JIHADIST PROPAGANDA, OFFLINE
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS IN MODERN WARFARE

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SUMMARY

Insurgent strategic communication has rarely posed as great a threat to regional and international security as it does today in Syria, where jihadists are using it to aggressively advance their short- and long-term interests.

Using a qualitative mixed-methods approach incorporating semi-structured interviews with activists and journalists operating inside Syria and in-depth, longitudinal content analysis, this paper compares and contrasts the in-theater outreach strategies of the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, tracking how each has used propaganda and censorship to entrench its rule over local constituents in recent years.

It demonstrates that, notwithstanding the fact that both organizations share the same ideology, there are significant tactical and strategic disparities between their respective approaches toward public diplomacy, disparities that run right to the heart of what drives their enmity for each other.

KEY POINTS

* Both groups see the information space as a decisive insurgent battlefield, and have developed institutionalized systems that synergize media production and performative communication.

* While ISIS invests more into production, HTS's approach is lower-key, less obvious, and could prove to be much more difficult to disrupt.

* In terms of propaganda delivery, the organizations are similar: they share tactics and infrastructural approaches, especially when it comes to education, mosques, and spectacles.

* ISIS's media infrastructure is significantly more sophisticated than that of HTS, which prefers to leverage proxy outreach officials to propagandize on its behalf.

* Both groups use censorship to manage the flow of outside information. Whereas ISIS does so indiscriminately, HTS is more targeted, and, in many ways, more effective.

INTRODUCTION

Propaganda has long been central to revolutionary warfare. However, never has it been used more aggressively and effectively than it is today. In Syria in particular, in-theater propaganda has come to be of foundational importance to non-state actors operating across the political spectrum. Few groups have been as adept at offline outreach as ISIS and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), each of which used propaganda and offline public diplomacy to systematically entrench itself within the local body politic, whenever and wherever conditions allowed.

Understanding how and why these organizations use strategic communication is a necessary step toward stabilizing Syria, yet the issue remains under-researched, with most analysis of jihadist communication operations focusing on propaganda disseminated over the Internet, and how its online consumption contributes to the radicalization of would-be foreign fighters and terrorists. With this paper, we hope to help correct this imbalance in the research. Comparing and evaluating the in-theater communication operations of ISIS and HTS, we shed light on an aspect of the Syrian war about which little information is publicly available. Using a qualitative mixed-methods approach incorporating semi-structured interviews with activists and journalists operating inside northern Syria, longitudinal propaganda research and in-depth content analysis, we examine how each organization used strategic communication operations to further their respective insurgent aims.

The paper proceeds as follows: first, we focus on communication infrastructure and delivery, contrasting ISIS's once-sophisticated and extensive network of propaganda kiosks and recruitment centers with HTS's own institutionalization efforts, which have tended to be subtler, more rudimentary and, arguably, more effective. The second section explores how both groups worked to restrict the flow of information in their heartland territories between 2013 and 2018. We conclude the paper with a discussion of the strategic principles that underpin each organization's understanding of and approach toward offensive and defensive strategic communication, noting that it is imprudent to assume similarities based on ideological inclination alone.

SECTION I: MANUFACTURING PUBLIC DISCOURSE

ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ AND AL-SHAM

Between 2013 and 2018, ISIS deployed both consumed and performative propaganda in Syria. The former consisted of audio-visual media products, everything that was broadcast and distributed in-theater through its bespoke communication infrastructure—documentaries, current affairs features, radio programs, photograph reports, newspapers, magazines, operation claims, theological literature, infographics, posters, billboards and so on. The latter—performative propaganda—relied on direct interpersonal engagement and was primarily delivered by outreach officials working on the ground in Syria. This latter form of propaganda involved constant face-to-face interaction between representatives of ISIS and its civilian constituents, and, while it was most obviously encapsulated in public spectacles like executions and amputations, it appeared in more benign contexts, too, from town fairs and mosque gatherings to school lessons and competitions.

ISIS evidently recognized the power of physical presence, and that the act of media dissemination could itself become a form of propaganda. With that in mind, its consumed propaganda was always a supporting act to its performative counterpart, a way for it to fight, in its own words, "on an internal front to bring the truth" to the population over which it ruled.

The most crucial physical components of its propaganda activism were the *nuqtah i'lamiyyah* (literally, media point)—a caliphate-wide institution that facilitated in-theater propaganda dissemination— the Center for Proselytization and Mosques, and the Ministry for Education. Regarding the *nuqat i'lamiyyah* (media points), a March 2016 article in ISIS's official newspaper, *al-Naba'*, provides some revealing information. Established in places that were "lacking in communications mechanisms," media points were intended to "present the media in all of its forms to the ordinary people" and serve as a "coupling link" between the ISIS organization and its civilian constituents. At one and the same time, media points delivered news updates on ISIS's war effort and projected its utopian narrative. Wherever they were, they screened propaganda films, and served as satellite publishing houses, radio listening points, and digital distribution centers. Attendance was assured by blatant intimidation, as well as the host population's desire to appear loyal. What's more, they were not limited to towns and cities—mobile

kiosks were also rigged up so that the caliphate's audio-visual output could reach even the remotest areas of Iraq and Syria.

