



Artificial intelligence and India's foreign policy in the digital age: Challenges and opportunities

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Abstract

The growing influence of artificial intelligence (AI) is redefining the way states formulate and implement foreign policy in an increasingly digital and interconnected world. Beyond its technological significance, AI has become an important strategic resource that affects diplomacy, national security, economic competitiveness, and international governance. In this context, India is gradually incorporating AI into its foreign policy agenda to strengthen its global engagement, protect national interests, and respond to emerging geopolitical and technological challenges. This paper examines the evolving relationship between AI and India's foreign policy by exploring both the opportunities created by AI-driven innovation and the policy challenges associated with its adoption.

The study employs a qualitative research approach based on the analysis of government publications, policy documents, reports of international organizations, and contemporary academic literature. It examines the role of AI in areas such as digital diplomacy, foreign policy decision-making, cyber security, defence capability, economic cooperation, and participation in global technology governance. The analysis also considers the constraints that may limit India's effective use of AI, including concerns related to data protection, ethical accountability, algorithmic bias, cyber threats, technological dependence, regulatory uncertainty, and the widening digital divide. Furthermore, the paper discusses how intensifying global competition in AI is reshaping strategic relations among major powers and influencing India's external policy priorities.

The study argues that AI offers India significant opportunities to enhance diplomatic capacity, strengthen strategic autonomy, and expand its role in international digital governance. At the same time, realizing these benefits requires coherent public policy, robust institutional capacity, responsible innovation, and sustained international cooperation. By addressing both the prospects and limitations of AI, the paper contributes to a better understanding of how emerging technologies are influencing the future direction of India's foreign policy in the digital age.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence (AI), India's foreign policy, digital diplomacy, cyber security, global technology governance

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative force that is reshaping international politics, diplomacy, security, and economic governance. Beyond its technological applications, AI has become an important strategic asset that influences national competitiveness, geopolitical power, and foreign policy decision-making. Governments across the world are increasingly integrating AI into intelligence gathering, cyber security, defence modernization, crisis management, and diplomatic engagement to strengthen their strategic capabilities. ^[1] As AI continues to influence global governance and economic development, technological capacity has become an essential component of national power. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that AI could affect nearly 40 percent of global employment, while more than seventy countries have already adopted national AI strategies, reflecting the growing recognition that AI is central to economic growth, national security, and international influence. ^[2] The widespread adoption of AI has also transformed the conduct of diplomacy. Digital diplomacy, cyber diplomacy, technology governance, and data-driven policymaking have become increasingly significant in bilateral and multilateral relations. AI enables governments to analyse vast volumes of data, improve policy forecasting, enhance diplomatic communication, and respond more effectively to emerging security challenges. At the same time, its rapid diffusion has raised concerns regarding cyber security, misinformation, algorithmic bias, autonomous weapons, cross-border data governance, and ethical accountability. ^[3] These concerns have prompted renewed international efforts to establish common principles for responsible AI governance. Initiatives such as the Bletchley Declaration on AI Safety (2023), the United Nations General Assembly Resolution on Artificial Intelligence

(2024), and on-going discussions within the G7, G20, and the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) demonstrate that AI governance has become a major issue in contemporary international diplomacy. ^[4]

India has responded to these global developments by incorporating AI into its broader vision of digital transformation and international engagement. The launch of the Digital India Programme in 2015 laid the foundation for expanding digital infrastructure, e-governance, and public service delivery. Building on this initiative, NITI Aayog introduced the National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence: AI for All in 2018, identifying AI as a catalyst for inclusive development through innovation, research, skill development, and international collaboration. ^[5] The strategy signalled India's intention to become not only a user of AI technologies but also an important contributor to global AI innovation. This vision was further strengthened through the Responsible AI for All frameworks in 2021, which emphasized transparency, fairness, accountability, privacy, safety, and inclusiveness in AI development. ^[6] More recently, the India AI Mission, approved in 2024 with an allocation of over ₹10,000 crore, aims to expand high-performance computing infrastructure, develop indigenous AI models, support AI startups, improve public datasets, strengthen GPU availability, and build a skilled workforce capable of sustaining India's long-term technological competitiveness. ^[7]

India's foreign policy has simultaneously adapted to the growing importance of digital technologies. The country's success in developing Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), including Aadhaar, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), and Digi Locker, has enhanced its international reputation as a provider of inclusive and scalable digital solutions. During its G20 Presidency in 2023, India

promoted digital public infrastructure, digital inclusion, and responsible AI as key priorities of international cooperation. The New Delhi Leaders' Declaration emphasized the development of human-centric and trustworthy AI consistent with international law and sustainable development.^[8] In parallel, India has expanded technological cooperation through initiatives such as the India–United States Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET), the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI), and collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).^[9] These partnerships seek to strengthen cooperation in AI, semiconductors, cyber security, quantum technologies, telecommunications, and other critical and emerging technologies.

