# Africa must act urgently to harness artificial intelligence amid global geopolitical shifts



Artificial intelligence (AI) is significantly reshaping global geopolitics by enhancing the technological capabilities of nations, thus creating new fields of competition. In this context, Africa faces a critical imperative to actively engage in the AI revolution and position itself as a centre for digital innovation and advancement.

Professor Arthur Mutambara, author, director, and professor at the Institute for the Future of Knowledge at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), emphasised this during a keynote presentation at a recent UJ-organised event focused on the impact of AI on geopolitics. He outlined how countries across the world are racing to harness AI for economic superiority, intelligence gathering, and military advantage, thereby influencing the global balance of power.

Mutambara explained that the "race to super intelligence" refers to the global competition to develop AI systems that surpass human cognitive abilities. Leading nations, including the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, Singapore, and others in Asia, are investing heavily to achieve this goal. The development of AI-powered autonomous weapons and superior decision-making systems is a critical aspect of this competition.

"The machines we are building are going beyond human capabilities in terms of physical ability and cognitive capacity. Nations are also building fully-autonomous machines, where there is no controller," Mutambara said. He further highlighted that the first country to achieve super intelligence would gain a substantial asymmetrical advantage, particularly in military strength with technologies like autonomous nuclear weapon systems.

Africa, Mutambara advised, cannot afford to be a passive player amid these developments. It must prioritise using AI to address pressing challenges such as poverty and energy shortages like load-shedding, while simultaneously building human capital and advancing its technological infrastructure. He articulated, "Africa needs to have urgency for problem-solving, and use AI to better understand and resolve challenges."

Besides the geopolitical power competition, AI introduces concerns about ethical implications and the control over critical resources such as data and infrastructure. Mutambara pointed out that no nation is neutral in this race, as each pursues its geopolitical interests. Control over data and standards forms a significant part of this competition.

"Our data is being taken from us and being weaponised against us, or it is being marketed without us benefiting, so we must make sure we control and have a say on the data from our domains," he warned. Involving African values in AI development processes and collaborating with other global powers such as China, Russia, and the US is essential for Africa to secure its place in the emerging AI landscape.

Education is another crucial element. Mutambara highlighted a global shift away from traditional qualifications towards emphasising digital skills and competencies. Africa faces challenges in digital infrastructure and skills development, which must be addressed to meet the demands of the AI economy.

"Now prospective employees need to show companies what they can do. What are their digital skills and capabilities? The way Africa teaches and learns has to change," Mutambara said. According to the International Finance Corporation, by 2030, approximately 230 million jobs in Sub-Saharan Africa will require digital skills, largely driven by the growth of digitally-enabled services.

Mutambara further noted that AI’s impact on employment in Africa will be multifaceted, involving job destruction, job modification, and the creation of new roles. The key challenge is ensuring that the number of new and modified jobs surpasses those lost to AI-driven automation, to avoid widespread unemployment.

"Infrastructure is key; without infrastructure and data, there is no AI," he concluded.

The ITWeb is reporting that this urgent call to action from Professor Mutambara underscores the critical need for Africa to invest strategically in AI technology, talent development, and international collaboration to effectively compete and thrive in the evolving geopolitical landscape shaped by artificial intelligence.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.ft.com/content/802864cb-a680-48ea-837b-32cb31ad09e4> - This article discusses the transformative role of artificial intelligence (AI) in modern warfare, focusing on its extensive use by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) in the ongoing conflict in Gaza. The IDF employs AI technologies for targeted operations, claiming these systems enhance precision and reduce civilian casualties. Critics argue the opposite, citing increased civilian deaths and ethical ramifications of automated targeting.
* <https://qa.time.com/6341043/africa-tech-innovation/> - This article highlights Africa's potential in technological innovation, emphasizing that the continent's tech scene thrives differently from the Global North, driven by grassroots developers and startups. African innovators address local challenges such as recurrent flooding and urban air pollution, with technology solutions that could have global impacts. The article underscores the need for immediate investment in infrastructure and leveraging data and AI to harness this potential.
* <https://apnews.com/article/be59047c41c86b03fafe646ea3a93bc0> - This article reports on U.S. Vice President JD Vance's debut at an AI summit in Paris, representing a key moment in the international diplomatic stage. The summit emphasized the impact of artificial intelligence on global security, economics, and governance, highlighting the competitive race among Europe, China, and the U.S. to set AI standards.
* <https://time.com/6691713/time100-impact-awards-karim-beguir/> - This article profiles Karim Beguir, CEO of InstaDeep, a company building decision-making AI systems from its headquarters in Tunis. The company has since moved its headquarters to London but maintains a significant presence in Africa, contributing to the region's technological advancements. InstaDeep's AI solutions are applied in diverse fields such as drug discovery, electrical grid optimization, and train route planning.
* <https://www.geopol.uk/the-geopolitics-of-artificial-intelligence-in-2024-navigating-global-power-dynamics/> - This article explores the geopolitical implications of AI, focusing on the strategic competition between major powers, the role of emerging economies, and the challenges of establishing global AI governance. It discusses how nations are leveraging AI to enhance economic productivity, strengthen national security, and gain a competitive edge in international relations.
* <https://www.buildour.world/reports/ais-ascendance-shaping-next-decade-geopolitics> - This report examines the impact of advanced AI technologies on global diplomacy, intelligence, and decision-making in the next decade. It discusses how AI is becoming integral to international affairs by affecting how global governors exert power and pursue digital sovereignty, and the need for diplomatic AI ethics frameworks to facilitate trust among stakeholders.
* <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMingFBVV95cUxQbF92amw4TkQwY2Y0UDd4b3hGa2ZqR1BZN25HSFhjaDgxbjQzbmx1Y29pcU1Zc0FyWTVnYXNOMjJHakxYU1hKSUpUdmJtWWNTejd6RE9HMVVWUE55QzNZOXB0WHh0cUs1MlBENEN1Y3drbVRkTjRpVWdlQ0tFNHRVWktpR1MyVmdiQ0RYRDA3R2dyMHFTYlVOUzBlNDBBZw?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data