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STANDARDS OF POWER: DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PRC'S APPROACH TO DRONE AND AI GROWTH AND THE RESHAPING OF GLOBAL REGULATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development and proliferation of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), also known as drones, alongside the increasing influence of artificial intelligence (AI), have created a complex web of regulations on a global scale. This paper delves into this evolving landscape, focusing specifically on China's unique approach to drone and AI development and its growing impact on international standards.

China's strategy for drones and AI is multifaceted. It blends civilian and military applications, prioritizes technological self-reliance, and actively seeks to influence international standard-setting bodies. This paper will explore these key elements and their combined effect on reshaping global regulations for drones and AI. This paper will first examine China's governance framework, including concepts like "informatized warfare", "intelligentized warfare", and "military-civil fusion", which highlight the integration of these dual-use technologies for both civilian and military purposes. This paper will then analyze China's national-level strategic

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initiatives to better understand the PRC's commitment to domestic innovation and technological leadership. Furthermore, this paper will investigate China's growing influence within international organizations responsible for setting drone and AI standards. This paper will examine how China strategically positions personnel within these bodies and leverages its market dominance to shape regulations that align with its interests.

By analyzing these factors, this paper aims to shed light on the complex dynamics shaping drone and AI regulations globally through a China-specific perspective, offering insights into the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead as the international community grapples with these powerful and rapidly evolving emerging technologies.

I. INTRODUCTION

The People's Republic of China's (PRC) use of emerging technologies in different applications is extremely complex and nuanced, with the proliferation of drones spurring a complex web of regulations spanning international, regional, and national jurisdictions. This presents a seemingly insurmountable challenge in understanding the regulatory landscape surrounding drone development and integration with artificial intelligence (AI). By analyzing China's governance framework and doctrine, desire for technological self-reliance and its role in both policymaking bodies and economic arenas, this paper will shed light on the complex landscape influencing drone development and regulation in parallel to AI, offering insights into the global trajectory of unmanned aerial systems through a China-specific lens.

II. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Regulations for drones vary significantly since their mass introduction to both civilian and military markets. On an international level, unique bodies like the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), a specialized United Nations (UN) agency, provide standards and recommended practices for the operation of aircraft, which also encompass drones. Private groups such as trade associations and standards-setting organizations also play a significant role in policymaking on an international level. The

International Air Transport Association (IATA) is critical to the regulation of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) on an international level. The International Standards Organization (ISO) contributes to the development of international standards for UAV technology, safety and interoperability. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) helps to manage frequency spectrum allocations for UAV control.

Figure 1. Harsono, Hugh. Image Representation of Organizational Bodies and Authorities Governing Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Usage and Policies. 2023. Compilation.

However, on a regional and nation-state level, different areas and countries alike have adopted a series of constantly changing local regulations regarding UAV standards and policies. An example of a regional regulatory body is the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), with two national-level bodies, those being the United States' Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and China's Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC).

A. Drones and Chinese Legislation

Drones in China present a unique case of dual-use technology, which is defined as innovations possessing both civilian and military applications. In 2023, the Chinese government released legislation titled "Interim Regulations for Managing Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Flight," which demonstrated this dual-use purpose

with the joint release of this document by both the PRC State Council and the State Military Commission.[1]

At the time of this writing, this legislation represented the latest doctrinal thinking of the Chinese government regarding drones. Some of the most important rules emerging from this document include the requirement of entities engaged in the design, production, import, flight and maintenance of medium and large civil UAV systems to apply for airworthiness permits from the CAAC, mandating unique product identification codes to UAVs, providing the Chinese government with authority to designated controlled airspace for UAVs and ensuring compliance with all other restrictions if designing, producing or using UAV systems, to include cybersecurity and information security requirements.[2] Therefore, one can conclude that while civilian policy is involved in shaping drone policy, mostly coming from the CAAC, the State Military Commission, and subsequently the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the PLA is primarily the force-driver when it comes to drone-specific legislation.

B. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Chinese Legislation

The case of AI presents similar insight into China's governance framework. Within this context, the largest entity governing AI policies in China is most often found to be the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC), supported in a variety of different facets by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) and the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST). Additionally, different sectors within China that leverage AI technologies have their own regulatory subsets. Chinese legislation with implications for AI highlights the significant crossover between civilian and military authorities, with some of these laws including China's National Security Law in 2015, China's Cybersecurity Law in 2017, and the Data Security Law in 2021.[3]

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[1] *See generally* PRC State Council and Central Military Commission, *Interim Regulations on the Management of Unmanned Aircraft Flights*, NAT'L ORDER NO. 761 (May 31, 2023), https://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?id=41328&lib=law (last visited Jun. 15, 2025).