Despite these significant policy initiatives, integrating AI into foreign policy remains a complex undertaking. Concerns related to cyber security, data protection, algorithmic transparency, misinformation, technological dependence, regulatory fragmentation, and ethical governance continue to shape debates on the responsible use of AI. Moreover, growing competition among major powers in AI and other critical technologies has intensified geopolitical rivalries and increased the strategic importance of technological self-reliance. For India, the challenge lies in harnessing AI to strengthen diplomatic capacity and strategic autonomy while ensuring that technological advancement remains consistent with democratic values, international law, and sustainable development.

Although research on AI has expanded rapidly, relatively few studies examine its implications for India's foreign policy by integrating diplomacy, national security, technology partnerships, and global digital governance within a single analytical framework. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how AI is reshaping India's foreign policy in the digital age by analysing both the opportunities and the challenges associated with its adoption. Using qualitative analysis based on government policy documents, reports of international organisations, and contemporary scholarly literature, the paper argues that AI is emerging as a significant instrument of India's foreign policy. Its effective integration, however, will depend on strong governance institutions, ethical regulation, technological innovation, and sustained international cooperation, enabling India to play a more influential role in shaping an inclusive, secure, and rules-based digital international order.

Artificial Intelligence and the Changing Nature of International Relations

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a defining feature of contemporary international relations, influencing the ways in which states pursue their strategic, economic, and diplomatic objectives. In the digital era, technological capability is increasingly regarded as an important element of national power alongside military strength and economic resources. As AI continues to advance, governments are incorporating it into intelligence gathering, cyber security, defence planning, public administration, and foreign policy analysis to improve decision-making and strengthen national resilience.^[10] Consequently, competition in AI research, advanced computing, semiconductor production, and digital infrastructure has become an integral part of global geopolitical dynamics, shaping both cooperation and rivalry among states.

The growing adoption of AI has also transformed the conduct of diplomacy and international engagement. AI-enabled technologies assist governments in analysing large and complex datasets, assessing geopolitical trends, monitoring global developments, and supporting timely policy responses. In addition to enhancing diplomatic communication, AI is influencing international trade, technology partnerships, digital supply chains, and the formulation of global technology standards. From the perspective of international relations, realist scholars consider AI a strategic resource that enhances national power and intensifies geopolitical competition, whereas liberal scholars emphasize the importance of

international cooperation, multilateral institutions, and common regulatory frameworks to ensure that AI is developed and deployed responsibly.^[11]

Despite its considerable benefits, AI has introduced a range of governance and security challenges that extend beyond national borders. Concerns relating to cyber security, misinformation, algorithmic bias, autonomous weapons systems, cross-border data governance, privacy, and ethical accountability have become central issues in international policy discussions. In response, governments and international organizations have initiated collaborative efforts to establish shared principles for the responsible development and use of AI. Frameworks such as the OECD AI Principles, UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021), the Bletchley Declaration on AI Safety (2023), and the United Nations General Assembly Resolution on Artificial Intelligence (2024) illustrate the growing international commitment to promoting AI that is human-centric, transparent, accountable, and trustworthy.^[12]

Overall, AI is reshaping the contemporary international system by integrating technological innovation with diplomacy, security, economic governance, and multilateral cooperation. Countries that invest in AI research, digital infrastructure, and effective governance mechanisms are better positioned to shape international norms, strengthen strategic partnerships, and enhance their global influence. For emerging powers such as India, AI presents significant opportunities to reinforce strategic autonomy and expand diplomatic engagement while also requiring policies that effectively balance innovation, security, ethical governance, and international collaboration. These developments provide an important context for examining the evolving role of AI in India's foreign policy in the digital age.

India's Foreign Policy in the Digital Age

The emergence of the digital era has significantly influenced the priorities and practices of India's foreign policy. Traditional diplomacy once centred primarily on political dialogue, territorial security, and economic cooperation, has expanded to address issues arising from rapid technological change. Digital technologies, cyber governance, artificial intelligence, data protection, and emerging technologies have become increasingly important components of international engagement.^[13] Consequently, India's foreign policy has evolved to respond to a global environment in which technological capability is closely associated with economic progress, national security, and international influence.

