He also added that, "God Almighty blessed the Prophet and chose him and you cannot transcend over the rest of the creatures to be like him; the true differentiating factor here is Revelation. The incorrect interpretation of the Quranic verse 'Say: I am only a mortal like you' (Surat al Kahf 18:110) does not in any way mean that there is any similitude between us and the Prophet or between him and any famous figure that the machine can simulate."

Dr. Abdel Latif continued to say that, "If they wanted to apply this machine's capabilities to Islam then the sole condition would be that it serve the implementation of Islamic Shariah and unite the religions fatwas [religious edicts] and ijtihad [independent Islamic interpretation]. This can be achieved through the formation of an Al-Azhar religious committee that could attribute what has been issued by the machine to be in accordance with Islamic Shariah – not according to what the Prophet has said."

As for Dr. Mustafa al Swahili, professor at Al-Azhar University, he totally rejects the concept behind this machine and said, "I am in complete agreement that Islam is a glorious science and that it invites interpretation – so long as it does not violate the religion. I believe a device such as this will create confusion among the people since no matter how advanced science is; it will still have limitations because simulation is limited and does not yield full answers."

However, Dr. al Swahili stressed the importance of seeking knowledge and confirmed that it is an Islamic duty to always seek and further knowledge.

الرقبة كالكبير ‎(1)‎، وإذا وجبت الدیة فی قتله خطأ فوجوبها فی قتله عمدًا أولی ‎(2)‎.

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(1) المغنی ‎816/7‎.
(2) المهذب ‎278/2‎.

In terms of the nationalities of the scientists and their fields of specialization, Dr. Fawzi said, "Scientists who have invented this device [electronic mufti] hail from various different nations. I am honoured to be part of this unprecedented scientific achievement. Through my work and residence in France for many long years, I am proud to be working with an exemplary large team where dozens of specializations abound."

In terms of implementing this technology and benefitting from it in the realm of Islam and fatwas, Dr. Fawzi said, "Although a team has assembled and uploaded all the information that is available about the Prophet Mohammed in [canonical] Islamic history books, the holy Quran and what is known about his life through Sunnah," he acknowledges that it would be highly controversial -- if not downright contentious -- to implement this.

Notwithstanding, he revealed, "I have consulted with several Islamic scholars and clerics in elevated positions -- there is no need to mention their names so as to avoid stirring up public opinion -- however, they have assured me that such a device is not 'haram' [prohibited by Islam]. But there are fears and scepticism regarding misuse and causing any misrepresentation or defamation to the figure of the Prophet. There are also fears in terms of Arab and Islamic public opinion and their acceptance of a machine such as this."

Dr. Fawzi expressed his aspiration to supervise over a team that could be headed by a group of Islamic clerics who would be directly responsible for all the religious edicts that can be sent to anyone anywhere in the world via email or through mobile phones or even using telephones so that questions may be posed directly.

Regarding the views of various Islamic scholars and clerics about this device, the Egyptian Awqaf [Religious Endowments] Ministry's First Undersecretary for Preaching Affairs, Dr. Shawqi Abdel Latif said with regards to the concept of 'simulating' the figure of the Prophet of Islam to serve the Islamic religion in accordance with special conditions: "the idea is a noble one if indeed it calls for Muslim unity in matters of religion in light of the satellite [channel] wars that the Muslim endure, in addition to the incapability of the relevant bodies of formulating and setting forth ideas in the interest of Muslims. However, I strongly stress that there is no machine or human mind capable of simulating the figure of the Prophet regardless of their knowledge or immensely advanced technological capabilities."

(فقہ المعاملات کا مطالعہ کرنا، فقہی معاملات پر غور کرنا اور فقہ المعاملات پر لکھنا وقت کی ضرورت ہے۔)

Can a Machine Issue Islamic Fatwas?

By Mona Madkour

Cairo, Asharq Al-Awsat- A controversial new electronic device could revolutionize the field of Islamic jurisprudence and allegedly issue more accurate Shariah fatwas [religious edicts]. The device, currently in production in France, will be known as the 'Electronic Mufti' and will depend on Artificial Intelligence (AI) to issue opinions on contemporary Muslim affairs and matters.

Asharq Al-Awsat met with the only Arab participating in the production of this machine, Engineer Dr. Anas Fawzi, who hails from Egypt and is a communications expert who is part of the team based in France.

He describes the device as "a very large capacity computer on which all the information that is relevant to a given [historical] figure is uploaded; everything that has been mentioned in history books or chronicled documents that indicate his/her responses and attitudes towards all positions adopted in his/her life. Through a process that relies on AI, the computer then simulates responses based on the available data so that the answers are the expected response that the person in question would give if they were alive," said Dr. Fawzi.

"The device deduces the expected response through consulting thousands of examples that have been uploaded on to the machine, pertaining to that person whilst taking into account their reactions so that it may relate the expected response in accordance with their personality as created by the Artificial Intelligence apparatus," explained Dr. Fawzi.

Regarding the team working to implement this project, Dr. Fawzi said that the creation of this machine is undertaken by a group of French scientists and that it is not available to the public.

He added, "Despite the success of research over the past decades, [AI] is still incapable of fully knowing and familiarizing itself with the human mind's operations. There are also considerable attempts being made to make AI machines 'translate' human emotions and reactions from sadness to joy and compassion, among other human feelings."

☆☆☆ اتحاد امت وقت کی اہم ضرورت ہے ☆☆☆