In Raqqa, which was the symbolic seat of the caliphate until 2017, activists asserted that there were "many [media points] in the city and its environs." According to the aforementioned *al-Naba'* article, each kiosk "provide[d] a full media archive in a number of languages, from English, French and Kurdish to Turkish, Farsi and Bangla, and so on." The same article went on to claim that ISIS's media officials in the city intended to set up a new "kiosk in every neighborhood and on every important street."

The media point initiative was complemented by ISIS's Center for Proselytization and Mosques, a caliphate-wide outreach unit that was dedicated to in-theater recruitment operations. Concerned with enlisting both civilians and soldiers to the group's ideology, the center worked doggedly across Iraq and Syria between 2013 and 2018 to entice locals to its cause. The scope and sophistication of its activities were encapsulated in a May 2016 video from northern Syria, which followed a team of its recruiters as they engaged in a two-week enlistment drive. First, they are shown distributing leaflets in mudbrick villages. Next, there is an account of their *da'wah* and Shariah courses, which are shown to have put particular focus on the education and recruitment of children: young boys are depicted being coached in *tahfidh*—learning the Quran by rote—as well as being taught how to write. The narrator explains that there are similar courses on offer for women and girls, something that had, he claims, resulted in mothers signing their own children up to volunteer for military and even suicide operations. The campaign concludes with a sight familiar to ISIS, a *da'wah* caravan party, at which villagers are shown rapturously pledging allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi before tucking into boiled sweets and bursting into song. This is just one example of the Center's in-theater recruitment drives—as many other propaganda videos and photograph reports attest, they happened continuously across ISIS's territories between 2013 and 2018.

Operating alongside these efforts was the Ministry for Education, which for a time presided over public schooling in parts of Syria that were controlled by ISIS. After its sweeping victories of 2014, ISIS commandeered the

pedagogical infrastructure that was already in place in its new territories—teachers were re-educated or, failing that, cast off, and entire curriculums were revised. When the schools eventually reopened their doors to the trickle of students that voluntarily returned, they worked to normalize the ISIS cause—arithmetic was taught with reference to AK-47s and hand grenades alongside a revisionist history of Islam and "Islamic" geography. Besides these more indirect forms of outreach, candidates for *shibl* (cub) camps were cultivated in ISIS-run schools. Upon selection, *ashbal* (plural of cub) were dispatched to boarding facilities in rural areas, provided with weapons training and intensive ideological coaching. There, they would be indoctrinated through a mixture of education, hardship, and social support, a cocktail of measures capable of turning many of them into some of the caliphate's most committed fighters.

Adopting a highly sophisticated approach toward in-theater outreach between 2013 and 2018, ISIS used pre-existing social structures in Syria as well as its own infrastructural institutions to interact with the civilian population over which it ruled. Its efforts were expensive and expansive—they crossed genders and did not discriminate according to age.

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Contrasting with the above, HTS's offline outreach operations have tended to rely much less on infrastructure. Whereas the self-proclaimed caliphate invested thousands of dollars in establishing hundreds of media points across Syria and Iraq—many of which were outfitted with widescreen televisions and laser printers—HTS's media output, which comprises the videos, photograph reports, and literature produced by in-house media centers like the Ebaa Agency and Amjad Foundation, is markedly less flashy, and so too is its distribution methodology. While, like ISIS, its outreach operations are split between consumed and performative propaganda, the relative weight of each category differs significantly; HTS tends to spend much less time and effort on consumed propaganda operations.

Instead, it usually opts for a more personal mode of dissemination, chiefly in the form of the media cadres it sends to mosques to hand out literature after Friday prayers. These officials are also in regular attendance at public *da'wah* gatherings and events. The literary materials they distribute are more variable than those of ISIS, tending to adapt to the group's immediate priorities in the area in question. Sometimes, they consist of leaflets working to mobilize specific groups against specific events—like, for example, the political negotiations in Astana—

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whereas at others they consist of Shariah guidance promoting HTS's rigid interpretation of Islam, and not much else. These cadres also distribute compact disks and flash drives loaded with lectures and leadership statements. However, compared to ISIS, there are far fewer of them.

