

What is the next step of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham?

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Summary: Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), known as the "Organization for the Liberation of the Levant" has experienced an escalation in the attacks it has been undergoing, which is now increasingly challenging the cohesion of its authority in Idlib. The Russian military campaign is increasingly threatening the HTS, whether through the continuation of its military campaign deep inside Idlib or by leveraging the possibility of Turkey responding to the Russian proposal to pressure the HTS. Internally, HTS and its civil arm, the Syrian Salvation Government, are once again facing popular demonstrations by revolutionary activists. HTS's leader, Abu Mohammad al-Julani is also being attacked by the jihadist movement from within for his pragmatic policies and accusations of financial corruption. The HTS has a diverse set of options; either dissolving the organization as demanded by its opponents, entering a new phase of transformation as it has done before, or resisting the current pressures and sticking to the same formulation of the organization, which is the most likely scenario in this case. However, the regional and international stances, which are still uncertain, remain critical for the future of the organization.

Introduction

After the defeat of the Ahrar al-Sham movement and its expulsion from the Bab al-Hawa border crossing in July 2017¹, HTS has become the dominant faction in the northwest of Syria, comprising Idlib and its countryside as well as the countryside of northern Hama . HTS has begun to impose control over the area through its civil arm, the Salvation Government, as an alternative to the interim government and the local councils, which is closely related to the revolutionist stream. Areas in the western countryside of Aleppo, once fell under the authority of the al-Zinki Movement and the Interim Government, as well as the sites of the falcons of Syria and Ahrar al-Sham in the al-Ghab plain and Jabal Zawiya, and some areas where the civil movement was active in rejecting HTS, most notably the city of Maarat al-Numan, all remain outside the control of the HTS. This meant that HTS had fragile control at the time.

By attacking Ahrar al-Sham and controlling the Bab al-Hawa border crossing, HTS anticipated the Turkish intervention in Idlib through the Astana process, establishing

itself in front of Ankara as a dominant party on the ground to coordinate with. As a result, the first Turkish military convoy to enter Idlib on October 13, 2017² was escorted by the organization. The HTS hoped that this step would help it gain regional and international acceptance which could pave the way for its removal from the terrorism list, leading to an international acceptance of its control over Idlib. This came in accordance with the moderation policy pursued by al-Julani since the formation of the Fatah al-Sham Front and later the formation of HTS. However, these pragmatic shifts and the acceptance of the Turkish intervention as an output of the Astana peace process contradicted the fatwa and jihadist slogans previously used by HTS against the rival local factions and against the Turkish army itself, which had a tendency to be described in the jihadist literature as a "secular army."

In August 2015, Jabhat al-Nusra withdrew from the northern countryside of Aleppo before Turkey intervened there against ISIS, declaring that it was not permissible to enter the battle alongside Turkey and America.³ Fatah al-Sham repeated this fatwa

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with the beginning of the Euphrates Shield Operation in which it forbade the fighting “under any regional party”.⁴ Following the first Astana process in early 2017, the Fatah al-Sham Front waged a large-scale battle against the factions based on the assumption that they were already preparing to fight and to implement the Astana process outputs.⁵ Then it described the implementation of the reduction of escalation agreement, which included the establishment of Turkish control points, as a “betrayal”.⁶ The contradiction in fatwas and statements continued up until just days before the Turkish intervention in Idlib.⁷

Later, in February-March 2018, HTS was struck in a way that almost overthrew its control when the Syrian Liberation Front (Ahrar al-Sham and the Zanki Movement) launched an attack on it forcing it to withdraw - within two weeks of fighting - from most of its controlled areas in the western countryside of Aleppo and southern and northern Idlib.⁸ However, HTS was able to recapture these areas through an adverse attack in alliance with the Islamic Turkistan Party. After two months of clashes, a ceasefire agreement was established⁹ and the HTS proved once again its ability to maintain control in the face of the revolutionary factions .

The remaining revolutionary factions assembled in Idlib and Hama under Turkish protection within what was called the National Liberation Front (FNL), which was initially announced on May 29, 2018.¹⁰ It included the factions that were part of the Military Operations and Support Coordination Room, known as the MOM room, after the US support program was cut off. In August 2018, the front witnessed a restructuring which brought together all opposition factions affiliated with the Free Syrian Army in the area (except Jaysh al-Izza), including Ahrar al-Sham, Soqur al-Sham and Failak al-Sham.¹¹

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escalations was announced following a Turkish diplomatic escalation that threatened to cancel the Russian-Turkish agreement. The agreement resulted in the removal of armed groups from the buffer zone and the continuation of the fight against terrorist groups in the region.¹² However, it did not bring about the dissolution of HTS, as it was rumored. The organization issued a statement approving the agreement and welcoming the Turkish efforts¹³ showing a significant shift in rhetoric and rapprochement with Turkey.

