

# Campaign Acceleration: How to Build on Progress and Avoid Stalemate Against ISIL

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

Nov 3, 2015

Also available in

[العربية \(/ar/policy-analysis/tsry-alhmlt-kyfyt-albna-ly-altqdm-almuhrz-wtjnb-ay-jmwd-fy-alhrb-dd-tnzym-aldwlt\)](/ar/policy-analysis/tsry-alhmlt-kyfyt-albna-ly-altqdm-almuhrz-wtjnb-ay-jmwd-fy-alhrb-dd-tnzym-aldwlt)

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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

---

**Contingency planning for unexpected success in Iraq is important because our impression of events there is often out of date by a few months, so now is the time to increase U.S. military leverage.**

**T**here seems to be a perception in the West that the war against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is stalemated on the main battlefields of Iraq and Syria. That's probably true in northwestern and central Syria, where ISIL and the Russian- and Iranian-backed Assad regime are containing and eroding progress by rebel forces. By contrast, there has been a mixture of frustrations and solid achievements in Iraq and eastern Syria. ISIL still holds Mosul, Raqqa, Ramadi and a number of other major Iraqi and Syrian towns. But Baghdad, Erbil, Samarra, Kirkuk and Haditha were denied to the enemy. And Mosul Dam, Jurf as-Sakr, Kobane, Tikrit, Tal Abyad and Bayji were recaptured alongside scores of less well-known settlements.

I just returned from three weeks visiting various coalition headquarters and training bases for anti-ISIL forces in and around Iraq. I came back with a strong sense that the campaign was not stalemated, at least not in Iraq and eastern Syria. With access to each major coalition headquarters and many Iraqi units, I gained a picture of the campaign that was complex and granular, and I emerged more optimistic about the prospects for the battlefield defeat of ISIL in Iraq and eastern Syria. Speaking privately to senior commanders -- as well as the young troops with a nitty-gritty, fingertip feel for the front line -- it was clear that more is going right at the tactical level of battles and airstrikes than many observers, myself included, might have suspected...

**[View the full version of this article on the publisher's website. \(http://warontherocks.com/2015/11/campaign-acceleration-how-to-build-on-progress-and-avoid-stalemate-against-isil/\)](http://warontherocks.com/2015/11/campaign-acceleration-how-to-build-on-progress-and-avoid-stalemate-against-isil/)** ❖

## 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 \(/policy-analysis/iraq\)](#)

