

Editor's note

Emerging and advanced technologies continue to creep into public and private life. Particularly forceful, the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) is unavoidable. New and advancing technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data and the Internet of Things have injected themselves in big and small ways in various aspects of daily life. Lavopa and Delera (2021) note that 4IR is much more than a 'technological leap forward'; indeed, this industrial revolution is likely to have much wider-reaching consequences than any other than has come before it.

The use of technologies in politics and international relations is not a new phenomenon. Throughout history we have witnessed that technological trends have often impacted domestic politics and state relations. The radio was welcomed by politicians as they were able to communicate to large amounts of citizens, domestically and abroad – think of Roosevelt's 'fireside chats'. Radio transcended the reach of print media in that it allowed listeners to hear the speaker's voice, and in turn lent the speaker the benefit of verbal communication – the use of elements that might otherwise be lost in printed word. Decades later, the invention of the email allowed faster communication within and between states. Overtime, technology has too transformed how states process and store information. The use of social media, for example, has been adopted by most states as a tool for engagement and has completely altered the way in which states communicate with the public – their own citizens, other 'publics', the media, stakeholders, and each other.

The purpose of this special issue is to explore a topic that is new and continuously evolving: the intersection of the fourth industrial revolution with aspects of the practice of politics and international relations. The issue focuses on a number of diverse areas of impact as an introductory exploration of this theme.

The issue begins with Dominique Uwizeyimina's exploration of the contributions by black Africans to industrial revolutions, from a pre-industrial era to the current 4IR. Africa is home to a wealth of talent and materials; however, it requires the support of African leaders through funding, training and supply. Anthoni van Nieuwkerk seeks to understand if, and how, the topic of digital driven warfare is relevant to Africa,

further tracing how the continent may protect itself from 4IR-induced attacks. The reality of technological advances is that powerful processes, knowledge and tools are not limited to government and for positive use but may be utilized to manipulate a scenario, impose threats and endanger human life. Robyn Williams and Lisa Otto explore the potential of artificial intelligence when applied in public diplomacy, exploring the case of the United States and Iran who have had strained relations for several decades. 4IR's intrusive is not limited to international relations, as it prompts itself into domestic politics. The effects of 4IR are both far-reaching and wide spanning, having detrimental effects on labour-intensive industries. Alecia Ndlovu seeks to understand the prospects for the mining industry, exploring if and how the adoption of advanced technologies, driven by 4IR, may impact political settlement in South Africa's mining industry. Furthermore, public service delivery may be positively transformed if a state were to adopt a highly digitized and efficient system, in some states, 4IR-driven service delivery may have already been adopted at a highly sophisticated level but in many developing states, implementation remains in the earlier phases. Samantha Layton-Matthews and Chris Landsberg explore the potential of 4IR in South African public service delivery.

While these articles cover five areas where we can witness an intersection of 4IR and politics/international relations, it is worth noting that there are more areas worth discussing, such as e-governance. However, the intersection remains in its infancy and implications and opportunities are yet to fully present itself.

Acknowledgments

We offer thanks to the peer-reviewers for providing high quality and detailed reviews. Lastly, thank you to Bhaso Ndzendze and Tshilidzi Marwala for the providing our concluding note and offering their insightful thoughts on the continuously evolving topic surrounding 4IR and politics and international relations

References

Lavopa, A., Delera, M. 2021. UNIDO: 'What is the Fourth Industrial Revolution?' Available online from <https://iap.unido.org/articles/what-fourth-industrial-revolution>