In fact,, the HTS took advantage of the Sochi Agreement to consolidate its control over Idlib, complete the construction of its institutional, security and economic network through the Salvation Government, and benefited from the displacement of besieged rebel enclaves in central and southern Syria towards Idlib, gathering displaced fighters - mainly affiliated with them - into regional blocs within the organization.¹⁴

After the Sochi agreement, HTS resumed its war against the National Front for Liberation in sporadic clashes, preventing the formation of a rival authority in the region. The HTS's attacks targeted the al-Zanki movement, but expanded with the participation of the areas and factions within the National Liberation Front in the battle, especially those in al-Ghab plain, Jabal Zawiya, and the northern countryside of Idlib.

The decisive wave of fighting took place at the beginning of 2019, when HTS at the time launched a full-scale assault targeting the al-Zanki movement in western Aleppo countryside, dismantling it and expelling its faction from its traditional stronghold in the western Aleppo countryside to Afrin.¹⁵ Through siege and threat, The National Front for Liberation surrendered in the al-Ghab plain and Jabal Zawiya, despite the fact that it generally preferred not to fight and to instead maintain their positions after the collapse of al-Zanki movement,¹⁶ although the National Front managed to take over important HTS locations during the first phase of the battle in the areas near al-Ghab plain, Jabal Zawiya and the southern countryside of Idlib.

The ceasefire agreement was signed on January 10, 2019 between the National Liberation Front and HTS, which was in fact a declaration of victory for the latter. The agreement imposed the ruling of the Salvation Government, accepted the voluntary departure of fighters, and kept the factions in their positions. The agreement strongly resembled the local reconciliation agreements with the regime which included the imposition of the regime's government, the confiscation of heavy weapons, and the voluntary exit of the fighters who refused the settlement. The HTS announced in a statement of victory that all the areas of Idlib and Hama had become part of the Salvation Government.¹⁷

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The Effects of the Russian campaign in Hama

This situation continued until the beginning of the last Russian military campaign, which began by aerial bombardment in early March 2019 and later transformed into a land campaign on May 6. The regime forces, supported by the Russian Airforce, were able to control several sites at first, most notably Kafr Nabudah and al-Madiq castle, before the factions were able to rearrange their ranks and carry out counter-campaigns in Tal Malh and Jubbayn.¹⁸

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It was remarkable that the factions of the National Liberation Front, which was previously attacked by the HTS and partially dismantled in the al-Ghab Plain and Jabal al-Zawiya and Idlib, quickly assembled itself and held the burden of the bulk of the battle fronts, in addition to the successive support of Turkish-backed National Army factions coming from Afrin and Euphrates Shield areas, despite the reluctance of the HTS, which used to detain people for joining the national army.²¹

The participation of the opponents of the HTS in the National Front and the National Army, in addition to the fall of the main axes in which the HTS had a strong presence, such as Al-Hubait, Harash Abdeen, and Khan Sheikhoun²², showed that the military performance of the HTS was well below expectations, even according to its supporters. And although the HTS stated that more than 500 people were killed in the battles in Hama²³, the recent battles invalidated its previous claims that it is the largest military force to protect the region, an argument that was previously used in its fighting and dismantling of the revolutionary factions. This did not only weaken the HTS ability to impose itself locally, but also weakened its image as a single and influential power externally, especially in front of Ankara.

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The Popular Movement against the HTS

With the fall of the northern countryside of Hama, the campaign against the HTS escalated. The revolutionary activists launched mass demonstrations in Idlib and its countryside raising slogans against HTS, its leader al-Julani, and its civil arm, the Salvation government. One of the direct causes of these demonstrations was the decision to decrease the provision of electricity hours generated by the government and the raising of taxes. The failure of the Salvation Government to provide people with services and the exacerbated humanitarian crisis with the increase in the number of people displaced, especially after the departure of a number of civil organizations either because of the restrictions on provisions imposed by the HTS²⁴ or because of the cuts to financial support provided by the donors.²⁵ Add to these the political reasons and the pressure for the HTS to dissolve itself is significant and multifold.