India's external engagement in the digital age is guided by the principles of strategic autonomy, multilateral cooperation, technological innovation, and inclusive development. In recent years, technology has moved beyond its conventional role as a driver of economic growth and has become an important element of diplomatic strategy. The growing significance of digital infrastructure, secure communication networks, critical technologies, and innovation has encouraged India to broaden the scope of its foreign policy.^[14] As a result, digital issues now occupy an important place in bilateral relations, regional cooperation, and multilateral negotiations, reflecting the close relationship between technological advancement and contemporary international politics.

The digital transformation of diplomacy has also changed the methods through which India engages with the international community. Advances in digital communication, virtual diplomatic platforms, and data-driven decision-making have made diplomatic interactions more timely, efficient, and responsive.^[15] These developments have strengthened India's ability to engage with foreign governments, international organizations, the private sector, and the Indian diaspora while improving crisis communication, consular assistance, and international coordination during emergencies. Digital diplomacy has therefore become an important instrument for strengthening India's global outreach and enhancing the effectiveness of its external engagement.

Another notable feature of India's foreign policy is the growing importance of technology diplomacy. Cooperation in areas such as artificial intelligence, cyber security, quantum technologies, digital connectivity, semiconductors, and other critical and emerging technologies has become an integral part of India's international partnerships.^[16] These areas are no longer viewed solely through the lens of scientific or commercial cooperation; they increasingly shape economic resilience, strategic partnerships, supply chain security, and the development of international technology standards. In an environment characterised by rapid technological change and increasing geopolitical competition, technology diplomacy has become an essential dimension of India's engagement with both developed and developing countries.^[17]

Despite these opportunities, the digital transformation of foreign policy also presents several policy challenges. Cyber security risks, cross-border data governance, misinformation, digital inequality, technological dependence, and the absence of comprehensive international regulatory frameworks continue to complicate international cooperation. Addressing these issues requires a balanced approach that protects national interests while supporting innovation, democratic values, privacy, and ethical governance. Strengthening institutional capacity and promoting international collaboration will therefore remain essential for ensuring that digital technologies contribute to peace, security, and sustainable development.

Overall, India's foreign policy in the digital age reflects a gradual transition from conventional diplomacy to technology-enabled statecraft. As emerging technologies increasingly shape international relations, India's ability to integrate digital innovation into its diplomatic and strategic priorities will play a decisive role in strengthening its global influence and strategic autonomy. This broader transformation provides the foundation for understanding the specific role of artificial intelligence in advancing India's foreign policy objectives, which is examined in the following section.

Role of Artificial Intelligence in India's Foreign Policy

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly influencing the formulation and implementation of India's foreign policy by strengthening diplomatic capabilities, supporting strategic decision-making, enhancing national security, and expanding international cooperation. In the contemporary international system, where information flows rapidly and geopolitical developments evolve continuously; foreign policy decisions require timely analysis and accurate assessment of complex global events. AI enables governments to process extensive datasets, identify emerging patterns, evaluate potential risks, and generate evidence-based policy insights. Rather than replacing conventional diplomacy, AI enhances the analytical capacity of policymakers, allowing them to respond more effectively to evolving international challenges.^[18]

One of the most significant contributions of AI lies in improving diplomatic engagement and foreign policy planning. AI-based tools facilitate the analysis of political, economic, and security-related information gathered from multiple sources, enabling decision-makers to better understand international developments and anticipate future trends. Machine learning, natural language processing, and predictive analytics assist in analysing diplomatic communications, monitoring global media narratives, and identifying shifts in international public opinion.^[19] These capabilities strengthen policy formulation by providing timely and reliable information while supporting more informed diplomatic negotiations and strategic assessments.

AI has also transformed the practice of digital diplomacy by expanding communication between governments and global audiences. Modern diplomacy extends beyond formal negotiations to include digital platforms that facilitate public engagement, crisis communication, and international outreach. AI-powered translation systems, automated information management, and sentiment analysis enable diplomatic institutions to communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries with greater efficiency.^[20] At the

same time, AI assists in identifying misinformation and coordinated disinformation campaigns that may influence international perceptions or affect diplomatic relations. These applications contribute to more responsive and effective public diplomacy while reinforcing India's international image in the digital era.

