Task Force 4: Peace, Security, and Global Governance

Enhancing Global Governance to Safeguard Peace in the Digital Age

Evelyne A. Tauchnitz, Senior Researcher, Institute of Social Ethics ISE, University of Lucerne, Switzerland

Abstract

This brief discusses the potential benefits and risks of digital technologies for society and peace, including the need to regulate them to prevent harm. It proposes establishing an Intergovernmental Panel on Digital Change (IPDC) under the United Nations to provide policy makers with scientific knowledge about the impact of digital change on global peace and human well-being. The IPDC could also serve as a platform for coordinating approaches to address the risks and opportunities posed by digital change and support the development and implementation of responsible policy frameworks.

The Group of Seven (G7) members could play a significant role in establishing the IPDC due to their technological and economic power. They could use their platform to raise awareness of the opportunities and risks of digital change and use their political influence to encourage others to support the establishment of an IPDC. Holding the G7 summit in Hiroshima in 2023 represents a rare political opportunity to promote and safeguard peace in the digital age.

The Challenge

Although digital technologies provide significant potential to improve our daily lives, they also pose significant risks that can threaten global peace. When used in a peaceful manner, technology can be a valuable tool for reducing poverty, improving access to health and education, and achieving the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 16, which calls for peace, justice, and strong institutions.

In addition, advanced digital technologies, such as big data and artificial intelligence (AI), can also be used to actively engage people in peacebuilding. For example, the Ushahidi platform uses crowdsourcing and mapping technology to collect and share information about crisis situations, such as natural disasters and political violence during elections, to enable faster and more effective response by public or humanitarian organizations.[1] AI can be used to identify patterns in conflicts and predict potential violence, allowing peacebuilders to take proactive measures to prevent violence (Barcelona School of Economics 2023). More futuristic examples include the use of holograms of revered figures by HIVE Pakistan to promote coexistence and social harmony,[2] the utilization of virtual reality installations like "The Enemy" to bridge the empathy gap between warring parties,[3] and the creation of video games for peace, such as Junub Games's Salaam, which highlights a refugee's experience of fleeing conflict.[4] Mobile applications can further facilitate communication and collaboration among different stakeholders, allowing them to work together to prevent and resolve conflicts. For instance, the Safecity app in India allows women to report incidents of sexual harassment and assault, which are then mapped to identify hotspots and enable better response by authorities and civil society organizations.[5]

New technologies, however, can also become a tool of violence and war at the service of authoritarian regimes to repress their citizens' political demands for more participation, equality, and fundamental freedoms. Additionally, digital technologies can spread misinformation, propaganda, and hate speech, manipulate democratic elections, and fuel political and social tensions that disrupt democracies (Andrzejewski 2023). They can be used to develop lethal autonomous weapon systems, engage in foreign espionage, and carry out mass surveillance of one's own and other countries' citizens. Furthermore, the development of new technologies can exacerbate

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[1]   https://www.ushahidi.com/
[2]   https://www.aik.hive.org.pk/holographic-screenings/
[3]   http://theenemyishere.org/about
[4]   https://junubgames.com/
[5]   https://www.safecity.in/

geopolitical tensions. For example, the development and use of certain technologies, such as cyber weapons or autonomous weapons systems, can be perceived as provocative or aggressive by other countries, leading to increased tensions and potentially even a military response. Furthermore, the development and deployment of new technologies can also exacerbate existing power imbalances between countries, as those with the resources and expertise to develop and deploy these technologies may be able to exert greater influence over those that do not. This can lead to technological arms races and give rise to concerns about technological imperialism, with some countries or corporations using their technological capabilities to dominate or exploit others. Finally, the potential for new technologies to disrupt traditional power structures and social norms can also lead to resistance and conflict, as different groups and individuals may have competing visions of how these technologies should be used and regulated (Bremmer 2018; Webb 2019; Ferguson 2018).

