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AI & Peacebuilding

New Directions in Mediation & Conflict Resolution

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INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly all around us. From widespread use in facial recognition technologies and navigation applications, to more specialised cases of self-driving car systems and genome sequencing, it is being used across industries.

Governments are embracing AI transforming their economies and militaries are integrating AI, changing the nature of warfare. However, little comparative attention has been given to how AI may impact mediation and peacebuilding. In response, we began a process of consultation in early 2024 to explore these issues.

A key challenge when writing anything with regards to AI today is the risk that it becomes outdated as soon as the ink has dried. Such is that rapid rate of technological change, a paper like this can only aim to contribute to a fast-developing field where new opportunities and challenges emerge daily. The fields of conflict resolution and AI and digital technologies are vast and no paper could account for all thinking in this space.

Our approach has been to conduct a consultation process with high level mediators, conflict resolution partitioners, policymakers, academics and professionals from industry. We held a series of roundtables, with the first supported by the AI for Resilience Societies Research Group at the Alan Turing Institute, who hosted us, and Regent's Park College, University of Oxford, and the second at Stanford University in the United States of America with industry leaders. Our aim was to

understand their experience of using these technologies, where they see opportunities and challenges, and to develop a sense of the underlying processes involved in conflict resolution, prevention, mediation and peacebuilding that could benefit from utilising emerging technologies and deepen understandings of their processes and functions.

Participation came from individuals from many institutions including the Alan Turing Institute, Amazon, the Asia Foundation, Carnegie California, Conciliation Resources, the Federal Foreign Office, the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, Google Jigsaw, the Houses of Parliament, John's Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, META, Microsoft, OpenAI, Regents Park College Oxford, the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe, Santa Fe Institute, the Sunnylands Annenburg Foundation, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Department for Political Affairs Mediation Support Unit, the University of Luxembourg, UK Innovate, and the US State Department.

This paper captures our learning from this engagement and highlights a series of recommendations for those working in conflict resolution and technological innovation. Principle among them – in recognition that these technologies are and will continue to surround us – is to establish a community of practice to provide the time and space to deepen understanding of one another's fields and how, ultimately, new technologies can support the core purpose of conflict resolution: the saving of human life.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The prospects for AI as a tool to assist the work of human-led conflict resolution abound. This report outlines various potential ways AI and digital technologies can contribute to the work of practitioners in conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding by enhancing analysis, helping uncover innovative ideas to advance processes, strengthening efforts to prevent conflict and improving implementation mechanisms across the field.

In the challenging, complex and unpredictable contexts within which conflict resolution practitioners are engaged, AI's potential lies not only in its ability to process and analyse vast amounts of data, but also in its capacity to support the decision-making of conflict parties and mediators, as well as create new avenues to engage a wider range of stakeholders at a scale and speed previously unthinkable.

There are undoubtedly challenges, even dangers, in applying AI to problems that are human-centric, including security, data quality, trust, and bias. In peacebuilding, the careless introduction of technologies could distract and derail mediation and peacebuilding efforts if they focus overly on the technological process and neglect the central importance of relational dynamics between people in conflict. An important step for any AI tools for this field is that in the design process of the tools human involvement is key so that the tech solutions are tested and calibrated.

Growing geopolitical tensions are likely to present further challenges and opportunities around using AI in conflict resolution. An urgent

priority is to consider ethical frameworks that can inform the use, and functioning of AI in peacebuilding and mediation, and to convene international players to discuss these.

By itself, AI will not solve conflict; neither will it build peace. But it can contribute to human-led efforts toward peace. As a first step, an ongoing conversation between the peacebuilding community and technologists is needed to identify the areas where the application of AI could have the most impact and to develop pilot collaborations to test ideas and learn through experience.

This report calls for in-depth research into these questions with conflict resolution practitioners, policymakers and technologists and makes several recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- foster **ongoing dialogue and cooperation between conflict practitioners, policy makers, and technology experts to generate a network of expertise and a diverse community of practice focused on how new technologies can support the peacebuilding sector.** This dialogue must be centred on well-defined problem statements generated by the conflict resolution community that articulate clear needs for AI practitioners to identify the areas where they can feasibly assist and add the most value. Such collaboration should aim to create AI tools tailored to peacebuilding's specific needs and insights, promote ethical and international frameworks, build capacity within the peacebuilding community to leverage AI effectively, and facilitate dialogue around addressing geo-political tensions with regards to AI. With technology advancing rapidly, the diverse community of practice can focus on a dual approach: in the one hand exploring the best possible tools for the most thorny questions while at the same time focussing on where most gains can be expected in the short term.

- identify **use cases where AI technologies could be tested and developed to help prevent and mediate conflict.**

- explore **the feasibility of using AI tools to support negotiation and mediation approaches and peacebuilding efforts.** For example, tools could be developed to support conversation with and between parties to conflict, regarding scenario planning and futures visioning. This would help conflict parties consider options, as well as modelling policies, pathways, and barriers to implementation of agreements and sustainable peace. This would require a careful assessment of the digital literacy of the parties as to whether such tools would be useful or not. These practitioners are also needed in the development stage and are co-creators in the testing and finetuning of the models.

- identify **immediate use cases where AI technologies address challenges in the field and thereby could be developed to help prevent and mediate conflict and build sustainable peace**. As first steps:

    - **Develop an AI Mediation Tool reflecting the collective knowledge, wisdom, and experiences of previous conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding efforts to provide a knowledge management and deep learning tool and resource for the field.** Agent-based modelling can also be utilised to draw deeper learning about specific conflicts, negotiation and mediation approaches and peacebuilding efforts that can be adapted in different contexts. Such tools could be used to support conversation with and between parties to conflict regarding scenario planning, foresight and futures visioning, as well as modelling policies and pathways and barriers to implementation on agreements and sustainable peace.

    - **Undertake research and test approaches in specific thematic areas associated with conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding.** For example, AI could help identify the challenges of conflict prediction and prevention regarding climate change and natural resources as drivers of conflict, focusing on the need to generate local data and effective AI tools that can be used in engagement with governments to address these challenges as a means of early prevention in areas at risk of conflict.