[2] *See generally id*.

[3] The Nat'l. Counterintelligence and Sec. Ctr., *People's Rep. of China (PRC) Laws Expand Beijing's Oversight of Foreign and Domestic Companies*, WASH. DC: OFFICE OF THE DIR. OF NAT'L. INTEL. (Jun. 20, 2023),

Therefore, the PRC's approach to drones and AI mixes civilian and military resources. Existing policy and legislation around both items are regulated jointly by civilian and military authorities.

III. PRC DOCTRINAL FRAMEWORK

China is a very specialized case when discussing the development of drones and artificial intelligence, particularly given China's unique governance framework over such emerging technologies. As part of his efforts in introducing the legislation discussed above, among other statements, President Xi Jinping has made it clear that prioritization of research and use-cases of emergent technologies, including drones and AI, is paramount for China to maintain and advance in its place on the global stage.

A. Chinese Civilian Doctrine

In terms of civilian policy frameworks, China has highlighted a significant desire to promote drones and artificial intelligence in documents such as the Made in China 2025 plan. Unveiled in 2015, the Made in China 2025 plan is a document that aims to launch China into the modern era by jumping into emerging technologies and reducing reliance on foreign companies, with a focus on innovation from within China.[4] Made in China 2025 highlighted aerospace and aviation as strategic sectors for development, with drone technology being amongst these two categories, while also emphasizing innovation and technological self-reliance as key cornerstones of the plan.[5]

The emphasis on driving domestic innovation, with a focus on aerospace technologies like drones, is supported in parallel by the National New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan, which the PRC published in 2017.[6] This plan called for domestic

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https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/SafeguardingOurFuture/FINAL_NCSC_SOF_Bulletin_PRC_Laws.pdf.

[4] *See generally* PRC State Council, 国务院关于印发《中国制造2025》的通知 (*Notice of the State Council on the Pub. of 'Made in China 2025'*) (May 8, 2015), https://cset.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/t0432_made_in_china_2025_EN.pdf; Karen Sutter, *'Made in China 2025' Indus. Policies: Issues for Cong.*, CONG. RESEARCH SERV. (Mar. 10, 2023), https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF10964.pdf.

[5] *See generally id.*

[6] Dep't. of Int'l Coop. Ministry of Science and Technology, *China Sci. & Tech. Newsletter: Next Generation A.I. Dev. Plan*, CHINA ASS'N FOR INT'L SCI. AND TECH.

development of AI technology, with an expansion into both civilian and military sectors as a key result.[7] This emphasis on AI is crucial as drones frequently rely on AI for tasks such as autonomous navigation, object recognition, and more.

B. Chinese Military Doctrine

On the other hand, Chinese military doctrine further highlights how unique China's environment is amongst global policymakers focused on drone development. China's approach to its strategies of "intelligentized warfare," versus its previous usage of "informatized warfare," highlights this doctrinal and mentality shift that Chinese military officials are taking when discussing the usage of drones and AI for military purposes.

The concept of "informatized warfare," developed in the 1990s and described how conflicts between opposing forces would leverage the speed, effectiveness and effects of information dissemination through digital networks, thereby enabling anything from precision-guided munitions to cyber-attacks.[8] However, as digital technologies have become increasingly nascent, the concept of "informatized warfare" has shifted to "intelligentized warfare," with the concept of "intelligentized warfare" in this case referring to the integration of advanced technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), into military operations to enhance decision-making, effectiveness, and efficiency on the battlefield.[9] While scholars have debated the efficacy and distinction of this cultural shift, Chinese military doctrine continues to heavily integrate unmanned vehicles, of which drones comprise a significant percentage of China's unmanned capabilities, alongside China's burgeoning AI capabilities.[10]

The usage of drones in "intelligentized warfare" is significant to note, as drones have evolved primarily from intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) tools, to being used in a wide

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COOP. (Sep. 15, 2017), https://d1y8sb8igg2f8e.cloudfront.net/documents/translation-fulltext-8.1.17.pdf.

[7] *Id*.