Another important dimension of AI is its contribution to national security and strategic preparedness. Contemporary security challenges include cyber-attacks, hybrid warfare, terrorism, maritime security, and cross-border threats that require rapid analysis and coordinated responses. AI supports intelligence assessment by processing satellite imagery, geospatial information, open-source intelligence, and cyber data more efficiently than traditional methods. It also strengthens cyber security through real-time threat detection, anomaly identification, and predictive risk assessment.^[21] These capabilities enhance situational awareness and enable policymakers to make more informed strategic decisions, thereby complementing India's broader security and foreign policy objectives.

AI is equally relevant to India's economic diplomacy and international technological engagement. Digital technologies have become central to global economic competitiveness, influencing trade, investment, innovation, and critical supply chains. AI assists governments in evaluating international market trends, assessing trade risks, identifying investment opportunities, and supporting negotiations on digital commerce and technology cooperation. As competition increasingly revolves around advanced computing, semiconductors, cloud infrastructure, and emerging technologies, AI has become an important component of economic statecraft. For India, strengthening technological capabilities also enhances its credibility as a trusted partner in global innovation and digital cooperation.^[22]

Beyond bilateral engagement, AI has acquired growing importance in multilateral diplomacy and global governance. The rapid expansion of AI has generated international debates on ethical standards, data governance, privacy, algorithmic accountability, and the responsible use of emerging technologies. These issues require collective responses because their implications extend across national borders. India has consistently advocated a balanced approach that promotes innovation while ensuring transparency, inclusiveness, accountability, and equitable access to digital technologies. This approach reflects India's broader objective of supporting an open, secure, and rules-based digital order in which both developed and developing countries participate in shaping global norms and governance frameworks.

Challenges of Integrating Artificial Intelligence into India's Foreign Policy

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into India's foreign policy has created new possibilities for strengthening diplomacy, security, and international engagement. At the same time, its growing adoption presents a number of technological, institutional, ethical, and geopolitical challenges that require careful policy attention. Addressing these issues is essential to ensure that AI contributes to India's foreign policy objectives in a secure, responsible, and sustainable manner. The major challenges are outlined below.

- 1. Cyber security and Digital Threats:** The increasing use of AI in diplomatic and strategic affairs has expanded the risk of cyber-attacks, cyber espionage, ransom ware, and AI-enabled disinformation campaigns. These threats can disrupt critical infrastructure and compromise sensitive government information. Strengthening cyber resilience, secure digital networks, and international cooperation is therefore essential for safeguarding India's strategic interests.
- 2. Data Governance and Privacy:** Reliable data forms the foundation of AI systems, making data governance an important policy concern. Differences in national regulations on data protection, privacy, and cross-border data transfers often complicate international cooperation. India must

establish a balanced framework that protects national interests and individual privacy while supporting innovation and the responsible use of data.

3. **Ethical and Regulatory Challenges:** The increasing use of AI raises concerns regarding fairness, transparency, accountability, and algorithmic bias. Inaccurate or biased AI systems may influence policy decisions and reduce public confidence in digital governance. Furthermore, the absence of universally accepted international rules governing AI creates uncertainty regarding its responsible application in diplomacy and international affairs.
4. **Technological Dependence and AI Sovereignty:** India's continued dependence on imported semiconductors, advanced processors, cloud infrastructure, and core AI technologies may create strategic vulnerabilities. Building domestic technological capabilities through research, innovation, and indigenous AI development is essential for strengthening technological sovereignty and reducing external dependence.
5. **Digital Infrastructure and Capacity Gaps:** The successful adoption of AI depends on robust digital infrastructure, high-performance computing facilities, quality datasets, and advanced research institutions. Uneven digital development and limited technological resources can slow AI adoption within foreign policy institutions. Sustained investment in digital infrastructure and innovation ecosystems is therefore essential.
6. **Geopolitical Competition:** Artificial Intelligence has become an important area of strategic competition among major powers. Rivalries over advanced technologies, semiconductor manufacturing, digital standards, and technology supply chains increasingly shape international relations. India must carefully manage these geopolitical dynamics while preserving strategic autonomy and expanding mutually beneficial international partnerships.
7. **Institutional Capacity and Skilled Human Resources:** Effective use of AI in foreign policy requires professionals with expertise in international relations, artificial intelligence, cyber security, and digital governance. Expanding specialised education, strengthening research institutions, and encouraging collaboration between government, academia, industry, and policy think tanks will be necessary to build long-term institutional capacity.
8. **Global AI Governance:** The absence of a comprehensive international framework for AI governance remains a significant challenge. Differences in national priorities and regulatory approaches have made it difficult to establish common global standards. India can contribute constructively by supporting transparent, inclusive, human-centric, and rules-based AI governance while ensuring that the perspectives of developing countries and the Global South receive adequate attention.