- invest **in capacity building for peacebuilders to improve their AI literacy to enable practitioners to adapt to evolving technologies and leverage**

them effectively. For example, basic training in AI prompt engineering would help many utilise existing tools more effectively. Consider building a library of existing resources explaining the technology.[i]

- deliberate **ways to address challenges when working with AI and digital technologies,** including:
  - The importance of having relevant and reliable data for these technologies to be effective in supporting the work of practitioners in conflict settings
  - How to establish the security and confidentiality of data in sensitive and complex conflicts
  - How to maintain trust in these technologies when working with conflict parties, including potential challenges around hallucinations and bias
  - How to ensure that there is sufficient digital literacy for these tools to be useful, both in mediation teams but also amongst conflict parties and their respective communities. This may require developing frameworks to assess the digital capabilities of potential users which can inform whether AI tools can be utilised effectively or not
- identify **where use of AI and digital technologies could have a negative impact and guard against use in such ways.**

BACKGROUND:

AS THE NATURE OF WAR CHANGES, HOW DOES PEACEBUILDING?

In the past five years, global conflict is estimated to have doubled.[ii] One in eight people were purportedly exposed to conflict in some form in 2024, with a 25% rise in political violence events compared with 2023.[iii] A conservative estimate suggests that 230,000 people were killed by violent events in 2024, with many more dying as result of the indirect consequences of conflict – hunger, disease and displacement.[iv] Conflict is now thought to be more prevalent than at any time since the Second World War, with inter-state conflict suddenly resurgent after decades of decline. Worryingly, trends such as climate change or job losses from increasing automation seem likely to make future conflicts even more likely.

That Artificial Intelligence (AI) will be utilised by parties in conflict to further their objectives is without doubt. Yet, comparatively little attention is being given to the question of how AI can be utilised to strengthen efforts to prevent, manage, and resolve conflict. There are further questions around how AI and digital technologies can support efforts to reduce tensions, build confidence, facilitate cooperation, and save lives.

In this regard, there is a need for peacebuilding, mediation, and facilitation practitioners, technology experts, and scholars to identify the kinds of functions and problems that AI might be able to support them with.

What is AI - A Technology, A Tool or An Agent?

Our understanding of AI is continually developing and defining AI remains a point of discussion. Is it a new tool – one with impressive capabilities and part of a chain of recent technological developments like the internet, personal computers and mobile communication devices? Or is AI something profoundly different, displaying the ability to reason and act as an agent – an 'autonomous intelligent systems performing tasks without human intervention'[v]? How this question is answered informs how one sees AI's potential applications.

For the purposes of this paper, we see AI as both a tool and beyond that as a potential agent, keeping our understanding broad and open to adaptation.

Those that see an agentic future (and present) urge peacebuilders to be aware of the scale of change and challenges that may be coming, to keep abreast of developments, and to continually review how it can be integrated into their work. They note that forms of AI are present in everyday technologies such as smartphones, facial recognition technologies, and call-rider services, and that an agentic future is not a possibility but already a reality. What has changed in the past decade stems from three factors:

- A vast amount of data is now digitised covering a significant proportion of humanity's knowledge. Simultaneously, the cost of storing this data has fallen and capacity is now essentially unlimited.
- Supercomputing facilities, behemoth complexes with far greater capacity for complicated computational problems than normal computers, have the ability to synthesise vast amounts of data at speed.
- Finally, there is the emergence of large language models (LLMs) which take data, synthesise it and then answer in real time any question which is put to it by a human user. This is vastly different to a traditional search function – the

> AI composes bespoke answers for the user and can refine and improve the result, the more the human interacts with it.

The speed of development and proliferation of AI is creating profound difficulties for government – legislators are struggling to respond, and military planners are discovering that carefully prepared strategies are rapidly obsolete. For the peacebuilding community – who have substantially fewer resources than governments – simply keeping up with how AI is changing has proved challenging.

IDENTIFYING PROCESSES, FUNCTIONS AND TOOLS IN CONFLICT PREVENTION, MEDIATION & PEACEBUILDING

Through our initial consultations five pillars emerged around which conversations on AI could be framed:

1. FUNCTIONS & TOOLS
2. CONFLICT PREVENTION
3. MEDIATION & DIALOGUE PROCESSES
4. IMPLEMENTATION OF AGREEMENTS & PEACEBUILDING
5. RISKS

The first was in terms of 'tools, 'functions' and 'approaches'. It became useful to identify *functions* within mediation and peacebuilding to understand where AI, as a tool, may be able to support and strengthen such efforts.

The second, third and fourth pillars group ideas around three broad concepts that are key processes in conflict resolution – conflict prevention, mediation and dialogue processes, and implementation of agreements and peacebuilding. Though conflict resolution efforts are rarely linear, it can be useful to think of the work of conflict resolution around these three processes whereby if conflict prevention fails, mediation may be required; and, in turn, if mediation succeeds implementation of agreements and peacebuilding will be necessary. That being said, mediation is necessary in conflict prevention, and peacebuilding is a constant process that ebbs and flows depending on the severity of conflict.

The fifth pillar is around risks. While identifying the opportunities for AI and digital technologies to support mediation and peacebuilding, it is important to be mindful of the pitfalls and dangers that may arise. There is much focus on trust and safety for AI which do not need to be rehearsed in this paper.

In briefly exploring each of these pillars, sections of this report begin with a note from an experienced mediator or peacebuilder. These comments capture an essential function of mediation and peacebuilding, inviting thinking around how AI may, or may not, be able to engage and support mediators and peacebuilders in their efforts.

The rapid evolution of AI is provoking new challenges for peacebuilding, not included in this paper. For example, the increasing deployment of AI through agents is becoming part of how wars and conflicts are fought and the decision-making processes behind the use of weapons. This raises questions around the implications of agent-based decision-making for conflict prevention and negotiation and the extent to which we may understand how AI-agents might function in peace and negotiation processes.

IDENTIFYING 'FUNCTIONS' AND 'TOOLS

Conflict prevention and transformation are widely considered *ongoing processes* rather than *ends in themselves*. This is true whether we focus on efforts to prevent conflict through dialogue and awareness of the risk of conflict; mediation and negotiation processes; or peacebuilding initiatives to deliver a peace dividend arising from a peace agreement and a tangible change to people's lives. Peace agreements are often the most celebrated moments, but rather than signifying the end of the conflict, they actually represent the beginning of a new phase for potential conflict transformation.

In this sense, AI and digital technologies potentially provide an opportunity to contribute to the *means* rather than the *ends* of conflict prevention, mediation, and peacebuilding. They are not going to solve conflict, but support the efforts of those engaged in such endeavours. They are tools that strengthen functions within key processes of conflict resolution and transformation.

Through this consultation, policymakers, practitioners, and academics have identified several functions AI and digital technologies could serve to support their work, and challenges they face that AI could help overcome.

- **research & analysis:** improving understanding of the drivers of conflict and risks of conflict with a view to strengthening prevention.
- **processing:** supporting interpretation and understanding within dialogue processes as well as providing suggestions for inclusive language to support facilitators.