Alongside its semi-formalized media distribution infrastructure, HTS has co-opted a number of already-extant structures and institutions in its territories in northern Syria, something that enables proxy media officials to propagandize on its behalf while masquerading as independent actors. By outsourcing its public diplomacy through *mudafat*, *du'at al-jihad*, and public gatherings, the details of each of which are outlined below, the group has been able to save on resource expenditure and become a more decentralized—and therefore elusive—target for counter-strategic communication operations.

One of the most important arenas for HTS's everyday outreach is its network of *mudafat*—large guest rooms set up and administered in rural areas that are used to host social gatherings. According to interview respondents currently residing in HTS-held territory, there are a number of different *mudafat*, each of which is used for a distinct purpose. The two most prominent manifestations are those that are devoted to the *muhajirin* (foreign fighters) and those that serve the interests of the *umara'* (leaders). The former is used exclusively by foreign fighters, the groupings of which are based on place of origin or tribal affiliation (there are, for example, both Tunisian *mudafat* and Yemeni *mudafat*). These facilities offer a center of gravity for social and ideological incubation among HTS fighters and are also important nodes for fundraising and recruiting. The latter, the doors of which are open to everyone, are reserved for hosting engagements between HTS elites and representatives from the local population. Usually, they are presided over by HTS's local military *amir* (leader) or some other influential figure from the organization. These institutions in particular are central to the group's public outreach: through them, it is able to maintain channels of communication with local dignitaries and allow people to air their concerns, make recommendations and voice demands. Attendance is incentivized more than it is coerced—in much the same way as ISIS's Center for Proselytization and

Mosques draws crowds, HTS periodically lays on public feasts at its *mudafat*, often following up with *da'wah* sessions or speeches from designated officials.

In tandem with the above, HTS also presides over a network of religious education centers, which are administered by its volunteer corps, the *du'at al-jihad* (callers to *jihad*). These institutions differ from the schools and camps of ISIS because they are less holistic in their approach and rarely fall under the official HTS rubric. Instead, they usually operate semi-autonomously, augmenting the group's official outreach operations under the watchful eye of the Saudi jihadist cleric, 'Abdullah al-Muhaysini. With tacit encouragement and endorsement from HTS, *du'at al-jihad* education centers and even a radio station have proliferated across northern Syria over the past few years. Although

their staff-members are always cautious to distance themselves from group affiliations, locals interviewed by the authors widely consider them to be part and parcel of the organization.

Some centers, such as Dar al-Arqam in the Idlib countryside, focus their efforts on young children, coaching them in *tahfidh* and Shariah jurisprudence. Just like ISIS, they too offer physical activities such as martial arts classes. Others, such as the al-'Izz bin 'Abdulsalam Center, target teenagers and younger men, seemingly hoping to develop them into HTS-sympathetic preachers for eventual deployment at local mosques and *da'wah* centers. These centers are somewhat akin to ISIS's boarding schools— they provide their students with food and accommodation, and offer two tiers of ideological education. The first lasts four months and focuses on introductory
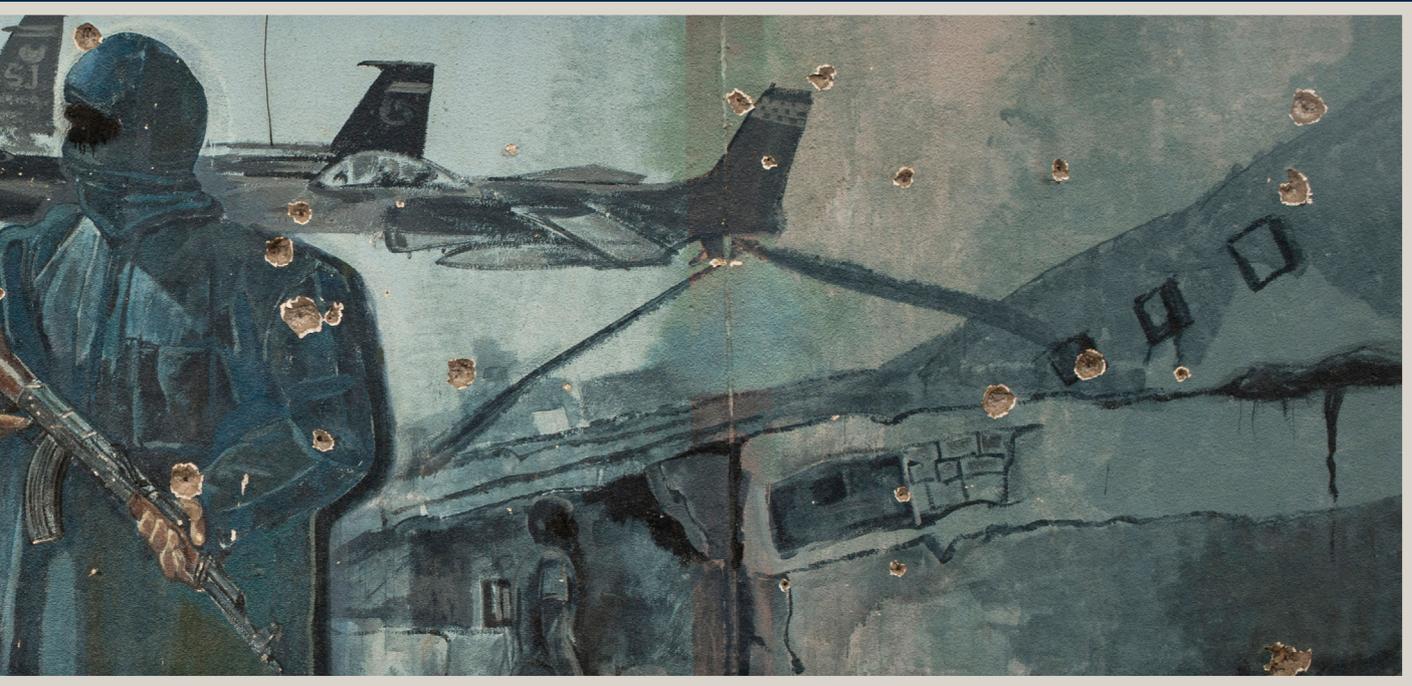
Shariah sciences (*al-'ulum al-shari'ah*); upon completion, the second tier opens up, allowing students to engage in more advanced Shariah courses for a further six months. Besides this, there are also women-only *du'at al-jihad* centers, such as the 'Umar bin al-Khattab and Umm 'Ammarah Institutions, wherein female attendants are provided with similar theological training. Just as is the case in the context of ISIS, the aim appears to be to use female supporters as a vector for ideology, a way to diffuse it and its accompanying worldview into both public and private spheres. After all, if the mother is a committed adherent of the jihadist ideology, then she is more likely to radicalize and recruit her own children to its cause. Teaching staff often float between more than one center—for example, the Dar al-Arqam and al-'Izz Bin 'Abdulsalam Centers share at least two teachers, each of whom have featured prominently in their respective graduation videos.

