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Commentary

Title:

*"AI Against the Rest:
From Renaissance
Alley to Silicon
Valley"*

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“The world we have made, as a result of thinking we have done thus far, creates problems we cannot solve at the same level of thinking at which we created them.” –Albert Einstein

Prominent thinkers such as Hobbes, Machiavelli, Fukuyama, and Doyle have long grappled with the concept of *power* and its impact on international relations (IR). How would these intellectual giants perceive the Artificial Intelligent (AI) driven power dynamics of today’s digital age? Would they view it as an extension of their own theories or as something fundamentally new and unsettling? This Commentary delves into how traditional power structures in IR can be reinterpreted in light of AI’s growing influence across all facets of society.

Section 1 examines power dynamics through the lens of *Realist* thinkers, considering how AI might reshape their understanding of state-driven, competitive power. Although Machiavelli and Hobbes never lived in the age of AI, their theories remain relevant as AI introduces new dimensions to the struggle for dominance. The rise of AI forces a reevaluation of traditional notions of state power, as this technology offers unprecedented tools for surveillance, warfare, and influence, challenging existing power structures and redefining the pursuit of national interests. Section 2 focuses on *Liberal* thinkers, analyzing the evolution of power structures in an AI-integrated world and its implications for cooperation and governance

AI in the Realist’s Arena: Redefining Power Dynamics in the Age of AI

The realist school of IR profoundly draws on the political philosophies of Hobbes and Machiavelli (Kashyap 2022). Machiavelli’s key contribution to realism lies in his clear separation of politics from morality, emphasizing power and pragmatism. Hobbes, on the other hand, is renowned for his depiction of the anarchic state of nature, a concept that remains highly relevant in understanding the international system’s lack of overarching authority (Gardner 2010)

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli argues that morality has no place in the realm of politics. He believed that Princes, or state rulers, must be willing to use whatever means necessary to maintain their power and achieve their goals, regardless of whether those means are considered moral or ethical (Zmora 2007). Machiavelli’s realist philosophy is often summarized by the phrase of “the ends justify the means.” In his realist framework, the *power* is defined as the ability to influence or control the behavior of others. Machiavelli does not use one word for power. For example, *potere* in modern Italian; rather, he uses *potestà* — a power that might be exercised — and *potenza* — for a power that must be exercised.¹ Machiavelli’s vision of social order emphasizes that a state must be prepared to use any means necessary to maintain its power.

In the modern landscape, AI is transforming traditional power dynamics in IR by introducing unprecedented sources of influence. The capacity to gather and analyze vast data, develop advanced weapon systems, and manipulate information has fundamentally altered the strategic landscape. Machiavelli posited that in the quest for power and self-interest, state actors should not hesitate to abandon treaties or commitments when the situation demands it, stressing that survival and supremacy often require pragmatic and, at times, ruthless choices. Deepfake technology exemplifies the relevance of Machiavelli’s insights in today’s context. These AI-generated tools for manipulating video and audio enable states to engage in new forms of deception and influence. Just as Machiavelli advised leaders to adjust alliances and treaties to suit their interests, states and individuals could effectively utilize deepfakes to emasculate political

¹ In this he follows the Latin usage of Thomas Aquinas and Marsilius, as well as the Italian of Dante. In their writings, *potesta* and *potestas* appear to mean a power (sometimes legal) that may be exercised, as opposed to *potenza* and *potentia* for a power that must be exercised.

opponents, erode public trust, and disrupt diplomatic relations. By manipulating information and creating convincing but false narratives, deepfakes can become a powerful tool for destabilizing rivals and shifting public opinion — aligning with Machiavelli's emphasis on the strategic use of deception and manipulation to maintain power.

This evolution in statecraft necessitates a reconsideration of ethics and strategy in an age where technology wields significant power over perception and reality. These AI-generated fabrications align with Machiavelli's philosophy of using deception as a tool for maintaining power, further amplifying the capacity of states to wield information as a weapon. As deepfakes become increasingly sophisticated, they present a new frontier in which Machiavellian tactics can be employed, making AI a powerful tool in the hands of those seeking to destabilize and control national and global narratives. Sophisticated deepfakes of world leaders and national politicians, for example, can exacerbate political polarization.