- **generating options:** identifying options or proposals to address challenges arising from a conflict and a dialogue process.
- **technical tools:** providing support to technical processes as part of prevention, mediation, and peacebuilding efforts, for example monitoring ceasefires or agreement implementation.

HUMAN LED PROCESSES:

WHERE AI AND TECHNOLOGIES COULD INADVERTENTELY DO DAMAGE

While presenting potentially numerous opportunities, there are also significant risks of applying AI to peacebuilding. These must be identified – both where AI and digital technologies may not offer any substantive advantages, and where they could have negative consequences if applied without consideration and expertise.

> "Peace is located in the nature and quality of relationships developed with those most feared"[vi]
>
> JOHN PAUL LEDERACH

Human interaction is central to mediation and peacebuilding. They involve time intensive person-to-person interactions that emphasize building relationships between parties to conflict and mediators. Well-meaning initiatives that aim to short-circuit this process may not be effective and may in fact do more harm than good.

A human-centered approach recognizes that a negotiation or dialogue process is fundamentally a conversation. Conversations are not

"By itself, AI will not solve conflict; neither will it build peace. But it can contribute to human-led efforts toward peace."

always solely about content, but how parties to a conflict relate to each other, their context, history, future, and to the facilitators and mediators. It requires being interested in one another because it is a process of relationship building. It is possible to become overly focused on the substantive or policy content of discussions. This can, in some respects and at moments in a process, be less important in comparison to engaging one another, and how parties to conflict and negotiations and dialogue processes make people feel.

Deployment and uses of AI in mediation and peacebuilding could prove counter-productive if considerations of how processes are conducted are not appropriately considered.

How to Complement the Human-centred Nature of Conflict & Peacebuilding

A negotiation in a political conflict is not purely a technical process but is a human-centred endeavour involving the development of relationships between individuals. It is rare that parties to political and armed conflict are conducting a simple cost/benefit analysis when thinking about their struggle. Rather, conflict is emotional and irrational – and revolves around difficult questions such as why someone is willing to fight and die for a cause, or why would one persist to engage in conflict that negatively impacts their lives when a 'solution' discernible to outsiders would be beneficial for all.

Those engaging in the question of AI and mediation need to engage with these questions. The solution may not be about finding optimal answers through AI. But, rather, how can AI be utilized as a technology to support the work of mediation and the efforts of helping the parties to transform their relationships. The goal should be to think about how AI's capabilities

can complement and enhance the human work of getting individuals to speak to another, of building trust, and restoring relationships.

This work is often patient and gradual, requiring moving at 'a human pace', no matter how frustrating that may in be. It often involves simple acts that begin to humanise the other – bringing people together repeatedly to work through perceptions and assumptions, fears and mistrust built up over long periods of time. Though there is an urgency to transform conflict, speed – one of AI's great assets – is not always desirable in a peace process. Moving too fast can lead to a rush to propose an agreement the parties are not ready or able to accept or sell to their constituents, risking the process falling apart, creating unwanted set-backs, and ultimately risking further cycles of mistrust, violence and conflict.

Gathering and compiling data – another of AI's strengths – is not just a technical exercise in a peacebuilding process. Rather, the way data is produced – the act of exchanging perspectives with one another – is the broader process of dialogue. Engagement between parties, the sharing of perspectives, identifying points of common concern or mutual interest, understanding implicit and previously unspoken norms, discerning red lines and much more, are not only of importance to forming common ground and bases for agreement, but are also mechanisms through which relationships and understanding are built. It is these relationships which are the basis for any transformation in conflict. To lose sight of this through focusing on data – what is said in a process – risks missing a fundamental relational process of conflict resolution.

Currently AI can also struggle with proportionality, moving straight to what it sees as the optimal solution – without accounting for more subjective considerations of whether such an approach is reasonable or desirable.

Further, in negotiations there can be times where a human's ability to hold information back or only tell partial truths can be essential in moving a process forward. Such qualities in a human are acceptable but may be less desirable in an AI.

Address the Potential for Bias

To date most LLMs have been built in the USA and have been trained on documents and data in English, again mainly from Western sources. Inevitably, this introduces an element of bias into how these LLMs operate by rooting them in a set of cultural assumptions and norms. Furthermore, researchers into AI argue that while we recognise AI are biased, we still don't understand how this bias manifests and influences their work.

In the field of conflict resolution, the potential for bias may mean that the ideas and suggestions that an AI generates may not resonate with the parties in conflict. In the future this could lead to questions of "which AI?" where parties prefer different models and do not necessarily trust the results or information they are provided with.

This presents both challenges but also possible opportunities. As LLMs have proliferated, there are already smaller models which, rather than seeking to answer all questions (as something like ChatGPT attempts to do), aim to assist in very specific tasks. Accordingly, it will be possible to develop LLMs that draw on different sources (for example sources only from one language or only religious texts) and which may be more culturally sensitive to conflict parties. It would also be plausible to have multiple LLMs, trained on different data sets which could be asked the same question and the different answers given could be compared. This could be helpful in generating ideas for a human facilitator, but also could become part of a process and used as a confidence building tool, where the parties could jointly examine the responses given by the different models.

Further 'challenges and obstacles' to the implementation of AI in peacebuilding are included in the relevant section below.

“Artificial Intelligence will be utilised by parties in conflict.”

CONFLICT PREVENTION

There are strong prospects for AI and digital technologies to support conflict prevention. Several ideas are highlighted below including strengthening efforts to understand the complex drivers of conflict to prevent escalation, new early warning systems, sentiment analysis, and new approaches to deepening our understanding of the interplay between climate change and conflict.

Charting Webs of Causality in Modern Conflict

Conflict in the 21st century is often a product of overlapping "polycrises" - the cumulative effect of economic, environmental, social and political factors – rather than any single cause. Conflict is also not something that simply "happens" in the Global South. Rather, international actors pursuing their own geopolitical interests are often intimately involved in facilitating and driving conflicts. AI models may be uniquely placed to help analysts unpick and understand this complex web of causality, exposing how factors are interrelated. In turn this might help to identify where there are unexpected

"To suggest that war can prevent war is a base play on words and a despicable form of warmongering. The objective of any who sincerely believe in peace clearly must be to exhaust every honourable recourse in the effort to save the peace."[vii]

RALPH BUNCHE
1950

opportunities to create the conditions for peace. The insights generated by AI models may help to challenge entrenched assumptions and show policymakers how their decisions may be generating instability.

