

Artificial Intelligence and Promoting Peace in Conflict Areas

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Introduction

The growing reliance on artificial intelligence (AI) raises a wide range of concerns, as a result of its misuse, whether by companies or even by governments that have advanced technology. There are many examples of the harm that artificial intelligence can cause to humans, such as the widespread dissemination of misleading information and the expansion of the use of lethal autonomous weapons, which are used in wars, especially in areas of armed conflict, in a clear violation of the right to life and personal safety stipulated in all international agreements. On a larger extent, artificial intelligence can be used in undermining civil liberties, through violating the right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly by targeting specific opinions on social media sites and deleting them under the pretext of violating the policies of these sites, in addition to its use in hacking the personal data of websites users, violating the privacy of individuals in cyberspace. As to freedom of assembly, it allows the police, by means of facial recognition technology, to identify participants in peaceful demonstrations so that they can arbitrarily detain them, all of the above represents nothing but a drop in the sea of violations that artificial intelligence can cause to humans.¹

However, despite the previous risks triggered by the use of artificial intelligence, it can be used positively in many ways. For example, governments can use it to combat the outbreak of the Coronavirus, provide medical services remotely, and deliver medications to infected people through using drone technology.

The positive aspects of artificial intelligence cannot be limited to medical uses only in the context of improving public health, but recently a new trend has emerged calling for the use of these technologies in spreading and promoting peace in areas of armed conflict and reducing tension in conflict hotspots and in areas threatened by humanitarian crises, replacing the traditional method adopted by the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs to achieve this end. Traditionally, to find out what people in war zones want, the U.N.'s peace-building affairs office would have personnel conduct a nationwide survey, on foot or via

¹ في عام 2018، أيد 26 بلدا صراحة حظر الأسلحة ذاتية التحكم. كما طالب خبراء الذكاء الاصطناعي، وأكثر من 20 العلماء الحائزين على جائزة نوبل للسلام، وأكثر من 160 من القادة الدينيين ومنظمات مجتمع مدني من سياقات مختلفة بتقييد وحظر استخدام هذا النوع من الأسلحة الذي يعتمد على تكنولوجيا الذكاء الاصطناعي

phone call, which took months to complete and costs several hundred thousand dollars to carry out.

Artificial intelligence techniques can be used to promote peace in conflict areas through using the information given directly by the citizens themselves, and by analyzing this information, the United Nations can intervene to mediate or stop the fire in conflict-affected areas through peace agreements. It also can identify the groups most affected in these fragile areas, and accordingly, these groups can be targeted with humanitarian aid, which may alleviate the suffering they are exposed to.

Accordingly, **Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights** believe that a special attention should be given to this new trend that calls for using artificial intelligence technologies to mitigate conflicts, and focuses on the case of three countries where the United Nations has applied these technologies to promote peace, whether in Yemen, Libya, or Syria. Therefore, after highlighting the negative aspects of using artificial intelligence, the report moves to discuss the challenges of the application of this new method.

The Negative Aspects of Using Artificial Intelligence

As previously mentioned, it is possible for technology based on artificial intelligence to cause various harms, especially if it is used in a manner that violates basic human rights such as the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, and the right to freedom to seek and receive information. China, for example, curbs the freedom of expression by using AI to find and block social media posts and websites that support the “#MeToo Movement”, which is an anti-sexual harassment movement in which Chinese officials were involved.² This is a violation of the freedom of opinion and expression and the freedom to circulate information guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in which the second paragraph of Article 19 states: “everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom

² How can AI amplify civic freedoms? Open Global Rights, 18 December 2018, Available at the following link: <https://bit.ly/2RpJJcl>

to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice."³

Not only China has used artificial intelligence in a way that violates human rights. Qatar, too, has used the AI-based application “Net Sweeper” to block any content deemed harmful or inappropriate by the government in addition to blocking websites that oppose these policies. The Qatari government has used this application to search for critical content opposing the Qatari government so that it could permanently delete it.⁴

In Yemen, the Houthis, through the "Yemen Net" network, which is controlled by the Houthi militia, used the previous application in addition to the Internet hacking search engine "Shodan" to delete any content opposing the Houthis or Iran. The latter application was also used to access some conversations of Yemeni citizens, opposing the Houthis, which is a gross violation of the right to privacy guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states in Article 17 thereof that “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honor and reputation, and that everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.” The Houthis violations did not stop at that point, they used other malicious programs such as Trojans and programs such as BOZOK, Dark Comet, Net Bus, to access users’ information in areas under their control.⁵ All this was at the level of governments and non-states armed groups that use AI-based technologies. As to companies, Facebook has faced accusations of withholding content related to the Occupied Palestinian Territory from Facebook pages and closing some other pages that publish related content, claiming that this content violates the rules of the "Facebook community", which forced some activists whose opinions were blocked to modify their statements and avoid certain phrases to circumvent Facebook's biased algorithms.⁶

