

The Fight for the Northern Iraq-Syria Border

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Michael Knights is the Jill and Jay Bernstein Fellow of The Washington Institute, specializing in the military and security affairs of Iraq, Iran, and the Persian Gulf states. He is a co-founder of the Militia Spotlight platform, which offers in-depth analysis of developments related to the Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria.



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At the symbolic level, Iran and its proxies are achieving great success in planting their flags along this contested frontier, but real control will entail the much tougher task of establishing permanent bases and logistical arrangements.

The Iraq-Syria border has emerged in recent months as the hottest piece of real estate in the multi-sided struggle between the Islamic State (ISIS), anti-ISIS fighters, and Iran's militia proxies. Why is this? I've stood on the Iraq-Syrian border many times and it is not much to look at. Empty desert stretches as far as the eye can see along almost all of its 600 km length. The border is rarely marked by anything more substantive than an earth berm, which is frequently cut with gaps made by smugglers and terrorists. To understand the value of the border to the various armed actors, one has to get into the minds of people from the region and see the symbolism of a piece of land that connects Iran to the Mediterranean...

[Read the full article on the Cipher Brief website. \(https://thecipherbrief.com/article/middle-east/fight-northern-iraq-syria-border-1091\)](https://thecipherbrief.com/article/middle-east/fight-northern-iraq-syria-border-1091) ❖

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