

AI in Wrong Hands

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Introduction

What will happen when, not if, governments start using the power of deep learning to control the masses? Repressive AI is already a reality. If in doubt, just look to China. Today, no longer content with controlling its own population, China is busy exporting its repressive technology around the world.

Is artificial intelligence dangerous? Should we be worried?

Elon Musk, AI pioneer Alan Turing and renowned researcher Nick Bostrom have all said that artificial intelligence will transform the world—maybe even destroy it. So, yes, we should be worried. After all, humans have taught computers to multiply numbers, play chess, identify criminals in crowds, replicate human voices and translate complex documents. Why can't we teach computers to annihilate humans?

The above examples—including the annihilation of humans—involve narrow AI. In other words, computer systems that are trained to perform at a human or superhuman level in one specific task.

Description

Although general AI, where computer systems perform at a human or superhuman level across lots of different tasks, is some way off, the day is coming. And when that day comes, AI systems will exhibit unforeseen levels of complexity and competency. These powerful systems will behave in unpredictable ways. And as we know, unpredictable power in the hands of unpredictable people often spells disaster.

If in doubt, just look to the People's Republic of China (PRC), where the proliferation of AI technology compliments an authoritarian, wholly illiberal regime. Suppression and intimidation are key components of China's geopolitical strategy and AI is helping the country achieve its mission. In Hong Kong, Chinese officials have unleashed the most brutal crackdown on internal dissent since the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989. On August 25th, clearly infuriated by the actions of those in Beijing, protesters took to the streets and destroyed facial recognition towers.

The people are afraid. And so they should be given the focus on facial recognition in China, such fear is warranted. As Zak Doffman of Forbes writes, in the world of surveillance, no country invests more in its AI-fueled startups and growth-stage businesses than China. And no technology epitomises this investment more than facial recognition—a technology that courts more controversy than almost any other. But a thriving domestic tech base has done nothing to quell the concerns of citizens. China is held up as a big brother example of what should be avoided by campaigners in the west, but that doesn't help people living in China. But it's not just the people of Hong Kong and mainland China that should be concerned.

Exporting AI-infused authoritarianism

As the ne plus ultra of authoritarianism, China now exports its AI technology to countries around the world. As a recent report published by the Council on Foreign Relations states: For China, the expansion to new markets takes the development of AI to a whole new level. In its ambitious plan to become a world leader in AI, Beijing has begun to use developing countries as laboratories to improve its surveillance technologies.

In 2018, the auxiliary force, a branch of the royal Malaysia police cooperative, entered into a partnership with Yitu Technology, a Chinese company that specializes in biometric computer applications that automatically identify an individual from a database of digital images. Today, equipped with such technology, Malaysian security officials can rapidly compare images caught by live body cameras with images from a central database. In a recent interview, the head of the auxiliary force explained that the agency plans to enhance the body-camera system, thereby enabling real-time facial recognition and instant alerts to the presence of persons of interest from criminal watch lists.

Neighboring Singapore is also using Chinese technology; government officials plan to launch a pilot camera installation project with the end goal of equipping every single lamppost on the island with facial recognition technology. Ostensibly, such a move is designed to curb criminal behavior. However, privacy advocates such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation warn that this technology will enable governments to target political opponents and suppress free expression, just like we see in China.

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In April 2018, cloudwalk technology, an AI startup based in the chinese city of the Guangzhou, signed a deal with Zimbabwe's government. Why?

For two reasons:

- To provide facial-recognition technology for use by state-security services.
- To build a national image database.

Conclusion

Cloudwalk already supplies facial-recognition and identity verification technology to police forces in China's Xinjiang region, the most heavily repressed region in the world. This

new African partnership falls under the umbrella of the multi-continental Chinese infrastructure and investment scheme known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). From Harare to Harlem, every one of us have reasons to be concerned. After all, one of the cruelest regimes in the world today is exporting a particular brand of governance around the world, AI systems are showing their potential for aiding repressive regimes and permanently altering the relationship between citizen and state. What is the end result? A global resurgence of authoritarianism.

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