In order to prevent these and other risks of the digital transformation and maintain trust in digital technologies, we must act now. Before we even realize it, we may be approaching a "tipping point" in the development and impact of technology on global peace and security (Nicolaidis 2022). As new technologies are created and utilized, they are creating facts not only more quickly than policy makers can regulate them (Schneier 2019) but, taken together, these smaller and bigger changes in our way of living might create effects that are difficult to foresee and nobody even actively intended. Climate change serves as a powerful example of how human-made dynamics can cause irreversible harm once they pass a certain tipping point (Climate Science 2022). The same may be true for digital change.

The development of cutting-edge technologies like AI offer enormous benefits to private tech companies, who may be resistant to restrictive regulations of digital technologies that could threaten or even reverse their profits. The aim of leading technology companies for example to develop brain-computer interfaces that are able to read a user's thoughts and translate them into text has raised serious concerns about privacy implications. If in the wrong hands, this technology could be used by governments or corporations for nefarious purposes, such as surveillance and coercion—targeting individuals under the control of state institutions, such as political dissidents, soldiers, and prisoners, but possibly also common citizens (Helmore 2023). The United States government has blacklisted the People's Republic of China's institutes and firms it believes to be working on dangerous biotechnology for its military, including "purported brain-control weaponry" (Helmore 2023).

Meanwhile, militaries and law enforcement agencies around the world are developing lethal autonomous weapons systems (so-called "killer robots) that they are reluctant to subject to international control or legal restrictions as defined in an international treaty (Doherty 2020). Law enforcement authorities, even in relatively well-established democracies, are already employing or considering employing new technologies for increasing public security through mass surveillance systems based on biometric data collection, which raises questions about privacy, civil liberties, and the potential for abuse of power (Hennessey 2023). Once these technologies are in place, they are unlikely to be abandoned as no one would want to take responsibility for potential security threats or terrorist attacks that could have been prevented by keeping the technology in use. As a result, the implications of our technological progress may be difficult to reverse. Nevertheless, the awareness that the same technologies that promise more security often pose a significant threat to peace is slowly rising among UN member states (UN 2021).

The Proposal

In order to enable policy makers and multilateral organizations to act, draft good policies, and foster effective implementation, there is a need to agree on the basic facts and impacts that digital technologies produce in our societies and affect the international order. We need a rigorous and scientific research-based analysis of the positive and negative impacts of digital technologies on peace and human well-being that can be translated into concrete policy recommendations. In an analogy to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that was established by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 1988,[6] this paper proposes establishing an Intergovernmental Panel on *Digital* Change (IPDC) under the UN to advance scientific knowledge about the impact of digital change on global peace and human well-being. Similarly, as the already existing IPCC, the IPDC would not necessarily need to undertake new original research but review all the already existing relevant scientific literature on the subject. This could include the social, political, and economic opportunities, positive and negative impacts, and risks for peace and human well-being, including human rights, and the natural environment.

Based on this peer-review process of scientific research, the IPDC could produce authoritative *assessments* of the current state of digital change, its likely future trajectories, and its potential impacts on society and the environment. These assessments could provide policy makers with the information they need to make well-versed decisions about standard setting, regulation and the governance of digital technologies. The assessments could also serve as a basis for public education and awareness-raising, helping to ensure that citizens are well-informed about the potential risks and benefits of digital change.

In addition, the IPDC could serve as a *platform* for bringing together policy makers, industry leaders, researchers, and civil society representatives to exchange knowledge, share experiences, and develop coordinated approaches to addressing the risks and opportunities posed by digital change. By facilitating open dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders, the IPDC could help build consensus around shared values and goals for the responsible development and use of digital technologies.

Finally, the IPDC could support the development and implementation of *policy frameworks* for the responsible development and use of digital technologies. It should also cover possible response and governance options for policy makers in order to transform digital technologies in a tool for peace. This could include the development of ethical standards, best practices, and guidelines for the design, deployment, and use of digital technologies. The IPDC could also support the development of international legal frameworks for digital governance, such as treaties, conventions, and agreements. As a first milestone, the IPDC could work toward drafting a United Nations Framework Convention on Digital Change as a legally binding instrument to allow human and natural systems to adapt socially, economically, and politically to digital change, to ensure that global peace is not threatened, and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.

