

Headlines:

- **Syria Oil Fields**
- **Lebanon Prime Minister Resigns**
- **Virtual Fatwa**

Details:

Syria Oil Fields

The Pentagon intends to retain control of Syria's oilfields going forward, and says they will repel anyone else trying to take that oil with "overwhelming force." This has become the chief, and materially only, military goal of the US military operation in Syria. Since President Trump announced his intention to control the oil, and conceivably to try to take some of it on behalf of the US, the Pentagon has been revising the Syria mission around controlling the oil. This has included sending more troops and tanks. Pentagon officials have tried to build this narrative around keeping ISIS from reclaiming the oilfields, since they held them once. With ISIS barely existing anymore, that's not a realistic threat, and Defense Secretary Mark Esper conceded that the deployments of US forces are meant to "deny access" to the oil to either Russia or the Syrian government.

Lebanon Prime Minister Resigns

Prime Minister Saad Hariri announced on Tuesday 29 October 2019, he was resigning following two weeks of demonstrations against his government and widespread corruption in the country. In his speech, Hariri said he had come to "a dead end." Lebanon has been paralysed by 13 days of protests that have seen hundreds of thousands of people mass across the country and roadblocks erected on key routes. The instability has also prompted banks - which prop up the country's moribund economy - to remain closed, increasing fear of a currency devaluation. Last week, Hariri promised a series of reforms in an attempt to placate protesters who spontaneously hit the streets to rail against a series of taxes that would have hit the pockets of the average Lebanese.

Virtual Fatwa

Dubai on Tuesday 29 October launched 'Virtual Ifta', said to be the world's first service using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to issue fatwas. Instead of an Islamic scholar answering questions over the phone, the AI-powered Virtual Ifta takes live questions on internet chat and replies back. At the moment, it is only able to answer around 205 questions related to salah, or prayer, Tariq Al Emadi, Head of Fatwa Section, Islamic Affairs and Charitable Activities Department (IACAD), told Gulf News. His comments came during the official launch of Virtual Ifta by IACAD at The Boulevard, Emirates Towers, where a three-day exhibition has been set up for visitors to experience Virtual Ifta. In the future, people will be able to hear audio replies of Virtual Ifta in addition to written responses, Al Emadi said. Users can frame their questions as they please, he added.