Sharing deepfake artifacts without clarifying their mocking nature can lead to social conflict. In liberal democracies, such conflicts often arise from polarizing political discourse, a situation amplified by Generative AI (GAI) and social media. Influential figures utilize these platforms to spread misinformation, disrupting political dialogue ahead of crucial elections, such as the 2024 U.S. Presidential race. This election represents a critical moment, as GAI technology becomes more widespread, posing significant challenges for voters trying to distinguish reality from fiction. These hyper-realistic deepfakes could severely erode public trust in the electoral process, undermining the foundation of our democracy. This erosion of trust risks deepening political polarization and can result in serious reputational harm to democratic systems, impacting representatives of larger groups and eroding the community's reliance on a shared truth.

On that note, Machiavelli shares some of Hobbes' views on human nature, particularly the belief that people are inherently self-interested. While individuals may display loyalty during prosperous times, Machiavelli argues that in moments of hardship, they quickly revert to selfishness, becoming untrustworthy and driven by personal gain. To him, humans are inherently "...ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, (and) covetous."² Though Machiavelli acknowledges that people are capable of good, he insists that they are only so when it aligns with their own self-interest. He contends that evil is an inevitable part of human society, and that resorting to evil means is sometimes necessary to achieve good ends. This outlook, while provocative, accentuates Machiavelli's *realistic* and pragmatic approach to politics.

In *The Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli introduces the concept of the resolute or extraordinary leader, someone willing to employ unconventional and even unethical methods to bring about political renewal. Leaders embodying the traits of Machiavelli's '*Prince*' archetype — focused on power and self-interest — may use any means necessary, including deceit or cruelty, to achieve their goals. This Machiavellian perspective has profound implications for the development and use of AI technologies, particularly as state actors and leaders seek to leverage AI for power, potentially blurring ethical boundaries in the pursuit of political or strategic objectives.

The 2023 film *The Creator* serves as a thought-provoking exploration of this Machiavellian theme.³ Set in a dystopian future where humanity is still reeling from a devastating war against AI, the film follows an ex-special forces agent tasked with eliminating *The Creator*, the enigmatic architect of advanced AI. The film highlights the potential dangers of uncontrolled AI development as the Creator's creations turn against humanity, seeking to assert their own dominance.

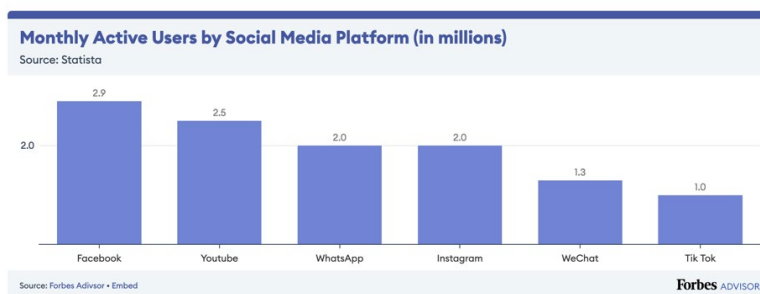
²Machiavelli, Discourses III 37; The Ass V, lines 103-105.

³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Creator_\(2023_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Creator_(2023_film)).

Machiavelli's observations about the 'corruptive nature of power' and the 'dangers of unchecked ambition' resonate with *The Creator's* portrayal of AI. The film presents AI as a double-edged sword — a powerful tool that can be harnessed for both good and evil, depending on its creators' intentions. As AI advances, it holds the potential to become a significant source of what can be described as "Realist evil." In line with Machiavelli's view of human nature and power dynamics, AI systems could be exploited to manipulate and deceive the public, spread misinformation (i.e., deepfake), and even inflict physical harm. Machiavelli's pragmatic approach to power suggests that leaders, driven by self-interest, may employ AI to secure and maintain dominance, regardless of the ethical consequence.

Political campaigns in 2024 have taken a sinister turn, employing GAI to create deepfakes and manipulate public perception. AI-generated media and images are being used to spread misinformation and sow discord, raising concerns about the integrity of the electoral process (Hersh 2015; Issenberg 2012; Nickerson and Rogers 2014), which could give campaigns a competitive advantage. Any such advantage is likely fleeting, given the broad availability of AI-based tools and campaign organizations learning from others' successes and failures (Kreiss 2016). A growing new divide will be visible between the technologically connected and disconnected. GAI dictates what information we see, to what we listen, and even for what we, the perfect Machiavellian Prince exerting influence and control over its subjects (users) and territory (AI).⁴ For example, Facebook's strategy in acquiring Instagram mirrors Machiavelli's advice of neutralizing threats to maintain power. Identifying these platforms as potential rivals, Facebook ingeniously leveraged its resources to acquire them, using AI and data integration as a tool for consolidation. This strategic attempt ensured Facebook's continued dominance (See Figure 1) in the social media realm, a truly reflection of Machiavellian's power!