As for the National Liberation Front, its factions were severely affected by the interruption of its own resources after the HTS took control over the border crossings and the commercial activities. It has also lost most of its depositories to the HST earlier and its international relations became limited to Ankara after the closure of the military operations and support coordination room, known by the acronym MOM room. Thus, the Liberation Front was obliged to assemble its forces quickly with the start of the Russian campaign against Idlib. It resorted to relying on popular donation campaigns in addition

to Turkish support²⁶. All of these accumulated tensions against the HTS, in addition to its military performance which was less than what was expected have taken their toll. However, the possibility of confrontation between the opposition factions and the HTS is unlikely to happen given the fact that the regime and Russia would benefit from this clash. There guarantee for a sustainable or long-term ceasefire in Idlib continues to be absent and there is no guarantee that Moscow will give up the attack on Idlib in the absence of HTS.

The Relationship with the jihadists

On the other hand, some jihadists voices were raised inside and outside the HTS criticizing al-Julani's pragmatic policies and accusing him of financial corruption. The most prominent of these was Abdul-Mu'in Kahal, known as "Abu al-Abd al-Ashda'a"²⁷, who is the leader of "Omar Army" in which all Halab fighters who belong to the HTS are assembled. Al-Ashda'a used to form one group with the "Egyptian legitimates" (Abu Shuaib and Abu al-Yaqzhan) when they were members of the Ahrar al-Sham Movement in Aleppo before they split and joined the HTS. Since then they have become the spearhead in calling for fighting the rival factions of HTS, especially against their former faction Ahrar al-Sham.

After Abu al-Abd's coup over his leadership, several stances emerged confirming al-Julani's accusations. The former HTS judge, Abu Yaqzhan al-Masri, who is one of the fiercest instigators in the killing of the

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HTS's opponents and known for his fatwa that allowed "the shooting in the head of Ahrar al-Sham's fighters"²⁸, issued a statement after his resignation talking about Al-Julani's military negligence and the administrative corruption of al-Julani.²⁹ The judge in the HTS military court Issam al-Khatib also accused al-Julani of seemingly deliberate responsibility for the fall of the territories in line with international resolutions³⁰, alongside his wife, "Batoul Jundiya", 's accusation of the HTS of committing sexual abuse and harassment against women.³¹ These accusations were similar to those raised by Talha al-Masir, who is considered as the most prominent legitimate authority, by calling for the dismissal of al-Julani and implicitly accusing him of holding responsibility for the assassination of his violators.³²

Whether the recent coup was done out of ideological convictions or because of the lack of real authority or influence over the HTS leadership, it shows that a broad stream within the jihadist milieu no longer recognizes the HTS and its leader as the representative of the jihadist stream. This includes all traditional Salafi-jihadi symbols such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, Abu Qatada al-filatini, Hani al-Sibai and al-Qaeda. It also includes a large group of founders and legitimates of the former Jabhat al-Nusra, after pragmatic behavior of the HTS started to contradict with the fatwas it used to adopt, both in terms of its relations with Turkey, its approval to the ceasefire, or its moderate political discourse.³³

In a recorded video released prior to his arrest³⁴, Abu al-Abed Ashda'a stated that the HTS's monthly resources amount to 13 million \$. He also stated that it has received over 100 million \$ from a country that he did not name, in addition to the wide trade and economic network it manages, while so little was spent on the military and social services in the area. He also mentioned that the voices opposing al-Julani were tamed, stating that the HTS was aware of the axes of the battle in Hama in advance but chose not to fortify the area, which led to its fall.

AL-Julani realized the seriousness of his rivalry to represent the jihadist movement on the grassroots level , as well as the overthrowing of its jihadist credibility, in addition to the deep security threat that his former comrades could pose. Consequently, he launched several crackdowns and arrests against parallel jihadist organizations

The HTS arrested Abu al-Abed Ashda'a. The media activist Ahmad Rahal, who is an advocate of the HTS, was also arrested under the accusation of filming the video. While a number of jihadist figures, who were formerly members of the HTS, were reported to have fled to Turkey out of fear of arrest and liquidation by HTS.³⁵