[8] B.A. Friedman, *Finding the Right Model: The Joint Force, the People's Liberation Army, and Info. Warfare*, 6 J. INDO-PAC. AFFS. 3, 4 (2023).

[9] Masafumi Iida, *PLA's Perception about the Impact of AI on Military Affs.*, 1(2) Sec. & Strategy 3, 5-6 (October 1, 2020).

[10] *Id* at 4.

variety of direct action and supporting capabilities, from having the ability to execute kamikaze-styled strikes to helping to resupply forces with critical material goods. Therefore, this relative move to "intelligentized warfare" could highlight a more aggressive posturing on Chinese military drones, particularly if coupled with AI.

This paper also categorizes the concept of "military-civil fusion" (MCF) as a military one, owing to the term "military" preceding "civil" in this concept's description. This policy refers to the integration and synergistic development of military and civilian technologies, industries, and resources to enhance national defense capabilities, promote economic growth, and achieve technological innovation.[11] MCF aims to break down barriers between the military and civilian sectors, facilitating the transfer of technology, expertise, and resources between the two domains, with both drones and their application of AI being an excellent example of two concepts primed for MCF due to their dual-use nature.

The concept of informatized warfare, followed by intelligentization, highlights the use of advanced technologies on the battlefield. Simultaneously, MCF merges both public and private capabilities, which can also be seen in the way funding is procured for emerging technologies. In the case of AI, universities, especially those with close ties to the government, receive a substantial portion of military AI funding.[12] This demonstrates a clear link between civilian and military entities in China collaborating on leveraging such technologies.

IV. THE PRC'S GROWING LEVEL OF INFLUENCE

The PRC has made significant strides towards ensuring increasing influence over standards in emergent technologies, with AI and drones being among these technologies that the PRC has focused on. This type of institutional legal warfare highlights how the PRC is gathering the ability and authority to enact legislation to achieve its strategic goals. This can be seen in both industries related to drones and AI, with China slowly attaining increased access and placement in these institutions.

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[11] *See generally* Alexander Farrow, *Modernization and the Military-Civil Fusion Strategy*, 6 J. of Indo-Pacific Aff. 104 (2023).

[12] Margarita Konaev et al., *U.S. and Chinese Military AI Purchases*, CTR. FOR SEC. AND EMERGING TECH. (Aug. 1, 2023), https://doi.org/10.51593/20200090.

A. Chinese Influence in Policymaking Bodies

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) is one of the premier international organizations focused on establishing international standards for drones, such as airworthiness, operations, traffic management, and more. Liu Fang, a Chinese attorney, held the top position as the twelfth Secretary General of the ICAO from 2015 to 2021.[13] During her leadership, ICAO denied Taiwan from attending critical ICAO meetings, concealed cybersecurity breaches against ICAO allegedly conducted by a Chinese hacker group, and established new air routes in violation of ICAO procedures while also denying Taiwan access to crisis coordination efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic.[14]

The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) is a specialized agency of the UN that deals with all aspects related to information and communications technologies, which is critical as drones are controlled through various spectrum waves. The ITU's secretary general from 2015 to 2022 was Zhao Houlin, who openly increased China's engagement with the ITU.[15] During Zhao's tenure, the ITU emphasized the usage of drones and policies clarifying drone usage, hosting events with China's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and the Chinese Academy of Agricultural

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[13] *Former Secretaries Gen.*, ICAO, https://www.icao.int/secretariat/SecretaryGeneral/Pages/former-secretaries-general-all.aspx (last visited Jul. 15, 2025).

[14] David Sutton, *Int'l Civ. Aviation Org. Shuts out Taiwan*, THE DIPLOMAT (Sep. 27, 2016), https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/international-civil-aviation-organization-shuts-out-taiwan/.; USINDOPACOM Joint Operational Law Team, *The PRC's Exploitation of ICAO*, HAWAII: U.S. INDO-PACIFIC COMMAND (Oct. 4, 2022), https://www.pacom.mil/Portals/55/Documents/pdf/J06%20TACAID%20-%20EXPLOITATION%20OF%20ICAO.pdf?ver=G1oSnOxiAKPqgroY3CwHag%3D%3D#:~:text=The%20People's%20Republic%20of%20China,of%20the%20broader%20global%20community (last visited Jul. 15, 2025); Michael Mazza, *Reconsidering Taiwan's Place in the Int'l Order: Lessons from the WHO and ICAO*, GLOBAL TAIWAN INST. (Jun. 2, 2021), https://global-taiwan.org/2021/06/reconsidering-taiwans-place-in-the-international-order-lessons-from-the-who-and-icao/ (last visited Jul. 15, 2025); Jakob Wert, *ICAO Excludes Taiwan from Coop. amid Coronavirus, Rejects Criticism*, INT'L FLIGHT NETWORK (Jan. 28, 2020), https://www.ifn.news/posts/icao-excludes-taiwan-from-cooperation-amid-coronavirus-rejects-criticism/ (last visited Jul. 15, 2025).

