5 – Beyond the US and China: Europe, Middle Powers and the Global South: *Can there be an AI world beyond the superpowers?*

- Explores the strategies of Europe, the Gulf states, India, Japan, South Korea, and other emerging technological powers. It also examines the risks of a new AI divide between countries that can develop and control advanced systems and those that remain primarily consumers of AI technologies.

Lesson 6 – Who Governs AI? Rules, Standards and the Future World Order: *The global struggle to write the rules of intelligence*

- Examines the growing competition between different models of AI governance and asks whether a global governance framework is possible in a fragmented geopolitical environment.

Teaching Methodology

The course combines theoretical frameworks, policy analysis, and contemporary case studies to encourage students to think critically about one central question: who will have the power to shape the age of artificial intelligence and what will that power look like?

Across six sessions, students will examine the political economy of AI, the geopolitics of chips and compute, the strategic importance of data and cloud infrastructure, the relationship between AI and military power, the global competition over AI governance, and the emerging forms of technological sovereignty and dependency.

Evaluation Methodology

To pass the exam, participants must correctly answer at least 8 out of 15 multiple-choice questions. Admission to the final exam is subject to meeting the minimum attendance requirement (at least 5 out of 6 classes).

Faculty for the course

Claudia Schettini: Research Associate Fellow & ISPI Head of Digitalization Program

Claudia Schettini holds a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from LUISS Guido Carli, a Master's degree in International Security from Sciences Po Paris, and a Ph.D in Global Politics and Human Rights from Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, Pisa.

Before starting her Ph.D, Claudia worked at the NATO Atlantic Treaty Association, where she developed her keen interest for the field of cybersecurity and digital policies, gaining valuable international experience. While completing her visiting research period at Cambridge University, she worked for the Swiss consultancy firm Horizon Groups, running strategic analyses and advising on international cybersecurity policies and standards, including ISO and IEC frameworks, monitoring developments in AI and cybersecurity while drafting comprehensive policy assessments for international clients like Saudi Aramco.

With a PhD thesis centred on addressing tech-facilitated abuses through an adaptive threat modelling, her main publications and interests address the governance of new technologies, the intersection of AI and cybersecurity and the geopolitical implications of cyber-threats.

Fluent in English, French and Spanish, Claudia always tries to offer strategic insight for navigating the complexities of cybersecurity and digitalization in global contexts.