Using AI to Promote Peace in Areas of Armed Conflict:

³ أنظر، العهد الدولي للحقوق المدنية والسياسية، المادة 19، على الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/3uUxVxc>

⁴ الشركة تساعد حكومات الشرق الأوسط على مراقبة الإنترنت، تيك، على الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/2RoOJOz>

⁵ قراصنة طهران.. المخابرات الإيرانية تسيطر على اليمن إلكترونياً، المرجع، 19 مارس 2019، على الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/3w6uunq>

⁶ هل يمكن لخوارزميات الذكاء الاصطناعي انتهاك حقوق الإنسان؟، عربي 21، 25 نوفمبر 2019، على الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/3bx9e2l>

Artificial intelligence, as previously mentioned, is a double-edged weapon cuts both ways. The United Nations Department of Political Affairs and Peacebuilding has been using AI-based technologies to reduce tension in areas of armed conflict, and to protect civilians and non-participants in hostilities, by trying to predict the locations of air strikes and alert civilians in the targeted areas. These technologies and tools were also used to obtain information from the affected population in areas of armed conflict. The analysis of these information contributes to the conclusion of peace agreements between the parties to the conflict. These technologies helped in monitoring ceasefire agreements in some areas through "live maps" that rely on artificial intelligence techniques, in partnership with humanitarian organizations working in armed conflict zones.

In **Libya**, for example, the United Nations worked through what is known as a "peacebuilding platform" in October 2020, with the startup Remesh for artificial intelligence, based in the United States of America, to reach a ceasefire agreement between the Libyan National Army led by Khalifa Haftar and supported by Parliament in eastern Libya and between the Government of National Accord led by Fayeze al-Sarraj, and to call for the formation of an interim national government,⁷ which was recently agreed upon at the UN-sponsored Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) between the conflicting parties in Libya. The LPDF ultimately led to the formation of an interim national government in Libya led by Abdul Hamid Dbeibah and a three-member presidential council headed by Muhammad al-Manfi.⁸

This Libyan government was not formed arbitrarily at all. The United Nations has used AI-based technologies to conduct public opinion surveys and it found out that the best solution for Libya is to form a government of personalities with an independent orientation, followed by a presidential elections. The United Nations Peacebuilding Platform published a link, to canvass the views of Libyans on the "proposal to form an interim national government." The majority of participants who visited this link, from Tripoli and Benghazi, has agreed on the proposal. Then the Head of United Nations Support Mission in Libya, "Ms. Stephanie Williams", shared these

⁷ الذكاء الاصطناعي لتحقيق السلام في مناطق النزاعات.. توجه جديد للأمم المتحدة، التلفزيون العربي، 25 أبريل 2021، على الرابط التالي:

<https://bit.ly/3uSafty>

⁸ «المصري اليوم» ترصد كيف تطورت الأزمة الليبية (1-2).. كواليس الصراع الدولي المحلي الذي مزق البلد الساحلي (ملف)، المصري اليوم، 19 فبراير 2021، على الرابط التالي: <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/2263258>

results with the leaders and politicians in Libya who represented the parties to the conflict in the Geneva negotiations, which led to the formation of an interim national government, as previously mentioned.⁹

The success of this technology was confirmed by Stephanie Williams, the acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Libya and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, who explained that the views of citizens on the peacebuilding platform in Libya was an important factor in pushing towards the formation of an interim government, as she held more than one conference with the Libyan people in more than one area through this artificial intelligence-based technology.