Besides the *mudafat* and *du'at al-jihad* initiatives, HTS also hosts regular public gatherings. Unlike ISIS, these rarely showcase the implementation of corporal or capital punishments. Instead, HTS seems to prefer consensual communication between it, or its affiliates, and the local population. For that reason, it uses the carrot more than it does the stick, something that is particularly apparent at its *da'wah* parties, where it organizes *tahfidh* contests, comedy evenings, and general knowledge quizzes. At the quizzes, the use of the carrot is most liberal: HTS quizmasters are renowned for asking deliberately easy questions so that they have a pretext to distribute more rewards, and therefore appear to be more generous. Those in attendance receive

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constant positive reinforcement and are encouraged to sign up to go to more regular classes, a possible first step toward their eventual recruitment.

All this is complemented by HTS's control of local mosques, something that gives it a direct line of contact with the masses over which it rules. In order to exert the requisite level of control, HTS has worked systematically to exclude all preachers that do not adhere to its particular reading of Islamism, replacing them with handpicked imams that are directly affiliated with it. Sometimes, this is done immediately, using coercive means; at others, though, the takeover has been known to be more gradual. In any case, once it has seized control of a mosque, HTS uses its sermons (Friday prayers in particular) to send a unified—and, rather like ISIS, strictly

regulated—message, broadcasting its ideological and political position. Interview respondents noted that mosque outreach has been a particularly important factor in HTS's efforts to mobilize the masses against peace talks and cease-fires, as well as its local rivals.

Instead of creating its own infrastructure, then, HTS favored already-extant structures and institutions in northern Syria; by outsourcing its propaganda activism like this, it has been able to save on resource expenditure and become highly decentralized, two qualities that stand in stark contrast to ISIS.

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As the above pages have shown, both ISIS and HTS have adopted concerted strategies for in-theater outreach in Syria. Using a

combination of bespoke infrastructure and co-opted local institutions, each group invested a huge amount of time and energy in communicating with the local population. The groups differed most in their reliance on the production and distribution of official media products. Whereas ISIS worked to fetishize its brand through a constant flood of propaganda, HTS was both more conservative and more subtle—it preferred to diffuse its ideological principles and sociopolitical values through long-term education and mosque outreach, and its output was seemingly borne more out of an *ad hoc* need to steer public opinion than anything else.