The suspicion around al-Julani's jihadism was the result of his transformations. He first appeared when he disengaged from al-Qaeda and moved to Fatah al-Sham Front (28/7/2016). This move actually started the rupture and enmity with al-Qaeda. Al-Julani benefited from the absence of Aymen al-Zawahiri to proceed with his disengagement with the organization. However, by re-engaging with al-Zawahiri, the leader of al-Qaeda announced in a speech titled "we will fight you so that it will not be disorder (fitna)" (4/10/2017) that the pledge of allegiance (bay'ah) to "al-Qaeda" is binding and leaving it is a forbidden act.³⁶ In his subsequent speeches after his despair over the return of the dissident organization and the HTS's attack on the organization of the guards of religion, al-Zawahiri's speech evolved to describe the HTS as denouncing covenants, perfidious Jihadists, renouncing jihad, accepting the democratic process, and submitting to Turkish secularism.³⁷ This

rupture reached its final episode when al-Julani moved to the HTS (28/1/2017), which witnessed a process of shifts in rhetoric and behavior and attempts to prove its moderation and adoption of the project of establishing a micro-government in Idlib. This led to the split of the part of the organization affiliated with the Al-Qaeda and the formation of the Guardians of Religion (27/2/2018)³⁸, which soon had its leadership arrested by the HTS, including the Jordanian Sami al-Aridi, who was previously the general legitimate of Jabhat al-Nusra, before releasing him out of fear of possible splits within the faction.³⁹

AL-Julani realized the seriousness of his rivalry to represent the jihadist movement on the grassroots level , as well as the overthrowing of its jihadist credibility, in addition to the deep security threat that his former comrades could pose. Consequently, he launched several crackdowns and arrests against parallel jihadist organizations such as the Guardians of Religion and the Jund al-Aqsa organization (his remnants assembled in what is called Ansar al-Tawhid organization). These parallel jihadist organizations, which oppose the policy of the HTS and the Sochi Agreement, allied themselves under one conviction which is "inciting the believers".⁴⁰

These organizations fear the military superiority of HTS. Al-Julani also fears that a thorough campaign against these organizations would impact the continuity of the loyalty and cohesion of the elements of the HTS. Therefore, the parties reached some understandings, through which the HTS would accept the existence of the organization of the guards of religion and pledge to provide it with weapons as long as it is subject to the conditions of the HTS.⁴¹ Despite the divisions among the Guardians of Religion and its inability to attract a number of important figures or to benefit from its representation of al-Qaeda to attract new foreign volunteers, it remains the most prominent threat and alternative to the jihadist stream which opposes al-Julani's policy.

Add to the above mentioned a spectrum of smaller jihadist groups in Idlib, which have varied positions regarding the HTS, who prefer to distance themselves from the HTS's conflicts against local factions and incubators. For Arab fighters, for example, Jordanians have been split between the HTS and the Guardians of Religion organization, but there are still some Jordanian names in the leadership of the two factions,⁴² while most of those coming from the gulf decided to stay neutral since the beginning of the fighting between the HTS and Ahrar al-Sham movement⁴³, a decision mostly influenced by Abdullah al-Muhaisni, who has been in dispute with the HTS ever since he came to office.⁴⁴

The same diversity and fragility can be found among the Asian fighters. For example, the Bukhari battalion of Uzbek fighters is considered to be close to Ahrar al-Sham (National Liberation Front). The front also has a group of Turkistan in addition to its relations with the Islamic Turkistan Party. But despite the previous fighting of the party alongside the HTS against the factions, the party is not affiliated with it and it is unlikely for their positions to match after the dispute between them and the jihadist factions, or in the event of a sharp dispute between the HTS and Ankara.

The HTS has been keen, despite its policies towards proving moderation and local resettlement, to establish a popular base among foreign fighters, particularly after its disagreements with the Guards of Religion organization. Some statements were issued in support of the HTS from non-Syrian legitimate and jihadist leaders,⁴⁵ many of which have recently changed their positions towards the HTS and its leader al-Julani.

The American strikes on Idlib during the previous period, the first of which targeted a meeting of dissidents from the Guards of Religion organization⁴⁶ and the second one targeted the camps of the Ansar al-Tawhid organization⁴⁷, reinforced the loss

For Ankara, it seems that a military clash with HTS is not a priority as it might put its troops and missions in Idlib at risk. In addition to that, fighting with HTS which is a Syrian-dominated organization would impact the relationship with the local community in Idlib where Turkish forces are based, which weakens the opposition's ability to defend the region

of credibility of the HTS among the jihadists and at the same time strengthened the HTS conviction of being from outside the terrorist list and thus can legitimately gain international acceptance for its control in Idlib.