In September 2017, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) announced the UN Action Plan for Libya. A key component of the UN Action Plan is the organization of a National Conference and a process to accompany the preparation of the event. One notable innovation was for Libyans to be able to contribute to the process online between April and July 2018. To achieve this, a website in Arabic was specifically designed by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) with parameters set to facilitate user access and navigation. This measure helped make the preparatory process more inclusive and transparent. The website included information about the national conference process as well as the dates and locations of the meetings, visual content from past events, meeting reports, and information about how Libyans could organize their own events. Most importantly, the website included an online questionnaire on the agenda for the consultations through which Libyans could provide their insights and feedback. The online platform offered an opportunity for various groups, including those politically and socially marginalized, to express their opinions and be heard without having to attend meetings in person. In addition, an outreach campaign was organized to ensure the broadest online participation. The website was also developed to ensure that participants located in areas where it was too dangerous to organize consultations could still participate. As a result, half a million comments were generated over the course of 14 weeks on social media platforms and it is estimated that

⁹ The United Nations is turning to artificial intelligence in search for peace in war zones, The Washington Post, 23 April 2021, Available at the following link: <https://wapo.st/33N4bqi>

more than one million Libyans were reached. In addition, some 1,700 questionnaires were completed on the Conference website, which made up 30 percent of the overall contributions to the consultative phase of the NCP.¹⁰

In **Yemen**, the United Nations used the "peacebuilding" platform, which relies on artificial intelligence, in order to find out the truth about the spread of the Coronavirus in northern Yemen, in light of the deliberate misinformation presented by the Houthis in mid-2020 to the international community and the World Health Organization.¹¹ This platform has polled people's opinions electronically through a web link sent to about 1,000 people at one time. It analyzed these data and found out that the virus is widespread in areas under the control of the Houthis in northern Yemen,¹² which helped the United Nations to know the impact of the outbreak of the virus on the citizens in these areas, and triggered the World Health Organization to demand the sending of humanitarian aid, especially health and medical aid, to Yemen, especially in the Houthi-controlled areas.¹³

Although this information obtained by the United Nations forced it to launch a call to stop the war in Yemen, which was already agreed upon between the Arab coalition to support legitimacy and the Houthis, nevertheless the ceasefire did not last for about a week as the Houthis violated this agreement when they targeted the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with two ballistic missiles, which was followed by air strikes by the Arab coalition to support legitimacy in Yemen on Sana'a. This has undermined all the efforts made by the United Nations. However, despite this failure, this platform was used to poll the views of Yemenis regarding the parties they support it in Yemen and their vision of how to get out of the crisis. The opinions of the participants contributed to reaching a prisoner exchange agreement between the Houthis and the internationally recognized Yemeni government led by Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi and to reducing tension in some other areas in Yemen.

¹⁰ DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND MEDIATION IN ARMED CONFLICT, United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, March 2019, Page 25, Available at the following link: <https://bit.ly/3tRErn9>

¹¹ مصدر سبق ذكره، على الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/3uSafty>
¹² الأمم المتحدة تلجأ إلى "الدردشة" بحثاً عن السلام في اليمن وليبيا.. ما الجدوى منها...؟، وكالة يمن للأخبار، 25 أبريل 2021، على الرابط التالي:

<https://bit.ly/3uVoAFx>
¹³ فيروس كورونا يحصد أرواح العشرات من الطاقم الطبي في اليمن، المشارق، 18 يونيو 2020، على الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/3okJ5c6>

In **Syria**, the role of artificial intelligence has been evident through the "Hala" technology, which is an electronic application that warns residents of the area targeted by air strikes, giving them ample time to find a safe haven before they are shelled. The artificial intelligence "Hala" technology mainly relies on what is known as machine learning, which relies on the use of algorithms to analyze data and learn from it in order to make a specific decision or predict a result.¹⁴

This application uses tracking, identification and matching algorithms. This system uses an enormous network of civilians such as: “teachers, engineers, students, and even farmers,” where some of them are located near air bases or military airports, and these volunteers monitor the sky in eight-hour shifts, and when they detect any plane, they send data about its location, direction and type through an application on their phones. In the same context, a wide range of battery-powered monitoring devices are spread on the roofs of buildings and trees that collect information about the aircraft heading towards them, determine the type of these aircraft and send it to "Hala" technology, which matches the data received from the volunteers, with the data received from the monitoring devices, to calculate the chances of the air strikes and to predict their locations and potential targets. All strikes forecasts are sent via social media to warn the civilian population in conflict-populated areas.¹⁵

The use of "Hala" technology prevented the deaths of an untold number of civilians from the raids that targeted the residential areas in which they live. Through this artificial intelligence technology, warnings were sent to more than 2 million people at a rate of 140 warnings per day, but there remains a danger to volunteers reporting aircraft movements, as they are at risk of retaliation, or falling victim to an air strike. Monitoring devices can also malfunction or be detected and destroyed.¹⁶

In a related context, a live interactive map was used by artificial intelligence, which is known as “LIVEUAMAP” and covers 30 regions, and provides translations in more than one language. The project aims at the present time after it started in Ukraine with the protests that