SECTION II: RESTRICTING PUBLIC DISCOURSE

ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ AND AL-SHAM

During its proto-state tenure in Syria, ISIS incrementally worked toward establishing an information monopoly. Like other totalitarian movements, it considered external channels of information that ran against its party line to be a long-term destabilizing threat. Hence, from 2014 onward, it set about removing or discrediting them. Cognizant of the fact that immediately withdrawing civilian access to the outside world would risk irreparably harming its local appeal, it opted for a gradualist approach—it was only in mid-

2016 that it began to fully implement its censorship program, inhibiting Internet access, jamming radio signals and banning satellite dishes (which it at one point condemned as *'adu min al-dakhil*—"an enemy within").

We should not overstate the extent of its censorship success; enforcing these policies was easier said than done and, for that reason, it had to be far more flexible than its edicts suggested. That being said, the group did eventually manage to severely constrict the information space in large parts of Syria and Iraq. For example, activists living in ISIS-held Raqqa last year reported that, while it was relatively easy to access the Internet in early 2014, "it became harder to do so in 2015, and even harder in 2016." By early 2017, Raqqa's once myriad Internet cafes had been whittled down to just a handful, each of which was administered by ISIS-vetted individuals who recorded their customers' names and facilitated regular police inspections.

The group's stance on satellite dishes followed a similar trajectory. After years of ambiguity—and apparent ambivalence—toward the consumption of satellite television, it began to take a more proactive stance toward the end of 2015, eventually threatening citizens in Raqqa with "severe punishment" if they were caught watching it. So, once again, while its stated position had long been clear, it was quite some time before it actually came to implement it.

Whereas in its heartlands ISIS proceeded cautiously, seemingly intent on preserving the fragile acquiescence of the local and

muhajir population, the same cannot be said of towns and cities that were of lesser strategic value to it—especially those that were seized after protracted military campaigns. For example, in Tadmur (also known as Palmyra), it circumvented any pretense of censorship gradualism and enforced a *de facto* ban on Internet communication by refusing to repair the cyber infrastructure that had been so crippled during its first capture of the city in May 2015. Incidentally, in the Iraqi city of Ramadi, it banned the Internet by the same means, though it did eventually permit some limited access alongside mobile telephony, provided it took place in custom-built, ISIS-monitored "halls."

As a cumulative result of its policy of information restriction, credible news that ran contrary to ISIS's official media was, by late 2016, structurally inhibited in Syria: verifiable reports about the coalition's efforts were scarce, and the rumors that did get past its firewall were often obscured by disinformation. While it was not enough to stop the group from being ousted from most of its urban holdouts there, this meant that conspiracy theories ran amok, and confusion as to its enemies' real aims blossomed.
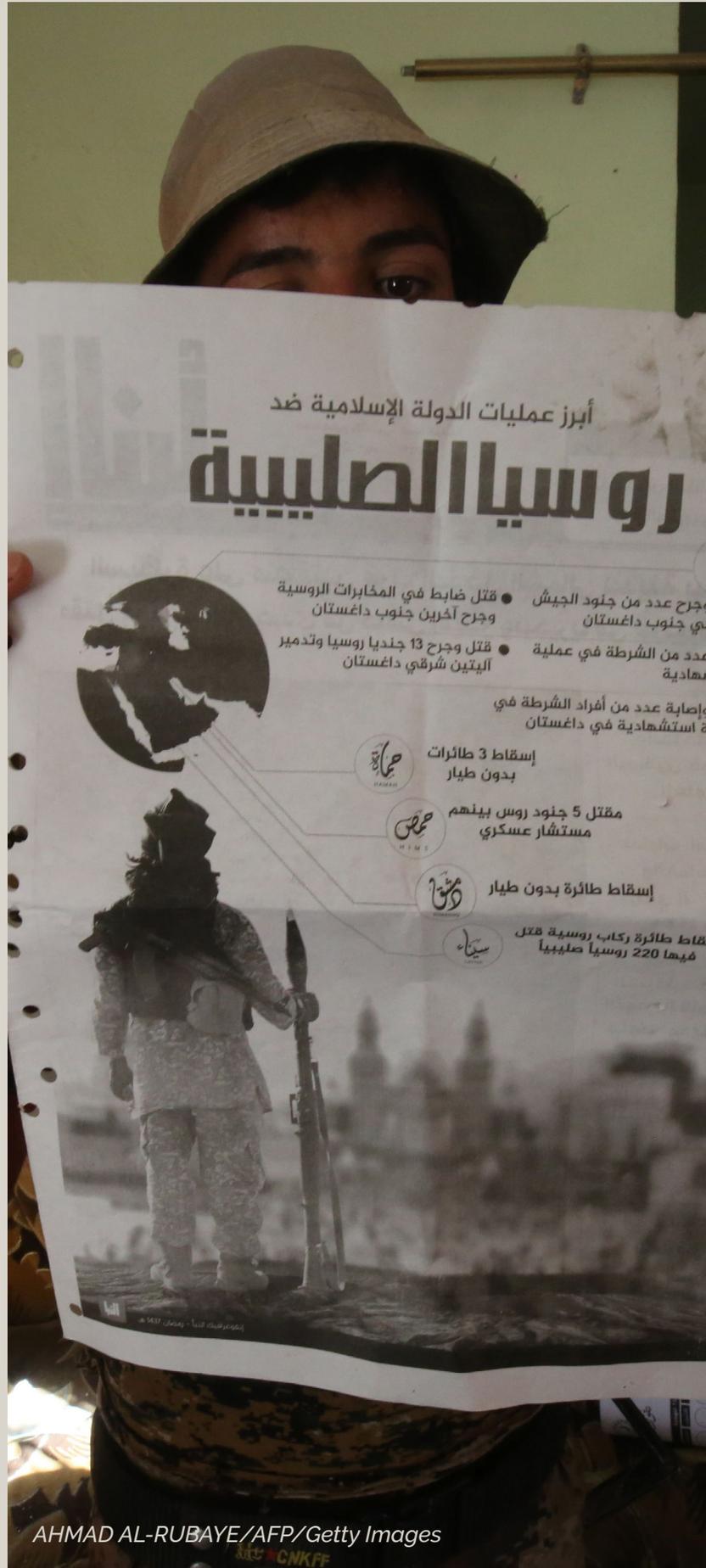
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For its part, HTS has tended to be more cautious than ISIS when it comes to censorship. Indeed, it has been demonstrably aware of its inability to ban outside channels of communication, whether at once or gradually, and its efforts have been more selective—only certain individuals, groups and forms of communication are targeted by its censors. The precise details of how it engages in its restriction measures are difficult to discern, but locals have noted that the group has its own specialized apparatus—informally referred to as the *fira' al-ma'lumat* (literally, information branch)— which is said to monitor the media distributed in its immediate sphere of influence. It is, according to interview respondents in northern Syria, this unit that has the final say on what does and does not get circulated in HTS territory.