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[6] https://www.ipcc.ch/about/

In order to ensure scientific independence and objectivity, the IPDC would ideally be composed of renowned and independent scientists and academics that are appointed by an academic council under the guidance of a consortia of UN organizations that are already working on digital change, peace, and human rights. The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) stand out as potential founding organizations that could actively promote the establishment of the IPDC. In addition, these UN agencies could engage in drafting a new UN General Assembly resolution to endorse the new IPDC by its UN member states.

Both UNESCO and the OHCHR would be well positioned to lead the creation of an IPDC. UNESCO has a mandate to promote international cooperation and peace. Addressing emerging social and ethical challenges—including those related to new technologies and promoting peace— are among its overarching objectives. As a matter of fact, UNESCO is already actively engaged in various initiatives related to digital technologies, AI, and platform governance that are closely related to peace. In 2018, UNESCO started its work on launching a global standard for AI ethics to be adopted by its almost 200 member states (UNESCO 2020). The standard explicitly bans the use of AI systems for social scoring and mass surveillance as UNESCO considers these types of technologies as invasive and infringing on human rights and fundamental freedoms (InfoWorld 2021). In the context of an IPDC, UNESCO could contribute by promoting international cooperation and dialogue among member states, facilitating the sharing of best practices, and providing expertise in areas such as ethics of AI, digital platform governance, promotion of human rights, fundamental freedoms, and democratic values. UNESCO could also help to promote the integration of digital technologies into educational systems and support the development of policies and guidelines to ensure their ethical and responsible use.

The OHCHR has immense expertise in the field of human rights, including those related to privacy, freedom of expression, and non-discrimination. These are areas that are often impacted by digital change and could be at risk if digital technologies are not governed properly. Human rights and peace are closely interlinked, and one cannot flourish without the other. The UN General Assembly observed that "everyone has the right to enjoy peace such that all human rights are promoted and protected and development is fully realized" (Art 1, GA Resolution A/RES/71/189) (UN 2017). At the same time, human rights present an ethical minimal standard for peace. Without the respect for fundamental human right norms such as the right to life and fundamental freedoms such as liberty of thought and conscience that are based on values such as human dignity, equality, and universality, there is no sustainable peace. The concept of peace goes far beyond physical security only, and a good starting point of what it might entail, is to start from the respect and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The OHCHR could contribute its knowledge and experience to the IPDC to ensure that the work is grounded in human rights principles. The OHCHR could also play a role in monitoring and reporting on the human rights impact of digital change. As a UN body, the OHCHR has a mandate to monitor and report on human rights violations around the world. It could use this expertise to monitor the impact of digital change on human rights and provide guidance and recommendations to the IPDC on how to mitigate any negative impacts. Moreover, the OHCHR could assist in the development of international standards and norms related to digital change. The OHCHR has been involved in the development of various international human rights instruments and standards and has for this purpose also established a Hub for Human Rights and Digital Technologies.[7]

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[7] https://www.digitalhub.ohchr.org/

Apart from those two UN organizations, there are a number of further existing institutions that work on the coordination of digital technologies at the international level. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) could contribute to the establishment of an Intergovernmental Panel on Digital Change (IPDC) by facilitating coordination and cooperation between countries, organizations, and stakeholders involved in creating and implementing the IPDC. Its division on digital governance and e-government could further play a crucial role in supporting the IPDC's work by providing technical assistance, expertise, and guidance on the substantive and procedural aspects of establishing the IPDC, including the development of its mandate, structure, governance, and work program. It could also support the IPDC in the development of international norms, standards, and policies related to digital change and make sure that a multi-stakeholder approach is adopted. Last, but not least, it could ensure that the activities of the IPDC consider the needs and perspectives of developing countries for sustainable development.