Early Warning Systems

AI models might be better (and faster) than human analysts in identifying early warning signals of conflict. Because they can draw on vast amounts of different types of data from different sources, they are also able to identify patterns that humans might miss. While human analysts are good at identifying risk factors of conflict, they are often less capable of predicting the specific timing of conflicts – peacebuilders often know the factors that make a conflict likely, but they do not know when a conflict might break out. AI could help in identifying tipping points where conflict is imminent.[viii] Better insights from AI on the potential for conflict will not inevitably translate into greater action from policymakers. However, it has the potential to provide a new body of evidence that peacebuilders can use to advocate and try and generate political will to take action.

AI can also help refine other areas of forecasting – for example identifying extreme weather events that could harm food production (a factor which can increase instability).[ix]

Improving Conflict & Sentiment Analysis

AI's ability to review data at scale and speed has the potential to significantly improve conflict analysis, giving peacebuilders additional tools to make more informed decisions based on comprehensive insights into the dynamics of conflict.

Furthermore, AI systems have improved the ability to analyse public sentiment – today it is possible to get a reasonably accurate sense of sentiment on a specific issue in a geographic region at a speed and cost that would have been unthinkable even a few years ago. This could be highly relevant for the peacebuilding community. For example, AI models may be able to analyse social and traditional media to identify shifts in public sentiment or changes in the language of public figures that are indicative either of heightened risks of potential conflict or of changing sentiments in favour of conflict resolution.

Conflict relapse is a specific area where AI may find novel insights. Research has shown that on average peace agreements will only last seven years before there is a relapse into conflict. AI tools could be useful in analysing the factors contributing to conflict recurrence and contributing to decision-making processes to mitigate them. Again, they might be able to monitor public sentiment towards an agreement – helping to identify when support might be waning and indicating possible reasons why.

Climate Change, Conflict, Fragility & Resilience - Early Warning Systems

Climate change is widely recognized as having a multiplier effect on conflict drivers, governance challenges, and public policy implementation. Acknowledging its complexity, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the cascading impacts of climate change (economic, political, social) and how they may contribute to potential conflict, or trigger cooperation, in and between communities, or between nations.

More research is needed to understand the extent to which AI can assist in forming early warning systems regarding climate change by improving

analysis, and improving foresight or forecasting of where and how climate change will impact social and political conflict.

Such AI-assisted endeavours can also address in identifying ways in which policymakers can respond in order to mitigate, manage, and address these challenges through proactive policy interventions. Further research is needed in these areas potentially framed around case studies to evaluate the capacity of AI tools to assist in diagnosing the risks of emerging conflict and identifying triggers of conflict with regards climate change that AI can help forecast.

"How can AI and digital technologies support efforts to reduce tensions, build confidence, facilitate cooperation, and save lives?"

MEDIATION, DIALOGUE & NEGOTIATION PROCESSES

The use of AI and digital technologies in mediation, dialogue and negotiation processes has to be handled with care given the sensitivities of such initiatives. Peace processes are complex, unpredictable, deeply challenging and more likely to fail than succeed. Reflecting on the perseverance, commitment, and courage of those involved, George Mitchell commented upon the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, "we had 700 days of failure and one day of success."[xi] AI and digital technologies will not solve human conflict, but they can support how mediation, negotiation and peace processes are conducted. Given these are new technologies further research is required to explore the extent to which AI and digital technologies can be useful, for example: building confidence between parties to conflict; supporting the use of language; as an analytical tool detecting ripeness for negotiations; countering disinformation; scenario-planning and digital twins; as a knowledge management tool for the mediation field; enabling broader public contribution to and buy-in of peace and political processes; and as a tool to strengthen mapping

"Words are the mediator's main tool: the mediator's central task is to capture inchoate, elusive compromise in his butterfly net as they emerge, before they float away unnoticed, and to render them in carefully crafted, clear language"[x]

ALVARO DE SOTO
Peruvian Diplomat & International Mediator

interests, needs and positions of stakeholders.

Supporting Facilitation and Providing an Opportunity for Building Confidence

Usually, any dialogue process is trying to facilitate a conversation that helps parties to conflict articulate a vision of a mutually bearable shared future.[xii] This often entails efforts to move from positions to interests and needs; to identify areas of mutual interest, common ground, and shared risks; to recommend steps that parties to the conflict could take to foster confidence in one another; to enable the parties to accept and see the benefits of the losses that compromises will require; and to ameliorate the deepest injustices that the conflict has produced. Dialogue processes are often intended as a space to look to the future and imagine a different course of events for the conflict and what would be required to get there.

The process of imagination can often be difficult for conflict parties and facilitators in dialogue processes. As such, so often conflicts can feel intractable or at an impasse. Through conversation, parties to a conflict at times can end up effectively re-articulating their narratives of the conflict outlining their grievances and positions. Such narratives often contain stories and can inadvertently replay the theatre of the conflict, subtly or explicitly portraying predetermined 'roles' played by different conflict parties. And there can be as many narrative conflict stories as there are parties to the conflict. This can create a complex situation of multiple narratives.

Diplomatic Language, Generating Ideas and Retaining Knowledge

Peacebuilders and mediators regularly draft documents, from reports to non-papers, white papers, and agreements. An AI programme that could act as a repository for all historic peace agreements could be a useful tool for mediators who are seeking inspiration while drafting specific clauses and who could benefit from studying other examples. AI programmes have proven to have an ability to draft "neutral" language which have been accepted over human-written language. These could be a tool for mediators seeking a starting point for discussion between different parties.

Furthermore, conflicts and peace processes can last for decades. In this time there can be multiple attempts at negotiations – some which don't succeed, others which might only succeed partially or only for a time. The longer a conflict endures, the more this information is at risk of being lost. This creates room for "myths" to emerge over what was agreed in the past, a potential impediment to future negotiations. This has been the experience of mediators working on the conflict in Cyprus, where the accumulation information of 60 years of negotiations has become unwieldy to access. AI could help address this by acting as a database of information on the process that both sides could access in negotiations, helping to ensure transparency and avoid misunderstandings.

Identifying Ripeness for Dialogue Initiatives or Negotiations

Conflict ripeness – the idea that ripe moments emerge when parties reach a mutually hurting stalemate where they become more ready to enter negotiations – is a well-established theory in the field of peacebuilding.[xiii]

However, it is the experience of negotiators that "ripe" moments are generally only discernible after the fact. Once negotiations have started, people retroactively declare that the situation had been ripe for talks. AI's ability to look at large pools of data rapidly could assist with research into conflict ripeness, looking at past conflicts to identify trends that led to negotiations starting. If successful, this could assist policymakers in identifying signs that a ripe moment may be emerging, or even help them think through actions that could help a improve the ripeness of a context. Conflict mediation usually requires the political will of significant powers to act and lend their political support to the efforts to find a way forward, and in this sense, such tools could help with efforts to illustrate when interventions could be most effective.