[15] Huaxia, *Interview: ITU Looks Forward to Further Cooperation with China—Secretary-General-Xinhua*, XINHUA NEWS AGENCY (Oct. 26, 2022), https://english.news.cn/20221026/bbb1ab62b5444f7c91f615aba78119c8/c.html (last visited Jul. 15, 2025).

Engineering (CAAE), among others, to this effect.[16] China has had enormous influence within the ITU in terms of technical standardization creation, with over 800 technical proposals made by the PRC to the ITU in 2019, with this number being higher than the combined submission total from the United States, South Korea, and Japan in that year.[17]

Lastly, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), an independent organization focused on international standard development, has also been significantly influenced by figures tied to China. Eddy Njoroge, the ISO president from 2020-2021, has been previously accused of corruption in Kenya, with Chinese-backed firms being the predominant beneficiaries of government contracts under Njoroge's purview.[18] Former President Zhang Xiaogang, who presided over the ISO from 2015 to 2017, was previously a senior leader at Angang Steel, a Chinese state-owned enterprise previously sanctioned for steel dumping.[19]

B. Chinese Influence Via Market Dominance

China's ability to have such a significant influence on both its domestic and global markets can be seen through various means, including manufacturing, economic, and research areas of focus. Examining these facets that enable the PRC to establish a certain superiority over the drone and AI industries will highlight how critical shaping international-level policies is to counter such undue influence.

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[16] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Focus on FAO-ITU E-Agriculture Solutions Forum 2018*, E-AGRICULTURE (Apr. 12, 2018), https://www.fao.org/e-agriculture/news/focus-fao-itu-e-agriculture-solutions-forum-2018 (last visited Jul. 15, 2025).

[17] Hideaki Ryugen & Hiroyuki Akiyama, *China Leads the Way on Global Standards for 5G and Beyond*, THE FIN. TIMES (Jul. 25, 2020), https://www.ft.com/content/858d81bd-c42c-404d-b30d-0be32a097f1c (last visited Jul. 15, 2025).

[18] Christopher Paris, *Latest ISO President Has Ties to China, Too*, OXEBRIDGE QUALITY RESOURCES (Jul. 4, 2020), https://www.oxebridge.com/emma/latest-iso-president-has-ties-to-china-too/ (last visited Jul. 15, 2025).

[19] Australian Gov't. Anti-Dumping Comm'n, *Review of Anti-Dumping Measures Applying to Certain Zinc Coated (Galvanized) Steel Exported from the People's Republic of China*, Rev. 371, DEP'T OF INDUS., INNOVATION, AND SCI. (Dec. 2016), https://www.industry.gov.au/sites/default/files/adc/public-record/009_-_verification_report_-_exporter_-_angang_steel-1.pdf (last visited Jul. 15, 2025).

1. China's Leadership in the Civilian and Military Drone Market

China's strength in having lower labor costs, significant manufacturing infrastructure, and as an early mover in terms of drone usage and manufacturing have made it the market incumbent and global leader for all types of drone production. Chinese manufacturers comprise a significant majority of drone manufacturers today. Chinese manufacturer DJI controls more than 70% of the global drone market, which is expected to grow from $30.6 billion in 2022 to $55.8 billion by 2030.[20] This dominance of the civilian market has enabled the significant growth of China's civilian drone industry, which is of note due to the dual-use nature of the drone industry in China.