Other UN institutions include the International Telecommunication Union, the UN Conference on Trade and Development, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and the World Trade Organization. On the regional level, there exist further organizations that could be involved in the IPDC, such as for example the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, and the Council of Europe. Including these organizations in the coordination of digital technologies could help ensure that policies and standards are harmonized and consistent across different sectors and regions, and that the benefits of digital technologies are more widely accessible and shared. Furthermore, these institutions could also potentially serve as funding sources for the IPDC, or at the very least, important clients of the information generated. For example, the UN agencies could use the information generated by the IPDC to inform their work on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To ensure coordinated adoption pathways for the IPDC, it would be important to involve these institutions in the early stages of its development and to work closely with them throughout the process. This could involve establishing formal partnerships or collaborations with these institutions, as well as engaging with their member states and relevant stakeholders to ensure alignment and buy-in. Additionally, the IPDC could consider leveraging the existing networks and expertise of these institutions to facilitate its work and maximize its impact.

In addition to the already mentioned institutions, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) are two additional international institutions that could be involved in an IPDC. The WSIS is a United Nations summit that aims to bridge the digital divide and promote the use of information and communication technology for sustainable development. The IGF is a UN-sponsored forum that brings together various stakeholders to discuss issues related to the governance of the internet. It provides a platform for discussion and exchange of ideas on topics such as meaningful access, emerging technologies, including AI, human rights and freedoms, cyber security, and global digital governance and cooperation in general.[8] Both the WSIS and the IGF could contribute to an IPDC by sharing their expertise and insights on digital governance and policy. Although both these fora are built around "soft law", i.e., recommendations and commitments without legal enforcement mechanisms, due to their multi-stakeholder approach they do enjoy high legitimacy. Within the context of establishing an IPDC, they could be involved in participating in drafting the main setup and functions of the IPDC, while creating the necessary political momentum and use their convening power to bring all

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[8] https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2023

stakeholders together. Similarly, the WSIS and IGF could also provide a platform for consultation and discussion on IPDC findings and recommendations. Furthermore, the WSIS could serve as a platform for promoting IPDC goals along action lines, while the IGF could provide a space for open dialogue and exchange on digital policy issues that are relevant for safeguarding human wellbeing and peace.

The Role of the G7

The Group of Seven (G7), as a group of leading industrialized democracies, could play a significant role in establishing an IPDC. The G7 countries have considerable technological and economic power and could provide the necessary expertise and resources to support the creation and functioning of such a panel. Being digitally advanced, the G7 countries could also take a leading role in governing digital change that could serve as a role model for others to follow.

In addition, the G7 could use its platform to raise awareness about the potential risks and challenges associated with digital change and use its collective political influence to encourage other countries and organizations to support the establishment of an IPDC. As a group, they could jointly propose the creation of the new intergovernmental panel and set the agenda for its work. The G7 members could also use their collective leverage to push for the inclusion of key stakeholders in the IPDC's work, such as experts from civil society and academia, and base such a process on an open multi-stakeholder approach. Potentially, the G7 members could also use this political opportunity to strengthen cooperation among them and search for an agreed ethical minimum standard based on human rights that governments and private sector players would need to meet. If this could be achieved, the G7 would be well placed to use its political and economic leverage to promote the adoption of international norms and standards in light of safeguarding peace, human rights, freedom, and democracy in the digital age.

The G7 countries could also provide funding and other resources to support the IPDC's work. This could include financial support for research and data collection, as well as the provision of technical expertise and infrastructure. The G7 could also use their economic power to incentivize private sector actors to support the panel's goals and work. Moreover, the G7 are composed of liberal democracies that are built on the values of personal freedom, human dignity, civil and political liberties, and peace. The digital transformation is impacting on all of these values in one way or another. The IPDC could provide the necessary insights to enable policy makers to protect these core values and at the same time actively govern the digital change towards peace and human well-being.

The selection of Hiroshima as the venue for the 2023 G7 Summit underscores Japan's steadfast dedication to advocating peace, nuclear disarmament, and international cooperation. The event's location carries a powerful message on the cruciality of preserving global peace during an era marked by mounting threats to the norms-based international system. This presents both a cautionary note and a unique chance to alter the direction of worldwide developments and policies. Capitalizing on this rare political window opportunity by advocating for the establishment of an IPDC at the G7 summit in Hiroshima could significantly advance peace promotion and protection in the digital age. We should do our "homework" now and commit to peace while it is still "peace times" in order to ensure that these times last and digital change becomes a transformative force for a harmoniously evolving humanity toward peace based on freedom and dignity for all.

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