Building Confidence Between Parties to Conflict

AI programmes themselves could in the future act as an entry point for negotiators as a means of building confidence between parties. This could take the form of parties working to agree on what an AI tool might look like (such as a joint forecasting tool). Not only would this help ensure all parties had confidence in the tool itself but would provide a mechanism for fostering dialogue and the building of relationships across divides. For this to occur, it would be important for both conflict parties to have full access to the data used in the building of AI tools, so that there is transparency which is essential to build trust. Conversely, uncertainty about how AI tools are working and the data they are utilising could inadvertently undermine trust and exacerbate conflict dynamics.

Rapid Translation to Counter Misinformation & Disinformation

Misinformation and disinformation can trigger conflict. These risks are heightened when conflict parties lack a common language and common media sources, allowing misinformation can spread rapidly. The ability of AI to translate documents cheaply and almost instantly could provide a tool to address this and help the dissemination of accurate information.

"Digital Twins"

With sufficient data, AI programmes have demonstrated the ability to mimic the speech and even the thinking of individuals. In the field of peacebuilding, some therefore see opportunities to create "digital twins" who negotiators could train with and develop their skills and thinking. This could also assist with planning, helping negotiators to think through issues and challenges that may emerge before they enter negotiations proper.

A General Resource for Negotiation, Mediation & Dialogue Processes

Any agreement is expressed through language. Although to be successful it must be underpinned by a transformation in the relationships of parties to conflict and their leaders, a written document will usually be produced explaining what has been agreed and laying out commitments parties to the conflict have made and need to carry out. At times language needs to be clear and at others less so. The term 'creative ambiguity', was used to describe elements of the Good Friday

Agreement that were deemed necessary to get an agreement on paper. Negotiations are often happening within highly tense conditions where all – parties to conflict, mediators, and facilitators – are under strain. Finding the appropriate language can be a key part of any negotiation process. This relies on the teams present, their experience and talents.

Further research is needed to understand how AI can support these creative processes, while acting as a repository of all previous peace and diplomatic agreements to serve as a resource for mediators and participants in peace processes to find the most appropriate ways to express ideas in language that could help to move processes forward. Developing this idea further, there are questions as to the extent AI can help parties come up with basic ideas or integrative solutions about how to resolve their conflict? For example, by drawing on the history of past conflict resolution efforts to help parties come up with possible substantive solutions to problems that others have confronted before and also help them in coming up with language to help memorialize agreement they may reach?

As an Analytical Tool Strengthening Mapping of Stakeholders & Interests

A key challenge is often in understanding the intragroup dynamics among the different parties to conflict – who are key internal/domestic actors for each party, what are their interests, who may be spoilers and why, and therefore also supporting efforts to explore how to mitigate such risks and support efforts to foster alignment.

The power of AI to compute enormous amounts of data raise questions around the extent to which AI can support in-depth analysis of the

intragroup dynamics among the different parties to conflicts, including the role of key individuals and stakeholders. How can AI tools be utilized to analyse diverse and complex data from multiple sources to strengthen understanding of key stakeholders' interests, needs, and motives in a way that may be relevant to a negotiation or dialogue process?

A group of researchers at META trained an AI agent, Cicero,[xiv] to play Diplomacy, a strategy game for seven players that plays through rounds of moves that are essentially cooperation and competition between players. Cicero proved as good if not better than many human players and illustrated the potential use of AI agents in scenario planning and seeing situations from multiple perspectives with a view to cooperation. It further raises the prospect of agent-based negotiations as something that may come in the future, whereby humans would task their agents to negotiate and then agree to final outcomes.

Knowledge Databases for Mediators

Large Language Models (LLMs) can be thought of as a repository of humanity's "ancestorial intelligence" – a database that contains a significant amount of everything humanity has written down. The ability to instantly and easily access this knowledge has immediate applications for the peacebuilding community.

Publicly available LLMs– such as ChatGPT and others – already contain a large amount of information from the peacebuilding community. If the data is available on the internet, then the models were probably trained on them. However, they have no ability to prioritise one source of data over another and if asked a question are likely to draw on other sources – such as business negotiation or divorce settlements – which

may be less relevant to the field of peacebuilding. Accordingly, some level of data curation and bespoke models is likely to be beneficial to make them most useful for members of the peacebuilding community working on intractable international or intergroup political conflicts. Achieving this may require accessing datasets that may not be available on the internet – for example old university archives, interviews, or the private notes of mediators.[xv]

There have already been efforts to create a bespoke dataset of all recent peace agreements.[xvi] Such tools have the potential to assist mediators with ideas and language, allowing them to look at how other processes drafted language on specific challenges (for example security sector reform or power sharing), as well as providing huge amounts of data on peace processes.

Another potential AI mediation tool would be one that collects and records the collective knowledge, and experiences of previous conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding efforts to create a learning resource for mediators to use. It would require a bespoke database that could be continually added to as new relevant data is identified. Such a tool could help mediators think through the design of processes, help them with ideas when they encounter roadblocks in a process, and provide a general tool for the upskilling of the community. This would align with broader efforts to improve the professionalisation of the sector.

Enabling Public Consultations

How to engage the public and marginalised voices in peace processes and negotiations is a long-standing challenge in peacebuilding. At

worst, agreements can end up as elite bargains that leave the wider public feeling alienated or unrepresented. This leaves such agreements vulnerable to collapse and heightens the risk of conflict relapse. New technologies, including AI, can try and address these challenges.

The Libyan National Conference Process represents a recent example of using technology to enable a public consultation on a political process.[xvii] It utilised a mixture of bespoke online platforms and social media to engage ordinary citizens to understand what their political priorities were and their opinions on key challenges facing the country. These insights were then fed into the work of the National Conference. Over 1.8 million Libyans were involved in the process, strengthening the legitimacy of the process.

AI tools offer an opportunity to carry out similar activities in other contexts but potentially at a greater scale and speed and with enhanced capabilities to review the data it receives. This can help mitigate the possibility in any mass deliberative process of being overwhelmed by the volume of data that comes in, creating a risk that the results of a deliberation are never acted on or understood. This can in turn increase public frustrations, creating a sense that the consultation was pointless or a waste of time.