It is worth mentioning that the HTS was initially benefiting from its relationship with foreign jihadists as to promote its new moderate image internationally as a trusted party able to maintain control over the region until it reaches an international consensus over their fate. However, the continuation of its pragmatic transformations and the deterioration of its credibility and its relations with the jihadists, in addition to the weakening of its image as a superior military force after the last battle, and its attempts to carry out silent assassinations targeting in the Al-Qaeda affiliated foreign fighters and others.⁴⁸ All of this is limiting the HTS's ability to play the foreign fighters card and making it more and more precarious as it could backfire on them.

The Russian-Turkish Understandings

Although the Sochi Agreement did not mention the dissolution or the fight against HTS, the Russians adopted the clause on "combating terrorist organizations" as an argument for the continuation of its military operations in Hama and Idlib. The formula

developed further in the tripartite summit (September 16) that followed the last ceasefire in Idlib. It reads: "deep concern over the increased presence of HTS in the region" as well as "continued cooperation to eliminate ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra"⁴⁹, which means, in statements, the Turkish approval of Russian operations against the organization, even if it does not necessarily reflect Turkey's actual position.

Despite the burden caused by the presence of the HTS on Ankara in the case of Idlib and despite the total absence of any statements issued by the Turkish side accepting the HTS or hinting any possibility of coordination with it or recognition of its moderation, Ankara has avoided any clashes with it and preferred to prioritize the entry of Turkish checkpoints into Idlib escorted by the HTS itself.

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There is no doubt that the military commission's performance in the battles of Hama, which was weaker than what the organization claims of itself to be a superior military force controlling Idlib, affects Ankara's estimation of the HTS's strength and real impact and weakens the ability of the HTS to challenge Turkish pressures. This to be added to the chain of pressures that the HTS is subjected to alongside the popular demonstrations and the discontent of the factions and the jihadist spectrum.

However, the possibility of Ankara - or its allied opposition factions - to wage a direct war against HTS remains limited, especially with the continued risk of a renewed Russian campaign. But Ankara could use the latest situation to challenge the HTS and the Salvation Government control over Idlib, especially after the emergence of new actors in the region (the National Army) and the return of the influence of previous actors (the National Liberation Front). The growing divisions within the HTS and the rise of the presence of Hurass al-Deen organization will be beneficial for Ankara and Washington to reclaim the counterterrorism argument in Idlib and for Ankara to put more pressure of the HTS when needed.

Conclusion: Expectations of the Transformation

HTS is continuously trying to prove its transformation towards moderation and localism, its estrangement with Al-Qaeda and the Salafi-jihadi ideology, and its acceptance to abide by regional and international understandings, except those which include its dissolution. It is also trying to bet on its ability to control the foreign jihadist situation within its regions, in return for tacit acceptance of its authority in Idlib. However, its shaking power internally weakens its ability to claim high-ceiling conditions.

The HTS leadership recognizes the general decline in the acceptance of its hegemony and in the estimation of its power in Idlib, both at the grassroots level and at the jihadi or external levels, alongside the growing discontent of the local communities, opposition factions, and the jihadist movement with its monopoly over commercial resources. Therefore, the HTS has hastened to

improve its public image. Thus, al-Julani held several meetings with sheikhs, traders and media personnel to win support.⁵⁰ The HTS also issued statements declaring its losses in the battles of Hama and its attempts to “split the Jihadists groups” followed by its opponents, and promised to conduct reforms and to initiate a monitoring committee.⁵¹

The HTS is also aware of its strengths. With its control over Idlib after the Sochi agreement, it has shifted from relying on ideology and military power as a jihadi faction to build an extended economic, institutional and security network in Idlib, while realizing that its opponents - both revolutionaries and jihadists - abandoned the military operations options against it. The HTS has struggled to gain popular support from the beginning, not just after the start of the demonstrations against it. Therefore, the greatest concerns of the HTS are not actually coming from the domestic threats as much as from a shift that could happen in Turkish behavior against it or in the renewal of the Russian military campaign to the extent that it could drain its capabilities or threaten its existence, which

may cause the failure of the HTS moderate policies, pushing it to use its maximum power and to return to its previous alliance with jihadist networks and its extremist rhetoric.