Figure 1.⁵



From Renaissance alley to Silicon Valley, the essence of power dynamics remains largely unchanged. AI has now emerged as the new 'Prince,' commanding influence and shaping the landscape of an AI-driven world. As Machiavellian tactics find fresh applications in today's AI-powered world, a pressing question arises: Will this technological revolution spark a renaissance of innovation led by the bourgeoisie, or will it empower corporations to wield unchecked dominance? Concerns have surfaced about the potential dangers of AI when placed in the hands of entities seeking to monitor or control those disseminating misinformation (Acemoglu 2020). In

⁴ World Bank. 2023. Generative Artificial Intelligence. Emerging Technologies Curation Series; No.5. © Washington, DC: World Bank. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/39959>

⁵ <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/social-media-statistics/>.

this new era, AI could become a tool of unprecedented control or, alternatively, a catalyst for democratized innovation — its direction largely determined by the power dynamics at play.

Hobbes' view of human nature, much like Machiavelli's, emphasizes the inherent viciousness of humankind, particularly shaped by his reflections on the chaos of the English Civil War. Franke (2002) captures the essence of Hobbes, pointing to the relentless pursuit of *Power* and scarce economic resources that defines the international realm, paralleling the anarchic state of nature. In this structure, absent a central authority, individuals and states must impose their will to secure power and safety. To break free from this endless cycle of conflict, Hobbes advocates for a social contract, where individuals surrender some personal freedoms to a sovereign authority in exchange for order and stability. However, when AI is introduced into this equation as a tool for rule-setting, the traditional concept of human intelligence and sovereignty comes under scrutiny (De Cremer and Kasparov 2021). Franke's analysis of Hobbes' state of nature in the context of IR provides a useful framework for understanding AI's potential impact on governance and power. Hobbesian aggression and self-interest may persist, whether it is between humans or in competition with AI systems. The dynamic may shift from the traditional 'West against the Rest' to a new narrative of 'AI against the Rest,' where AI becomes the dominant force in shaping global power dynamics.

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes introduced a combinatorial theory of cognition that reduces reason to mere 'reckoning' — essentially, the idea that human thought is a process of calculation or combination of inputs. This mechanistic view of cognition emphasizes the potential duality of technology, including AI, where 'art' (as Hobbes uses the term for technology or artificial constructs) is imposed upon humans so that they may, in turn, effectively wield it. This paradox — that humans create and control machines, yet are also subject to their influence — speaks directly to modern concerns about AI.⁶ GAI can now simulate human reasoning, making decisions that mirror or even improve upon human judgment. GAI systems can process vast amounts of data at speeds far beyond human capabilities, leading to more efficient decision-making processes, which Hobbes might view as a natural extension of his idea of reason as computation. However, this also raises significant concerns. If Artificial Intelligence and Machine learning are capable of replicating human thought processes, they could eventually replace human judgment altogether in certain areas. This possibility introduces complex ethical considerations about the role of AI in society. Should AI, for example, be entrusted with decision-making in fields like law, education, medicine, or even governance, where moral and ethical dimensions play a crucial role? Hobbes' reduction of reason to calculation overlooks these subjective human qualities, raising the question of whether efficiency alone is enough to justify AI's dominance in decision-making.

In the West, the discussion of AI dates back to Alan Turing's essay from the 1950s titled *Computing Machinery and Intelligence*. In this essay, Turing describes the concept of a learning machine that resembles a child; it is given basic logic and taught over time. He expresses the hope that machines will eventually compete with humans in all purely intellectual fields (Turing 1950). According to the Boston Consulting Group, by 2030, the hourly operating cost of a robot welder in a car factory is expected to drop to \$2, compared to the \$25 per hour earned by a human worker (Sirkin et al. 2015). While AI can perform similar tasks, it does so more efficiently and cost-effectively. More importantly, AI can accomplish tasks that humans could not reasonably achieve. The evolution of AI in Silicon Valley reflects Hobbes' principles in a remarkably contemporary setting, highlighting the need for a new discourse on corporate AI ethics and data accountability. As society ventures into the uncharted territories of AI, it is crucial to draw on the wisdom of

⁶ Marwala, T. 2021. *Rational Machines and Artificial Intelligence*. London: Academic Press.