AI models help address this challenge as they can review data and spot patterns far faster than humans. AI can look at the results of a consultation, pulling out areas of consensus and disagreement amongst respondents, and cultivate areas of agreement. It can also map the political landscape – identifying if there are specific groups (for example youth or residents of a particular area) who have a different attitude to the issues under consideration. The ability to feed these insights into an

ongoing political process or negotiation could be invaluable – helping to inform the content of discussions, offering evidence to inform decision making, and increasing public buy-in. This could result in a much more dynamic process in developing peace agreements.

Consultations do not always need to target the general public, they can also be aimed at specific groups who might be of interest to a mediator. For example, ALLMEP, working with the organisations Remesh and Pol.Is, have launched an AI guided dialogue amongst Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilders.[xviii] This dialogue identified where there were points of consensus and divides amongst the two communities, as well as possible opportunities for collaboration. The results of the dialogue will be used to inform future interventions and programme design by the different participating organisations. Such a mechanism could be replicated in other contexts where communities are highly divided, to help peacebuilders refine and identify realistic initiatives that are grounded in the analysis of local communities.

GoogleDeepMind have also been active in this space developing an AI technology, Habermas,[xix] that has shown an ability to mediate effectively, helping human beings find common ground enabling technologically assisted democratic deliberation. Google Jigsaw has put together a library[xx] of sense-making tools that support efforts to make sense of large scale conversations that take place on social media or technology platforms.

Language, Developing Options, Scenario Planning & Training

AI's language processing capabilities hold great promise for summarising

positions, reflecting diverse perspectives, and identifying areas of agreement. For example, conflict parties could be asked to describe their visions of the future. These could be fed into an AI model to identify points of convergence as a starting point for dialogue. By facilitating nuanced and accurate representations of conflicting parties' positions and needs, AI may be able to support mediators in generating innovative solutions, breaking stalemates in negotiations, and identifying key interests that need to be factored to deal with potential spoilers. AI's language capabilities can also help with crafting messages that will resonate with different audiences, a potentially useful tool for public outreach or messaging in a peace process.

AI's ability to model and simulate human behaviour may open new possibilities for scenario planning and policy testing. "Wargaming" is a well-established tool used by militaries and universities around the world to help them prepare and identify possible risks. AI could help other communities "game" scenarios before implementing them in full. By creating simulations based on historical and contextual data, AI could help policymakers and peacebuilders envision potential outcomes of various possible actions in peace processes. The insights could help stakeholders to anticipate risks, evaluate policy options, and identify pathways of possible, probable, and preferential futures, as well as identifying what types of actions might be needed to achieve them. Such tools would be particularly valuable in post-conflict scenarios, where policymakers are suddenly confronted with the challenges of delivery and meeting the public expectations that can follow a breakthrough, post conflict context, or peace agreement. For example, it was suggested that the new leadership in Syria could benefit significantly from tools to help them review their policy options, particularly if these tools were

able to draw on the experiences of other countries in the region that had confronted similar challenges.

AI may also be able to assist with training and upskilling of parties in post-conflict situations. A reality of post-conflict situations is that the figures taking power often lack experiences of governing. Individuals who might have spent the past 10 years fighting a war can suddenly find themselves in charge of a ministry or serving some other governance role. There is an open question if AI could be a useful tool to help prepare such individuals for the challenges of governance, helping them run through scenarios, test policy ideas, and provide novel ideas drawn from a broad pool of knowledge. However, to be effective this would require a degree of digital literacy, internet access, and technology that not all conflict parties may have.

"A peace agreement does not signify the end of a conflict, but rather reflects its transformation and modification through new institutions and processes."

PEACEBUILDING & IMPLEMENTATION

Deals that end hostilities, or achieve political breakthroughs, do not always translate into the kind of practical change that delivers on people's aspirations and expectations. Research shows that agreements last on average last seven years before there is a relapse into conflict.[xxii] There are often missed opportunities where insufficient awareness of the challenges of political transition can lead to popular frustration and a return to conflict dynamics. Leaders who have spent their lives fighting the war may fail at winning the peace because they lack the necessary ideas to respond to post-conflict challenges. Without reform, institutions can be incapable of delivering change, especially where there are vested interests and spoilers. Unexpected events can trigger highly unstable political, social, and economic environments that create challenges for new leaders to navigate.

"Do not expect to be driving a Mercedes the day after the election or swimming in your own backyard pool... you might have to wait five years for results to show."[xxi]

NELSON MANDELA
1994

Implementing Peace Agreements: Support Delivery & Tangible Change to People's Lives

A peace agreement does not signify the end of a conflict, but rather reflects its transformation and modification through new

institutions and processes, for example, transitional periods and elections. There is often the need for new forms of dialogue processes, frameworks, and mechanisms to support these processes. Ultimately, the inability to deliver peace dividends, promised or expected from agreements, can be factors that contribute to new cycles of discontent, grievance, and conflict.

Utilising AI could help politicians in identifying how they might address post-conflict policy challenges, the success of which would support implementing a peace agreement and sustaining the newly established peace. For example, drawing from history on how different contexts have addressed similar challenges. AI driven scenario modelling could help in creating models of different policy pathways, enabling mediators and politicians to explore various outcomes based on policy pathways and strategies, utilising scenario modelling, to aid in achieving a sense of peace dividend. Further such scenario planning could help identify which interventions could augment efforts to raise awareness and public engagement.

Agreement Observation

The monitoring and observation of agreements can present both technical and political challenges; in some cases, parties to an agreement have turned to third party observation monitoring mechanisms as part of agreements.[xxiii] Monitoring agreement mechanisms are part of the process of confidence building measures aimed at reinforcing the commitments made in an agreement. Therefore, monitoring mechanisms serve not solely to document violations, but in some cases can seek to facilitate the parties shared efforts to monitor their agreement, for example through

joint activities, to build confidence.

AI has applications in potentially improving technical aspects of monitoring ceasefires – something that has historically proven difficult. For example, in Yemen, one of the main sources of information remains local radio, which would often report possible fighting in an area. AI could comb these local radio reports to identify possible "hot spots" where there are repeated reports of violations. Satellite imaging could then be used to investigate the sites of the supposed violations and look for evidence of shelling, explosions, or even small arms use. This could then be used to improve assessments of whether a violation has taken place.

Another application could be when monitoring of a ceasefire takes place over a large area of land using multiple cameras, satellites, and human sources for gathering information. As found by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (2014 – 2018), when activity happens and is picked up by multiple sensors or monitors, it can appear as several violations.[xxiv] When violations are happening regularly, this becomes an overload of information. AI would have the potential take the data from violations, cross examine it at speed and collate it into one event, producing more accurate information in real time.