Notwithstanding its existence, HTS is significantly more permissive than ISIS. For example, it has long allowed dozens of pro-uprising newspapers and magazines to be circulated in its territories, publications over which it has no direct oversight whatsoever. While it frequently levels accusations of secularism at them, it only bans those which criticize it specifically or threaten its ideological hegemony. One of those banned was the *Enab Baladi* newspaper, which was cut off in January 2017 after it published an article criticizing the group for dominating Idlib and providing a pretext for the Syrian regime to attack the city. Furthermore, back in early 2015—when HTS still referred to itself as Jabhat al-Nusrah—it famously banned a series of other pro-revolution newspapers, among them *Sada al-Sham*, *Tamaddon*, and *Souriatna*, after they published a message of solidarity with the murdered journalists of *Charlie Hebdo*. After accusing them of attacking Islam, it confiscated and incinerated all the editions it could lay its hands on, framing its actions as an attempt to defend the interests of the religion. The editors of the "offending" newspapers considered this to be a cynical effort to opportunistically leverage local people against channels of information that were unsympathetic to its jihadist cause.

In the context of radio stations, HTS has been less ambivalent. It has, for example, raided a number of rival broadcasters in northern Syria after accusing them of committing acts

forbidden under Islam. In January 2016, it stormed the facilities of *Radio Fresh*, a station run by local activists in the town of Kafranbal. In its immediate aftermath, the station was taken off-air, its manager arrested, its electronics confiscated and its archives wiped clean, all under the pretext that it had been broadcasting "immoral" programs with women announcers and music.

Besides this, HTS has also aggressively competed for visual dominance in northern Syria. Like ISIS once was, it is a profligate producer of billboards, signposts, and posters, and has attempted to render its iconography ubiquitous across its territories. As one respondent reported to the authors, "When you only see one logo all over the place, you unconsciously start assuming the dominance of that group." To this end, it has systematically worked to erase any symbols or signs of which it disapproves, whether that is because they are "un-Islamic," or because they are deemed to be an ideological threat to the group and its leaders. Subversive anti-HTS slogans—which often appear covertly overnight—are immediately expunged and replaced with pro-HTS slogans, as are posters and billboards produced by rival organizations fighting for the same outcome goals. By way of example, HTS frequently defaces the billboards of Hizb ut-Tahrir and has even banned printing presses from working with it, even though it too intends to instate Shariah law and establish an Islamic caliphate.

In sum, through gradual and selective censorship, HTS and its antecedents have worked methodically to become one of few hegemons in northern Syria's information landscape. While, like ISIS, it remains far out of reach of a true information monopoly, the targeted damage it has done to public discourse in its territories is likely to have lasting consequences.