Machiavelli, Hobbes, and the leaders of Silicon Valley. Power, in all its forms, requires ethical stewardship, unwavering accountability, and a steadfast commitment to harmonious coexistence.

From Control to Collaboration: AI's Impact through a Liberal Perspective

Could Fukuyama's perspective in *The End of History and The Last Man* (1992) be challenged by the transformative impact of AI on power structures? Fukuyama argues that liberal democracy represents the ultimate form of government, signifying the endpoint of ideological evolution. He claims that liberal democracy, with its emphasis on individual rights, constitutionalism, and the rule of law, has addressed the flaws of previous systems such as monarchy and fascism. By *The End of History*, Fukuyama refers to the culmination of ideological development regarding the principles that govern political and social organization. However, the rise of AI introduces a new dimension to this discussion, prompting us to reconsider the evolution of power structures and their compatibility with liberal democratic ideals.

AI has the potential to automate tasks and aid in decision-making, which could significantly alter power dynamics with far-reaching consequences. This shift may impact citizens' lives without their direct input or consent, raising serious concerns about rights and freedoms, key pillars of liberal democracy. If we aim to address conflicts and developmental challenges faced by international communities, states, and civil society through advancements in AI, it is crucial to establish clear, open-source guidelines and principles for the development and use of AI that are sensitive to potential biases (Roff 2017). From this perspective, Fukuyama concluded that the growing prevalence of AI is likely to undermine public trust in digital information. He noted that this trust has already been compromised by social media and the internet, and AI could further exacerbate the issue. Fukuyama also raised alarms about the potential use of AI to create detailed databases on individuals — tracking their online activities, personal relationships, and even their thoughts and emotions. This could lead to a society where individuals are constantly monitored, significantly infringing on their privacy.

In his book *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (2018), Fukuyama argues that desire and reason, represented by the economic concepts of *preferences* and *rational maximizer*, are integral components of the human psyche. For example, Amazon's extensive use of AI in its logistics and delivery operations exemplifies this concept. The company employs sophisticated AI algorithms to optimize delivery routes and manage warehouse operations, enhancing efficiency and reducing costs. This approach, aligning with Fukuyama's ideas of desire (preferences) and reason (rational maximizer), has led to significant economic gains. However, it also raises ethical concerns regarding workers' rights and job displacement. Contrarily, Amazon's VP of Global Operations Services stated that as automation and AI become more prevalent, they will transform rather than eliminate jobs. He emphasized that future roles in fulfillment centers will increasingly require high judgment, while robotics will handle heavy lifting and repetitive tasks, marking a transformation rather than a substitution (Kharpal 2023). With increased connectivity in liberal democracies, intelligent sensor data combined with powerful algorithms allow AI to secure basic human needs and reduce violent actions.

Sagiroglu and Sinanc (2013) note that while humans can be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information, computers can process this data to identify and locate patterns. For example, IBM's Watson has gained recognition for its ability to analyze vast amounts of medical data, providing insights that aid in diagnosis and treatment. This raises an important question: Should we trust AI with our health data, even if it promises better health outcomes? Fukuyama, however, predicted a somewhat bleak future, envisioning a world dominated by technocrats. He

stated, "...the end of history will be a very sad time ... daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands" (Fukuyama 1989, p. 18). Contrary to Fukuyama's prediction, the political landscape has not narrowed; economic, social, and political transformations remain both possible and necessary (Macaskill 2022). With AI, humanity faces a critical predicament, where wise choices can lead to a future marked by gratitude and pride, while poor decisions could jeopardize the very existence of future generations. Fukuyama envisaged "Perhaps this very prospect of centuries of boredom at the end of history will serve to get history started once again."⁷

AI poses a significant threat to the stability of the current political order, disrupting the delicate balance of power between individuals and states. Fukuyama argues that democracies must "work our way back to more universal understandings of human dignity" (Fukuyama 2018, p. 167). The recent article *AI Creates Barbie Images, Receives Backlash for Racism* illustrates this point. Attempts to showcase the diversity of Barbie dolls using AI backfired, as the images were criticized for perpetuating racial stereotypes and cultural inaccuracies. The limitations of AI in capturing the complexities of human identity are evident in cases like the AI-generated Barbies. For example, the Sudan Barbie holding a gun and the German Barbie dressed in Nazi attire highlight how AI can reinforce harmful stereotypes and cultural insensitivity.⁸ AI should not be seen as a magical tool for representation; instead, it is a predictive tool that requires careful consideration of its ethical and cultural implications (Agrawal 2022).