Therefore, it is unlikely that the HTS will dissolve itself or become a new body in the foreseeable future, unless a definite shift in the Turkish position happens, which has been absent in Ankara’s latest statements, except for the common positions raised during the Tripartite meetings in Astana that emphasized the fight against terrorist organizations. However, Ankara may resort to limited security operations or provoke splits inside the HTS as a means to pressure its leadership. It is still unlikely that Ankara would carry out a military operation in Idlib similar to the Euphrates Shield or the Olive Branch. Thus, it is clear that the HTS will face further withdrawal, internal divisions, and growing tensions whether the ceasefire continues or the military operations are renewed in Idlib.

Endnotes

- 1- <http://bit.ly/2koXjw7>
- 2- <http://bit.ly/2m1NuF6>
- 3- <http://bit.ly/2kx7RcG>
- 4- <http://bit.ly/2m4o05s>
- 5- <http://bit.ly/2mbpQFT>
- 6- <http://bit.ly/2kRIAvg>
- 7- <http://bit.ly/2mrGgKF>
- 8- <http://bit.ly/2kXmaYh>
- 9- <http://bit.ly/2kNACCg>
- 10- <http://bit.ly/2m1bd8m>
- 11- <http://bit.ly/2kuSW2F>
- 12- <http://bit.ly/2kuj7Xp>
- 13- <http://bit.ly/2kCJRVl>
- 14- <http://bit.ly/2mTZGbZ>
- 15- <http://bit.ly/2mv6Suh>
- 16- <http://bit.ly/2m2AkYi>
- 17- <http://bit.ly/2m29QpW>
- 18- <http://bit.ly/2m9Owi4>
- 19- <http://bit.ly/2kJ2Ttr>
- 20- <http://bit.ly/2kzSzE8>
- 21- <http://bit.ly/2m9PA5w>
- 22- Media sources close to the factions indicate that HTS withdrew from the city of Khan Sheikhoun and Tal al-Nimr hours before the Turkish convoy set off towards south of Idlib, impeding the convoy's arrival in Khan Sheikhoun shortly before its fall. Reference through the following link: <http://bit.ly/2mxkUf3>
- 23- <http://bit.ly/2kuPRQ8>
- 24- <http://bit.ly/2m1kWPw>
- 25- <http://bit.ly/2mmnZhy>
- 26- <http://bit.ly/2m62MbK>
- 27- <http://bit.ly/2mnCdUb>
- 28- An audio leak spread during the fighting between HTS and Ahrar al-Sham in July 2017
<https://twitter.com/abazeid89/status/889097701975093248>
- 29- Mohammad Naji Channel (Abu Yaqthan Al-Masri) on Telegram
<https://t.me/mnagui/4830>
- 30- <http://bit.ly/2orcd6O>
- 31- Batoul Jundiya channel (Ola Sharif) on Telegram
<https://t.me/drolatele/546>
- 32- Talha Al-Masir Channel (Abu Shoaib Al-Masri) on Telegram
<https://t.me/abosheab/108>
- 33- See references 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7
- 34- <http://bit.ly/2meLEki>
- 35- Special resources for the researcher
- 36- <http://bit.ly/2mzLcod>
- 37- See <http://bit.ly/2mL84tB> and <http://bit.ly/2l4Gall>
- 38- <http://bit.ly/2m6rkkU>
- 39- <http://bit.ly/2l3RYKW>

40- <http://bit.ly/2kBovrK>

41- <http://bit.ly/2l442fc>

42- The most prominent of the Jordanian leaders is Abu Hussein al-Jordan, the military commander of the elite forces in HTS, his real name is Abdul Rahman Hussein al-Khatib. He is a young Jordanian of Palestinian origin who was a medical student at the University of Jordan in Amman before traveling to Syria in 2013 (private sources of the researcher). The most prominent leaders of the Jordanian religious guards are: Abu al-Qassam Jordanian, Sami al-Aridi, and Iyad al-Tobasi Abu Jleibib before leaving the organization to Daraa, where he was killed in late 2018.

43- <http://bit.ly/2mzLcod>

44- <http://bit.ly/2lgNNvr>

45- <http://bit.ly/2mki8JJ>

46- <http://bit.ly/2kJdCUJ>

47- <http://bit.ly/2mJM3D>

48- Between 26 April 2018 and 1 January 2019, 420 assassinations were recorded, including 45 assassinations of foreign fighters. See: <http://bit.ly/2mGTaEx> and <http://bit.ly/2lhVbH5>

49- <http://bit.ly/2lelqgo>

50- <http://bit.ly/2kAzSQL>

51- <http://bit.ly/2kuPRO8>

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