¹⁴التطبيقات التكنولوجية الأكثر انتشاراً لمساعدة متضرري الصراعات، مركز المستقبل للأبحاث والدراسات المتقدمة، 12 سبتمبر 2018، على الرابط التالي:

<https://bit.ly/3feVhac>

¹⁵ المرجع السابق

¹⁶ المرجع السابق

broke out there to predict, prevent and limit future conflicts. The impact of disasters, in Syria, for example, when the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD)¹⁷ was working on ceasefire agreements in Eastern Ghouta, between the Syrian government and the opposition factions, live interactive maps were used to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire, assess the feasibility of humanitarian corridors in these covered areas, and contribute to ensuring the security of the staff of the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue working in Syria. This tool also provides the United Nations Department of Political Affairs and Peacebuilding with the violations that are monitored on social media with approximate geolocation, due to the occurrence of the violation on the maps, which may help in the possibility of intervening to prevent these violations or limit their aggravation in a way that harms the innocent civilians.¹⁸

Based on the above, the ability of artificial intelligence technologies to mitigate armed conflicts is evident through three main factors:

- The ability to predict the whereabouts of air strikes and warn the civilian population before launching these raids, which helps in saving the lives of innocent civilians in areas of armed conflict.
- The ability to monitor information from the population in conflict areas. The analysis of these information is useful for knowing the true opinions of the population in these areas, and then sharing this information with political leaders and pushing for peace agreements or ceasefires in other areas.
- Predicting the possibility of tension between some of the conflicting parties in the conflict areas before it occurs, and intervene to prevent the exacerbation of this tension, reduce it, and try to eliminate it before it begins.

Challenges of Using Artificial Intelligence-based Technology in Areas of Armed Conflict:

- High poverty rates in the areas targeted by United Nations questions. The number of those having cell phones and good internet network is very small in these areas, which impedes

¹⁷ مركز الحوار الإنساني، هو منظمة غير حكومية مستقلة تعمل في مناطق الصراع، وتهدف بالشراكة مع هيئات الأمم المتحدة إلى الوساطة بين الأطراف المتصارعة وإنهاء النزاعات المسلحة

¹⁸ DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND MEDIATION IN ARMED CONFLICT, United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, March 2019, Page 18, Available at the following link: <https://bit.ly/3tRErn9>

the majority of citizens' access to the United Nations Peace Platform questions and the lack of full engagement with the consultations that it conducts remotely.

- The lack of real guarantees that obligate political leaders in conflict areas to take into account the opinions of the people surveyed. These leader care only about their personal interests even at the expense of the people, and in many cases this obstructs any future peace agreements in the areas of armed conflict.
- Active social media users may not be representative of the entire population, which calls into question the validity of the final outputs and results based on artificial intelligence-based surveys in the process, and this may have some of the distorting effects that may result from the use of these methods.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Having reviewed the negative and positive aspects of artificial intelligence-based technologies, it can be clearly indicated that expanding the use of this technology in spreading a culture of peace, and in trying to reduce tension in areas of armed conflict, may have a positive effect on the long run in ending these conflicts and civil wars. These technologies can also be developed to reach the largest possible number of affected people in areas of armed conflict, but at the same time, the persistence in using these technologies in a harmful way will constitute a major violation of basic human rights, including the right to life and the right to freedom of opinion and expression. In this light, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights recommends the following:

- Drafting a comprehensive purification document or setting a legal status for artificial intelligence in a manner that establishes the positive aspects that this technology can achieve, and in line with what UNESCO went to in its recommendation regarding the foundation of artificial intelligence on a solid moral base that protects and promotes human rights.
- The international community should consider the possibility of imposing sanctions on countries or companies that use these technologies in a manner that violates human rights and in a way that protects individuals from the risks of this technology.

- The Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy must give special attention to the issue of the right to privacy when using artificial intelligence solutions in light of the rapid technological development, whether by states or private companies, especially in the context of temporary or immediate crises, which require quick solutions that do not take into account human rights contexts. Therefore, in his reports to the Human Rights Council, he must focus on the impact of artificial intelligence on human rights in general and in conflict areas in particular.
- States must implement the principle of non-discrimination in designing, developing or operating artificial intelligence solutions in a manner that ensures that the most marginalized or vulnerable groups are not subjected to discrimination in any of the areas in which these solutions are used, as stipulated in the "Toronto Declaration" on the right to equality, and not to be subject to discrimination in the machine learning system, or automation, which is a term given to everything that works automatically without human intervention.