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Big tech at war: The infrastructural politics of public-private relations

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This article examines the role of big tech companies in international politics through an infrastructural lens, focusing on their involvement in the Ukraine-Russia war. We situate the article in IR literature examining the public and the private not as a distinction but as public-private relations, and we draw inspiration from the infrastructural turn in social science to develop an approach that can capture the complex dynamics of state-big tech relations specifically and public-private relations broadly. The infrastructural perspective offers a way to understand how big tech companies shape international politics, moving beyond debates about state decline or corporate dominance on the one hand, and infrastructure as an external driver of change that allows for a neat separation of states and big tech and politics and technology on the other. Our analysis demonstrates three ways in which the infrastructural politics of big tech-state relations is expressed in the war in Ukraine, showing how sovereignty, geopolitical decision-making, and national security knowledge are contingent upon infrastructural arrangements entangling big tech companies and states. The analysis points to how infrastructural politics is at the core of expressing and realizing what makes both states and big tech companies, offering new avenues for understanding and examining public-private relations in international politics.

What discipline or branch of humanities or social sciences do you identify yourself with?

Political Science and International Relations

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Yes, I have included all required information (see below).

Are you a PhD student or early-career researcher?

No

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