Opportunities for India in AI-Driven Diplomacy and Global Governance

Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers India new opportunities to strengthen its foreign policy, expand international cooperation, and enhance its role in global governance. By integrating AI into diplomacy, security, and economic engagement, India can improve policy effectiveness while contributing to the development of a secure, inclusive, and rules-based digital order. The major opportunities are as follows:

1. **Strengthening Digital Diplomacy:** AI enhances diplomatic communication through real-time translation, data analysis,

and digital engagement. These capabilities improve public diplomacy, facilitate faster communication, and enable India to engage more effectively with international partners and the global Indian diaspora.

2. **Improving Strategic Decision-Making:** AI-driven analytics support policymakers by identifying geopolitical trends, assessing potential risks, and forecasting policy outcomes. Better access to timely information enables more informed and evidence-based foreign policy decisions.
3. **Promoting Global AI Governance:** India's growing digital capabilities provide an opportunity to contribute to international discussions on AI ethics, data governance, and regulatory standards. By advocating transparent, inclusive, and human-centric AI, India can strengthen its role in shaping emerging global governance frameworks.
4. **Expanding Technology Partnerships:** AI creates new avenues for collaboration in research, innovation, cyber security, and critical technologies. Stronger technology partnerships promote knowledge sharing, strengthen innovation ecosystems, and deepen India's strategic cooperation with partner countries.
5. **Enhancing National Security:** AI improves intelligence assessment, cyber defence, border surveillance, and maritime security through faster data processing and predictive analysis. These capabilities strengthen India's strategic preparedness and support its broader security objectives.
6. **Advancing Economic Diplomacy:** AI supports digital trade, investment promotion, technology cooperation, and innovation-led economic growth. A stronger AI ecosystem enhances India's competitiveness and reinforces its position in the global digital economy.
7. **Strengthening Soft Power and Global Leadership:** India's experience in digital transformation and inclusive technology offers an opportunity to build international trust and influence. Sharing digital best practices and supporting capacity-building initiatives can further enhance India's leadership, particularly among developing countries and the Global South.
8. **Supporting Sustainable Development:** AI contributes to addressing global challenges in healthcare, agriculture, education, climate action, and disaster management. International cooperation in AI-based solutions enables India to advance the Sustainable Development Goals while promoting inclusive and sustainable development.

Conclusion

This study examined the growing significance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in shaping India's foreign policy in the digital age by analysing its strategic opportunities, emerging challenges, and implications for global governance. The analysis demonstrates that AI has evolved beyond a technological innovation to become an important instrument of contemporary statecraft, influencing diplomacy, national security, economic engagement, and international cooperation. As digital technologies increasingly shape the global balance of power, the effective use of AI has become an essential component of foreign policy and international competitiveness.

The study finds that AI offers India considerable opportunities to strengthen digital diplomacy, improve strategic decision-making, enhance cyber security, expand technology partnerships, promote economic cooperation, and contribute more actively to global AI governance. At the same time, the integration of AI into foreign policy is accompanied by complex challenges, including cyber security risks, data governance, ethical and regulatory concerns,

technological dependence, institutional limitations, and the absence of comprehensive international governance frameworks. These issues underscore the need for policies that integrate technological innovation with effective governance, ethical standards, and institutional resilience.

To maximise the benefits of AI, India should adopt a comprehensive and forward-looking strategy that promotes innovation while ensuring transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, and strategic autonomy. Continued investment in research and development, digital infrastructure, human capital, and indigenous technological capabilities will be essential for building a resilient AI ecosystem. Equally important is India's active participation in multilateral institutions and international policy dialogues to support the development of transparent, human-centric, and rules-based AI governance that reflects the interests of both developed and developing countries.

In an increasingly interconnected and technology-driven international environment, AI is expected to play an even greater role in shaping diplomacy and global governance. India's ability to integrate AI responsibly into its foreign policy framework will influence not only its national interests but also its contribution to the evolving international order. By combining technological advancement with responsible governance, international cooperation, and sustained institutional development, India can strengthen its diplomatic influence, reinforce its strategic autonomy, and emerge as a constructive leader in building a secure, inclusive, and sustainable digital future.

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