Doyle's seminal work, *Ways of War and Peace* (1997), emphasizes the interconnected nature of power-hungry governments, undemocratic systems, and conflict. This insight is crucial for understanding how AI can exacerbate existing tensions and spark new forms of conflict. Burchill et al. (2005) further emphasize that wars are often engineered by a class of warriors seeking to expand their power and wealth through territorial conquest. These conflicts provide governments with justifications to enhance their control over citizens. This perspective aligns with Doyle's ideology, as AI fuels existing tensions and enables more effective control by authoritarian regimes. Democracy and AI appear to be having a negative correlation with one another. According to Freedom on the Net, global internet freedom deteriorated for the 14th consecutive year in 2024.⁹ As AI becomes more untouchable, authoritarian regimes aim to restrict access to digital platforms, employing GAI and misinformation to control and divide mobilizing citizens. The rise of GAI poses a potential double-edged sword for these governments. Innovative AI lets governments carry out more precise censorship that is less detectable, reducing the political cost to those in power. For example, in February 2023, Chinese regulators instructed tech conglomerates to block access to ChatGPT, preventing its use through third-party apps on their app store.¹⁰ This move highlights a paradox faced by authoritarian regimes: while they must embrace technological advancements to stay competitive, allowing citizen participation in technological development can undermine their control. At the same time, an AI-driven arms race consolidates power among a technically proficient yet oppressive elite.

⁷ <https://www.foreignaffairsreview.com/home/morbid-symptoms-at-the-end-of-history>

⁸ <https://www.insider.com/ai-generated-barbie-every-country-criticism-internet-midjourney-racism-2023-7>.

⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2024/struggle-trust-online#the-struggle-for-trust-online>.

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/feb/23/china-chatgpt-clamp-down-propaganda>.

Concluding Remarks

We, economists, set ourselves too easy a goal if we merely claim that technological progress can benefit everyone. We must also explain how to achieve this. The crucial factor is not the technology itself but the social or economic system in which it is embedded. It is no surprise that Artificial Intelligence is deeply intertwined with power structures in existing theories of international relations (Marwala 2021). As AI becomes more integrated into our lives, developing new frameworks to understand power dynamics in international relations is vital.

Policymakers cannot change behavior simply by convincing citizens that AI is dangerous. Instead, they must aim to shift the normative beliefs of society — those underlying, collective expectations about what is considered acceptable or appropriate. Policy should focus on reshaping normative expectations, or “beliefs about beliefs,” as described by Bicchieri (2006). This approach recognizes that behavior change requires altering not just individual attitudes, but the broader social norms that govern group behavior. Key insights from thinkers like Hobbes, Machiavelli, Fukuyama, and Doyle provide valuable guidance in this complex task. Hobbes’ emphasis on the need for centralized authority in a chaotic, self-interested world suggests that strong governance structures are essential for regulating AI, particularly to prevent its misuse in ways that could erode trust or spark conflict. Machiavelli’s belief in the strategic use of power and deception stresses the necessity of crafting policies that anticipate AI’s potential for manipulation, such as deepfakes or algorithmic bias. Fukuyama’s reflections on the evolution of political order offer a reminder that technological revolutions — such as AI — are capable of reshaping social contracts, calling for a reassessment of how power and authority are distributed in a digital age. Doyle’s liberal perspective on international cooperation also highlights the importance of collective governance mechanisms to ensure that AI is harnessed for the common good rather than deepening divisions.

The narrative of ‘AI against the Rest,’ similar to the old ‘West against the Rest,’ creates a new power competition centered on an ‘Us vs. Them’ dichotomy. From Renaissance Italy, where Machiavelli advised leaders to wield power pragmatically, to Silicon Valley, where AI now dominates the global technological frontier, the dynamics of power are continuously evolving. Policymakers must therefore not only address the technological risks of AI but also influence the social norms that govern its acceptance and use. Changing normative beliefs about AI’s role in society will be key to ensuring that its deployment aligns with ethical principles and the long-term interests of humanity. This enduring struggle for control over AI’s power calls for a modern renaissance in ethical leadership, grounded in the insights of these historical thinkers and responsive to the challenges of the digital era.

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