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While both ISIS and HTS have had an uneasy relationship with outside channels of information, each responded to this challenge differently. Whereas ISIS was more radical in its approach, which eventually came to consist of censorship of anything that was not published by the group, HTS has tended to be more cautious, preferring to preserve relationships through more targeted negative measures.

CONCLUSION

As the above pages have shown, ISIS and HTS deployed a carefully thought-out cocktail of consumed and performative propaganda in Syria between 2013 and 2018, one that was calibrated to the needs of both the general population and active group members. Weaving together media distribution and media restriction in a range of ways, each group invested a significant amount of time in the deployment of domestic influence operations, working to enhance, stabilize and entrench their respective insurgent governments.

However, despite their shared ideology and similarly strategic understanding as to the importance of in-theater communication, ISIS and HTS are highly distinct at the tactical level. Unlike ISIS, which expended huge amounts of resources in media production, HTS has been more unobtrusive. A 2012 interview with one of the HTS movement's former commanders, a man named Abu 'Adnan who was a Shariah official at the time, gives a glimpse into how the group has historically viewed audio-visual propaganda. In it, he states, "We don't care about the press. It's not a priority to us." As such, instead of flooding the world with a constant torrent of on- and offline propaganda like ISIS has done, HTS portrays itself to be more interested in actions than in words. So, whereas ISIS invested heavily in propaganda and infrastructure, using consumed and performative operations in almost equal measure, HTS has tended to rely more on the performative side of the equation, focusing more on co-opting institutions and engaging in regular face-to-face outreach. This difference in the proportionate reliance on consumed and performative propaganda lies at the heart of what makes the two groups so distinct from one another.

In any case, it is imperative that policymakers and military practitioners develop a better understanding of how both organizations have used—and differed in their use of—offline strategic communication operations in Syria. In the context of modern-day revolutionary warfare, the information space is increasingly seen as a "decisive battlespace," and, for that reason, far more research needs to be done on how it is leveraged in-theater. While studying the impact and influence of online propaganda is important in its own right, it

has distracted the world from what could be an even greater challenge. The above pages, which are just an initial step toward filling this gap in knowledge, hint toward the scale of the mass-indoctrination operations that have occurred in Syria in recent years, the cumulative impact of which will not simply evaporate, even after both ISIS and HTS have been militarily defeated.

ENDNOTES

1.   The group's name has changed several times since its rise in 2013. In July 2016 it changed its name from Jabhat al-Nusrah to Jabhat Fatah al-Sham after breaking ties with al-Qaeda. The group renamed itself Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in January 2017, making a large-scale merger with other Syrian rebel groups. For consistency, this paper always refers to the group as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).

2.   This article draws on primary data collected from five semi-structured interviews with journalists and experts familiar with HTS. These were conducted online in February 2018 by the author over Skype and/or WhatsApp.

3.   This analysis on ISIS's media kiosk infrastructure draws on research undertaken by the first author for a United States Naval War College case study project. For more detail, see Charlie Winter, "Totalitarian insurgency: Evaluating the Islamic State's in-theater propaganda operations," Naval War College Center for Irregular Warfare and Armed Groups, January 2018.

4.   ISIS, "The media point: a window inside the media of the Islamic State," Al-Naba' XXI, March 8, 2016.

5.   ISIS, "Aspect of the work of the media point in the city of Raqqa," Raqqa Province Media Office, April 19, 2017; ISIS, "Aspect of the work of the media office in the province – the media point," Khayr Province Media Office, March 8, 2017; ISIS, "Establishing a media point in the city of Tadmur," Homs Province Media Office, June 5, 2015; ISIS, "Opening a media point in the city of Sirte," Tripoli Province Media Office, September 2, 2015; ISIS, "A screening of Allah and His Messenger spoke the truth at the media point in the city of Raqqa," Raqqa Province Media Office, April 22, 2017.

6.   ISIS, "The media point," 12.

7.   As of December 19, 2015, al-Naba' has been disseminated in electronic form, too, through ISIS's official propaganda disseminator, Nashir.

8.   ISIS, "Distributing the weekly al-Naba' newspaper to ordinary Muslims," Nineveh Province Media Office, November 19, 2016; ISIS, "Distributing al-Naba' and video materials in south Shirqat," Dijla Province Media Office, July 23, 2016; ISIS, "Distributing al-Naba' in the city of Tal'afar," Jazira Province Media Office, April 14, 2017.

9.   Interview between author and Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently, June 15, 2017.

10. ISIS, "The media point," 13.

11. ISIS, "The media point," 13.

12. ISIS, "Raiding the villages to spread guidance," Aleppo Province Media Office, May 2016.

13. See, for example: Quentin Somerville and Riam Dalati, "An education in terror," BBC News, August 2017.

14. See, for example: Pamela Engel, "Inside the textbooks that ISIS uses to indoctrinate children," Business Insider, August 21, 2016.

