

Time to Focus on the Wars Within the War Against the Islamic State

by [Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](#)

Dec 21, 2015

Also available in

[العربية \(/ar/policy-analysis/alawan-lltrkyz-ly-alhrwb-almndwyt-fy-atar-alhrb-dd-tnzym-aldwlt-alaslamyt\)](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Michael Knights \(/experts/michael-knights\)](#)

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.



Articles & Testimony

To have any hope of deterring, limiting, or winning the coming conflicts in the Middle East, Washington needs to widen its view beyond the Islamic State in the manner that regional states are already doing.

Contrary to many assertions, defeating the self-proclaimed Islamic State may not be particularly complex in the parts of Iraq, Syria, Libya and other countries where the group has sought to hold terrain. If local armed forces get organized and receive air support, they will defeat the Islamic State on the battlefield, and in doing so they will tarnish the group's reputation for success and limit its recruitment potential. But there is one thing standing in the way of this victory: the lack of unity and motivation of its opponents.

In the absence of a major international ground force deployment, the pace of the war will continue to be driven by local actors -- meaning the fight will run on their timeline rather than ours. While defeating the Islamic State may be Washington's top concern, it is not the over-riding priority of most local actors arrayed against the group on the ground. The reality is that there is no cohesive team of allies fighting against the Islamic State and this war is only one of a number of wars being fought or prepared for across the region. In many cases actors are fighting the Islamic State purely to better position themselves for these other conflicts...

[View the full article on the publisher's website. \(http://warontherocks.com/2015/12/time-to-focus-on-the-wars-within-the-war-against-the-islamic-state/\)](http://warontherocks.com/2015/12/time-to-focus-on-the-wars-within-the-war-against-the-islamic-state/) ❖

RECOMMENDED

BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆
Grant Rumley

(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[How to Make Russia Pay in Ukraine: Study Syria](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆
Anna Borshchevskaya

(/policy-analysis/how-make-russia-pay-ukraine-study-syria)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy](#)

Feb 14, 2022

◆
Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)

TOPICS

Military & Security (/policy-analysis/military-security)

Terrorism (/policy-analysis/terrorism)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Iraq (/policy-analysis/iraq)

Syria (/policy-analysis/syria)