AI tools could also help with monitoring the delivery and impact of development assistance in conflict/post conflict settings. Despite numerous efforts in recent decades, the delivery of assistance can often be uncoordinated, reflect the priorities of the donor (rather than the needs of recipients), and have weak mechanisms to monitor effectiveness. AI's ability to review data at speed and scale could complement efforts to improve monitoring – helping donors to identify the most successful programmes which could then be scaled and replicated. This would be

particularly valuable at a time when budgets for development assistance are under scrutiny and being reduced due to financial constraints.

Post Conflict Stabilisation & Support

AI can also contribute to the building of 'positive peace'. For example, AI has enormous potential in delivering education in conflict and fragile settings. It could create avenues to reach children in areas where education may be hard to access or to mitigate the loss of years of education due to displacement and conflict. Where societies have to grapple with extensive trauma and mental health challenges resulting from violent conflict, AI may be able to provide at scale support where human-led activities may be insufficient. However, there may be risks in relying on AI to provide mental health support and caution should be taken pending additional research on impact of AI in addressing mental health challenges. Other factors such as access to technology, electricity and internet should also be considered, especially in volatile situations where one family member is the gatekeeper of access to technology.

RISKS, CHALLENGES & OBSTACLES TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AI IN PEACEBUILDING

There are significant challenges that must be addressed for AI and digital technologies to be used appropriately and responsibly in support of conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding. Here we explore a few of them including: data, trust, digital literacy, digital divides and deskilling.

Data Challenges

One of the most pressing barriers to the utilisation of AI in peacebuilding is the quality and availability of data. AI systems depend on robust, unbiased datasets to function effectively – low quality data results in low quality outputs. However, data in conflict zones is often incomplete, unreliable, or biased, which could be a significant challenge for potential applications of AI that are focused on local data in a conflict zone (as opposed to broader data sets on other peace agreements and conflict resolution dynamics).

Examining the linkages between climate change, natural resources, and conflict highlights some of the potential challenges around data in the sector. There is strong evidence that a changing climate can lead to an increased competition for resources, increased migration, and social and political conflict. Furthermore, conflict resolution practitioners are confident that a key determinant in the potential for climate factors to provoke conflict is the quality of governance at the local level. However,

quantifying the quality of local governance in fragile states is extremely challenging, with limited or incomplete data sources at the national level let alone the subnational. Without this robust data, AI models will struggle to fulfil their potential in this sector.

Another challenge is that most LLMs to date are reliant on data in English, much of which comes from Europe or North America. This inevitably shapes how LLMs work and the recommendations they propose. It is a challenge for all sectors, but especially in peacebuilding where the insights and behaviour of local conflict parties is critical. English data sources may disproportionately reflect the perspectives of dominant or elite groups, further neglecting marginalized voices and potentially perpetuating existing inequalities. This is true in many parts of the world where fewer people are active online, and the majority population generates little digital data. Against this, there is a significant amount of content produced by researchers in the English language that explicitly seeks to capture the perspectives of non-dominant groups. In some contexts, such resources may be the only substantive written datasets reflecting non-elite perspectives – highlighting the need for nuance and adopting different approaches depending on the locality under examination.

Some of the concerns over language can be partially overcome by prompt engineering – telling LLMs to only utilise indigenous languages as sources in its work. But again, this requires the models to have sufficient data in these languages for their work to be effective. LLMs can also make mistakes, hallucinate and be unreliable. For example, challenges have also arisen over AI models not recognising women's names particularly in other languages than English, and rewriting achievements as those of men – this reveals gendered biases that have been noted in LLMs and the need for further investigation to tackle such issues.[xxv] The lack of

data in indigenous languages may also have implications for other AI applications such as public sentiment analysis.

In other fields, limitations on data have been partially overcome by using synthetic data – data that is computer generated for the explicit purpose of helping train AI models. However, for the peacebuilding community this raises questions about what this data would look like, and how it could be evaluated and validated to ensure it is sufficiently robust. Bias is a challenge in all datasets, but this is especially true for synthetic data, creating a risk that certain assumptions and ideas would be entrenched into models without safeguards.

For sensitive political work, there are also risks of datasets being deliberately "poisoned". Most LLMs do not distinguish between types of information and simply draw on what is available. This creates opportunities for malign actors to exert influence through misinformation or "astroturfing", when companies or political groups publish an idea or comment disguised as being from the general public, especially as the barriers to influencing the public discourse have fallen away. For example, an actor could use AI models to create thousands of social media posts or dozens of news articles to artificially magnify a certain position. There is currently no way to prove that underlying content has itself been generated by AI as part of an influence operation (though there are high-level talks about enforcing watermarking), and so AI models would be unable to tell which data is genuine. In a mediation process this could present a significant challenge, particularly if the mediator was trying to understand public sentiment or conduct a robust conflict analysis. Even if data is not being deliberately manipulated by an actor, growing geopolitical competition raises questions about whose datasets can be trusted to be accurate – especially when states are

themselves increasingly aware of the value of data and the possibility for manipulation.

Trust & Transparency

Potential trust deficits represent another barrier to AI adoption in peacebuilding. Cultural, political, and technical factors can contribute to scepticism among stakeholders, particularly in environments where technology is associated with external influence or lack of transparency.

Additionally, bias and hallucination are inherent risks in AI systems, particularly when models are trained on flawed or unrepresentative data. In peacebuilding, where impartiality and fairness are paramount, even minor biases can have profound consequences. While it is important to recognise that human mediators are also not free from bias, AI-generated recommendations that favour one party over another could potentially exacerbate tensions and undermine the credibility of the mediation process, were they adopted and pursued – particularly if those biases could be independently verified (as they have in other AI models) and thus shatter trust in the process and the mediator.

Bias and trust are pressing questions at a time where the proliferation of technologies such as social media and the decline of traditional media appear to be feeding a trust deficit (particularly in established democracies). Online content is increasingly hyper-curated, creating a situation where many individuals only see stories that confirm their existing perspectives, are never challenged, and even basic facts can be refuted. This reinforces the tendency of different communities to have opposing narratives on current affairs and recent history. An awareness that AI can create "deepfakes" is only reinforcing scepticism and a trend

towards individuals only trusting content from members of their own communities or information which reinforces existing worldviews.

Building trust in AI tools in this context will require significant effort. There are technical steps that can be taken – for example having models cite which information they are using to allow the human user to judge its relevance and possible bias. But perhaps more importantly in a conflict setting will be promoting inclusive and participatory approaches that involve local communities in the design and evaluation of AI systems, particularly if AI is being used for such functions as conflict analysis or recommending proposed conflict resolution terms. Transparency in how AI models operate and make decisions will also be crucial to fostering confidence among users.