Additionally, China itself has a burgeoning domestic market for drone usage, thus incentivizing further innovation within China. This is critical to understand because China can enact legislation to force international entrants to partner with a Chinese firm in return for access to the Chinese market.[21] In exchange for access to Chinese markets, international entrants often must become partners to either direct State entities or entities affiliated with the PRC.[22]

From an export perspective, China has also become a powerhouse in terms of exporting drones. Between 2022 and 2023, Chinese firms exported more than $12 million of drones and drone components to Russia, ostensibly for use in Russia's ongoing conflict with Ukraine.[23] These factors build upon further exports of military-specific UAV products to other countries worldwide, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Saudi Arabia.[24]

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[20] Ed Alvarado, *Drone Market Analysis: 2022-2030*, DRONE INDUS. INSIGHTS (Sep. 20, 2022), https://droneii.com/drone-market-analysis-2022-2030?srsltid=AfmBOoq7zoXdJlfzeA9ZjkwDNu8H4hP9CQ-6_fYRxpg0ltX-fS6CPyoL (last visited Jul. 15, 2025).

[21] Sutter, *supra* note 4, at 2.

[22] Sutter, *supra* note 4, at 2.

[23] Office of the Secretary of Def., *Military and Sec. Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* at 15, WASH. DC: U.S. DEP'T OF DEF. (Oct. 19, 2023), https://media.defense.gov/2023/Oct/19/2003323409/-1/-1/1/2023-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF (last visited Jul. 15, 2025).

[24] *See id.* at 168.

An interesting facet of China's drone market that must not be ignored is the utilization of China's civilian drones for military purposes, with this being seen most clearly in the use of DJI drones in the Russo-Ukrainian War by both Russian and Ukrainian military forces, despite a DJI policy suspending sales to both regions because of the conflict in 2022.[25] Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal publicly stated in late 2023 that Ukraine is effectively buying 60% of DJI's global output of Mavic quadcopter drones, while Russian entities continue to import DJI-manufactured civilian products directly to Russian military facilities tied to its efforts against Ukraine.[26]

China's cutting-edge research in military drone development is also a fact that cannot be ignored. The PRC's exploration of emerging technologies including drone swarms and drone-dedicated aircraft carriers, among many others, highlights the increasing competitive advantage that concepts such as MCF can create between China and its adversaries.[27] This theoretical and digital arms race-of-sorts has increasingly extended to reality, with PLA Unit 78092 unveiling a hypothetical special operations project to utilize drones exclusively in a scenario to strike a critical command and supply hub in a scenario where both sides have agreed to "to limit their equipment to small arms, including small boats, drones and anti-aircraft guns."[28] These types of plans bridge the divide between the theoretical utilization of drones for military applications and reality, with such scenarios highlighting the extent to which

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[25] Reid Standish, *Chinese Drones Flow to Training Centers Linked to Russian War in Ukraine,* RADIO FREE EUR./RADIO LIBERTY (Oct. 5, 2023), https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-ukraine-chinese-drones-training-centers/32621432.html (last visited Jul. 15, 2025).

[26] Elisabeth Gosselin-Malo, *Ukraine Continues to Snap up Chinese DJI Drones for its Defense*, C4ISRNET (Oct. 23, 2023), https://www.c4isrnet.com/global/europe/2023/10/23/ukraine-continues-to-snap-up-chinese-dji-drones-for-its-defense/ (last visited Jul. 15, 2025).

[27] Emile B. Stewart, *Survey of PRC Drone Swarm Inventions*, CHINA AEROSPACE STUDIES INST. (Oct. 9, 2023), https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Research/Other-Topics/2023-10-09%20Survey%20of%20PRC%20Drone%20Swarm%20Inventions.pdf (last visited Jul. 15, 2025).

[28] Stephen Chen, *Drone 007: Chinese Military Plans to Replace Human Agents with Machines in Special Operations Overseas*, SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST (Feb. 5, 2024), https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3249831/drone-007-chinese-military-plans-replace-human-agents-machines-special-operations-overseas.

PRC military planners are integrating drones into their existing military strategies.

Understanding China's significant lead in drone developments enables individuals to better grasp how such leadership in emerging technology like drones can have significant second and third-order effects. The PRC's dominance in both civilian and military markets showcase the immense potential that the PRC has in developing well-functioning, cost-effective and operational drones in both civilian and military worlds, with ongoing conflicts like the Russo-Ukrainian War demonstrating the increasingly small distinction, if any, between civilian and military applications for drones.

2. China's Leadership of AI

China's rise to prominence in the AI market is a story fueled by a combination of government intervention, a unique data advantage and a focus on both talent development and commercial applications. Government policies like the Made in China 2025 plan provide significant funding for AI-focused research and development, while also creating a business environment that prioritizes domestic innovation.[29] This financial backing is crucial for universities, research institutions, and private companies working on cutting-edge AI projects.

