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Technological competition, cooperation, and control in an uncertain global order: Emerging strategic and governance challenges beyond the US-China hyperbole

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Rising global competition over strategically important technologies has raised complex questions about the future of intelligence collection, technology governance, and cooperation in an increasingly privatized, interdependent world. This panel explores the primary tensions, opportunities, and challenges which characterize global actors' efforts to manage and respond to key technologies, and it considers their consequences for the future of international relations. Using diverse theoretical, empirical, and methodological approaches, the four papers in this panel examine these dynamics in several important areas: artificial intelligence (AI), cloud computing, and the technologies supporting military intelligence collection. Foremost, in their contribution, Siegel, Nandkumar, and Blomquist examine Silicon Valley's leading role in procuring AI systems for critical American security services and its consequences for wider dynamics of AI arms racing between Beijing and Washington. Their paper highlights the rising significance of private actors in public-private AI systems procurement and in the securitization of AI systems, exploring whether this emerging "military-tech-industrial complex" adds a fundamentally new dimension to US-China technology competition. From a different angle, Harack's paper introduces a novel conceptual approach to the issue of AI verification and arms control, fleshing out the technical elements of verification, their political trade-offs, and the rationale for why AI verification processes are crucial for the future of AI arms control–in an increasingly fractious period of geostrategic competition. Next, Carver's paper explores how European countries–often framed as 'falling behind' in the US-China tech race–have managed concrete trade-offs between control and innovation in their strategic approaches to cloud computing technologies. The paper theorizes an AI-cloud sovereignty trade-off and explores how, if at all, policymakers have managed this tradeoff through different cloud procurement strategies. Finally, Kearney's contribution inverts the question by considering how technological changes in areas such as space surveillance and signals intelligence affect state incentives around intelligence disclosures. Employing a formal model to systematically evaluate how the emergence of novel technologies shift states' shadow of the future, the paper reveals not just the areas of technology in which we might expect future competition but also how this competition might alter states' ability to signal resolve and employ coercive intelligence disclosures as a tool of crisis bargaining.

Track Classification: Security Policy and Practice