Participatory methods also reflect core principles of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Rarely in a process is it helpful to present conflict parties with an optimal "solution" that has been externally developed. Rather, value comes from having the parties engage in a process where they gradually develop their own solutions. The same may be true of AI tools – trying to impose any particular use of an AI tool on communities may be less effective (or even actively harmful) compared to inviting parties to engage in a dialogue together where they define needs and jointly explore how AI may be able to help them.

These challenges highlight the need to develop ethical frameworks around the use of AI in the sector, which in themselves might help to build trust in their usage. Such frameworks are absent and represent a gap in current practices.

Peacebuilders possess invaluable knowledge and insights that can guide

the design and application of AI tools, including discussions around ethics. However, without mechanisms for collaboration, this expertise risks being overlooked. Bridging this gap requires deliberate efforts to involve peacebuilding professionals in AI development and to create platforms for cross-disciplinary dialogue.

Digital Literacy

A degree of digital literacy is essential to utilise AI tools effectively. In some conflict contexts, communities may simply be too unfamiliar with the technology or too distrustful of it for the tools to be useful. There may be a need to develop frameworks to assess the digital literacy of conflict parties, their readiness to use AI tools and build mechanisms to develop the skills to use these tools. It is plausible that for the foreseeable future, mediators and peacebuilders might be the primary users of AI tools in the sector.

However, there are also open questions about the extent to which mediators and peacebuilders themselves have the digital literacy to use these tools. There is also debate over whether they need to have a strong understanding of the programming aspects of AI before using them with conflict parties. On the one hand, mediators use technologies all the time whose technical nature they might not fully understand (such as computer programmes or apps). On the other hand, because many of the potential use cases for AI in the sector entail having the AI generating recommendations or analysis, it may be necessary for mediators to understand how these have been created so they can be robustly assessed and explained to conflict parties in an informed manner.

Geopolitics & Digital Divides

The concentration of AI capabilities among a few global tech companies and the competitive dynamics between major powers potentially creates ethical dilemmas and risks of entrenching inequality.

Today, training LLMs requires access to supercomputers. These are enormously expensive devices which cost anywhere between $15-18 billion to produce, and these costs are rising. As such only governments and the largest technology companies have the capital to build their own. Indeed, it is notable that the market capitalisation of Nvidia alone (whose chips power many AI models) is US$3.37 trillion – slightly greater than the entire US$3.2 trillion GDP of Africa. Even if countries are strategic about the deployment of AI and its usage, not all are going to be able to compete in the current AI race. It remains to be seen whether technological changes will result in the emergence of AI platforms that can be developed, trained, an operated more economically.

This raises questions around equity of access to AI and who will benefit from the technology. Governments (and even companies) are not certain to offer their most advanced features to outside organisations. Conflict is highly political, and external governments can be involved in backing one side over another. It is therefore plausible to envision a future where the beneficial applications of AI are not deployed equally, with one conflict party having greater access to more advanced functions than their opposite numbers (as is already the case in many conflicts). In this way, AI could aggravate existing power imbalances – imbalances whose existence often contribute to greater conflict.

Such an outcome seems more likely as geopolitical rivalries grow in intensity. It is possible to envision a world where different AI models

exist, data is largely concentrated and partitioned into two "pools" – one accessible to the USA and its allies, another to China and its allies – and conflict parties can "shop" between different brokers to find AI tools which are most favourable to them.

Open-source initiatives offer a possible avenue for democratizing AI access and enabling local actors to develop bespoke and context-specific solutions. For instance, localized AI tools can address unique challenges in regions with limited resources, enhancing the inclusivity and effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts. However, open-source models also carry risks and are ultimately funded by commercial entities. As it becomes easier to build one's own AI models, more actors will do so – not all of whom are aware of the ethical and technical issues they need to consider and not all of whom will have benign intentions.

Deskilling

AI may also lead to an inadvertent "deskilling" effect that mediators and peacebuilders need to be aware of and guard against. In a future where AI takes over a growing number of tasks such as data analysis and scenario modelling, there is a risk that these core skills in negotiation and conflict resolution may erode. There are also concerns that AI could limit creative thinking amongst mediators if they increasingly turn to the options presented by AI models rather than first trying to generate their own ideas. Ensuring that AI complements rather than replaces human expertise is vital to maintaining the integrity and effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts.

Can AI Help to Build Political Will to Prevent or Resolve Conflict?

AI is highly likely to improve and refine forecasting of when countries or communities are at risk of sliding into conflict. However, such efforts are far from new – early warning systems within governments have existed for decades. These are not perfect but are often quite accurate in their warnings and predictions of conflict. The problem lies in the will to act on warnings and better systems have not stopped conflicts from erupting. Recent events in Sudan are emblematic of this. Experts on Sudan had been issuing stark warnings that the country was descending into conflict, yet governments did not act. Similarly, extreme warnings were given in regard to the in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Russia-Ukraine. Ultimately, the issue may not be a lack of data, but a lack of political will.

Questions remain as to whether AI can do anything to address this issue. Still, its ability to process vast data can help governments understand policy options to reduce tensions and prevent conflict. AI is already changing the nature of conflict, and further investigation into the use of AI in peacebuilding and mediation must continue.

CONCLUSION

The use of AI and digital technologies in conflict prevention, mediation, and peacebuilding has enormous potential. Yet, to date, this has been underexplored. AI's ability to go beyond data processing and analysis to actively support decision-making or engage vast numbers of individuals in participatory processes, places us at a crossroads. On the one hand, mediation has aways been and will remain centred around human interaction. On the other hand, integrating AI into processes as a tool for confidence building, to support mediators, or inform parties to negotiations, offers exciting prospects that require further examination while remaining mindful of possible risks.

As this paper has highlighted, in a world where AI is shaping the future of war, a failure to grapple with its prospects to contribute positively to peacebuilding and conflict prevention would be irresponsible. Continued dialogue and partnership in a community of practice that brings together expertise from technology, innovation and conflict resolution fields is essential if AI's contribution to peacebuilding efforts and preventing violent conflict is to be best utilised, and the risks appropriately managed.

Use cases and pilot projects should be accelerated, AI literacy increased, and understanding of the risks posed by AI analysed. AI is already being used by parties in conflict. While resources abound and are increasing in these industries, the long-term dividends of preventing violent conflict must also be taken seriously. It is the role of the peacebuilding community and of AI practitioners to investigate and innovate on how it can be used toward reducing tension, building confidence, facilitating cooperation

and saving lives. This is a long-term, resource-heavy endeavour, but its benefits could be paradigm shifting.

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