Furthermore, China boasts a significant advantage when it comes to data, which is known as the lifeblood of AI development. The sheer size of China's population translates into a massive data pool that can be used to train and improve AI algorithms. Concerns exist regarding data privacy regulations, which might allow for less restricted data use compared to other countries. This raises ethical questions, but from a development standpoint, the vast amount of data undeniably fuels China's progress in AI.

China's aggressive policy of commercialization, as fueled through strategies such as intelligentization and military-civil fusion, further ensures that China is the dominant player in the AI market. The prioritization of STEM education allows China to ensure a steady flow of engineers and scientists equipped for AI

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[29] Yujia He, *How China Is Preparing for an AI-Powered Future*, THE WILSON CENTER (2017).

development, with China leading the world in AI-related patent filing, with China accounting for over 70% of all AI-related patents in the world in recent history.[30] China also proactively attempts to integrate AI into various sectors, creating a strong demand for AI solutions.[31] This thriving market incentivizes further development and fuels the growth of promising AI startups that attract venture capital funding. While concerns remain about the quality and ethical implications of China's AI development, the country's multipronged approach has undeniably positioned it as a major player in the global AI landscape.

Therefore, increasing Chinese representation and influence at these international organizations is cause for significant concern, particularly as PRC-influenced standards continue to spread globally. The example of China's presence in international bodies revolving around drone development presents an ongoing case in which the PRC's influence is being heavily used to force standardization according to the PRC's conditions. This form of institutional legal warfare highlights how the PRC can embed key personnel into normally chartered organizations to support broader global interests for the benefit of all nation-states.

Additionally, China's clear dominance in the global market for drones and AI highlights how economic, research, and demographic factors can also play a role in a nation-state's attainment of further power on the global stage. Understanding and analyzing how the PRC can affect such influences, whether in the drone sector, AI sector, or any other field, is key to countering them accordingly.

V. CONCLUSION

China's rapid advancements in drone technology and AI influence present a complex challenge to the global community. This paper explored China's unique approach, blending civilian and military applications, its drive for technological self-reliance, and its growing influence in international organizations. These factors combine to reshape the regulatory landscape for drones and AI.

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[30] *China Leads the World in AI Related Patent Filing*, WORLD INTELL. PROP. ORG. (Sep. 28, 2021), https://www.wipo.int/about-wipo/en/offices/china/news/2021/news_0037.html (last visited Jul. 15, 2025).

[31] He, *supra* note 29, at 7.

The fragmented nature of current regulations necessitates a more unified global approach to ensure safety, security, and ethical considerations. China's strategic placement of personnel within international standard-setting bodies highlights the need for a more critical evaluation of these processes and potential conflicts of interest. Additionally, China's dominance in drone manufacturing and its booming AI sector grants it significant leverage over others throughout the world. This underscores the importance of fostering innovation in other countries to create a more balanced and competitive global market.

The ever-decreasing line separating civilian and military drone usage is another significant challenge that must be understood by international bodies. The simultaneous usage of Chinese-manufactured drones in the Russo-Ukrainian War demonstrates the impact that drones can have in modern conflict. Offensive swarm drones, which leverage numerous drones to overwhelm opposing military forces such as air defenses, necessitate some level of AI for autonomous command and control. At the same time, other applications like GPS-enabled automatic resupply deliveries can be executed by drones created for nearly any purpose.[32] A similar thought process can also be applied to artificial intelligence, which could potentially be programmed and utilized for either civilian or military purposes, particularly when applied directly to controlling drones.

Moving forward, increased international cooperation is crucial to establishing comprehensive drone and AI regulations. This collaboration should involve not only governments but also industry leaders, academic and civil society organizations. Transparency and scrutiny are essential to ensure fair and ethical development of international standards. This includes holding international organizations accountable and ensuring equal participation for all member states. Finally, diversifying drone and AI markets beyond China's dominance is vital. This can be achieved by supporting domestic research and development initiatives in other countries, as well as fostering international collaboration on alternative manufacturing bases. By acknowledging the complexities of China's approach and its potential implications, the international community

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[32] Stewart, *supra* note 27, at 2.

can work towards a future where drone and AI technologies benefit all. This requires proactive measures to address regulatory gaps, promote transparency in standard-setting processes, and foster a more balanced global market. Only through such collaborative efforts can we ensure these powerful technologies' responsible and ethical development.