15. Asaad Almohammad, "ISIS Child Soldiers in Syria: The Structural and Predatory Recruitment, Enlistment, Pre-Training Indoctrination, Training, and Deployment," International Center for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague, February 19, 2018.

16. Author interview via skype with Ali El Yassir; Middle East analyst focusing on violent extremist groups, February 2018.

17. Author interview via Skype with Mustafa, a freelance trainer focusing on peace-building, February 2018.

18. Author interview via skype with Ali El Yassir; Middle East analyst focusing on violent extremist groups, February 2018.

19. Author interview via skype with Orwa Khalifa, a Syrian journalist, February 2018.

20. Author interview via Skype with Mustafa, a freelance trainer focusing on peace-building, February 2018.

21. Author interview via skype with Orwa Khalifa, a Syrian journalist, February 2018.

22. Author interview via Skype with Mustafa, a freelance trainer focusing on peace-building, February 2018.

23. Author interview via skype with Orwa Khalifa, a Syrian journalist, February 2018.

24. Author interview via Skype with Mohammed, the coordinator of 24CR, a civil resistance group against extremism, February 2018.

25. Author interview via Skype with Ahmed, a Syrian journalist, February 2018.

26. The official soundcloud account for du'at al-jihad radio station, du'at al-jihad.

27. Author interview via skype with Orwa Khalifa, a Syrian journalist, February 2018.

28. Dar al-Arqam Center, "Graduation ceremony of the first course at Dar Al-Arqam center," Dar al-Arqam Center, August 23, 2017.

29. Author interview via skype with Ali El Yassir; Middle East analyst focusing on violent extremist groups, February 2018.

30. al-'Izz bin 'Abdulsalam Center, "Graduation ceremony of the eighth course at al-'Izz bin 'Abdulsalam Center," al-'Izz bin 'Abdulsalam Center, February 14, 2018.

31. Umar bin al-Khattab Center, "Graduation ceremony of the first course at Umar bin al-Khattab Center," Umar bin al-Khattab Center, September 14, 2017.

32. Umm 'Ammarah Center, "Graduation ceremony of the fourth course at Umm 'Ammarah Center," Umm 'Ammarah Center, September 11, 2017.

33. Author interview via Skype with Ahmed, a Syrian journalist, February 2018.

34. Author interview via Skype with Mohammed, the coordinator of 24CR, a civil resistance group against extremism, February 2018.

35. Dar al-Arqam Center, "Graduation ceremony of the first course at Dar Al-Arqam center," Dar al-Arqam Center, August 23, 2017.

36. al-'Izz bin 'Abdulsalam Center, "Graduation ceremony of the eighth course at al-'Izz bin 'Abdulsalam Center," al-'Izz bin 'Abdulsalam Center, February 14, 2018.

37. Author interview via skype with Orwa Khalifa, a Syrian journalist, February 2018.

38. Author interview via skype with Orwa Khalifa, a Syrian journalist, February 2018.

39. Author interview via Skype with Ahmed, a Syrian journalist, February 2018.

40. Author interview via skype with Orwa Khalifa, a Syrian journalist, February 2018.

41. Author interview via skype with Ali El Yassir; Middle East analyst focusing on violent extremist groups, February 2018.

42. Author interview via Skype with Mohammed, the coordinator of 24CR, a civil resistance group against extremism, February 2018.

43. Elements of this section are drawn from research undertaken by the first author as part of a United States Naval War College case study project. For more detail, see Winter, "Totalitarian insurgency."

44. On December 2, 2015, ISIS's Department of Hisba released a statement banning satellite TV transmitters on account of their insidious spreading of "deceit, lies and defamation." By the end of the month, this statement had been officially translated into English and Farsi. In the weeks that followed, al-Naba' featured an infographic detailing the seven central evils of satellite transmission, which was subsequently translated into English. ISIS, "The banning of satellite receivers," Department of Hisba, December 6, 2015; ISIS, "The banning of satellite TV receivers," Diwan al-

Hisbah, December 30, 2015; ISIS, "al-Naba' XI: Wait, we are also waiting," December 29, 2015; ISIS, "Purifying the homes of the Muslims from satellite dish receivers," Hisba Committee, May 17, 2016.

45. Interview between author and Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently, June 15, 2017.

46. Interview between author and Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently, June 15, 2017.

47. Interview between author and Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently, June 15, 2017.

48. Interview between author and Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently, June 15, 2017.

49. As signified by the release of ISIS, "Destroying the satellite devices," Raqqa Province Media Office, May 31, 2016.

50. Interview between author and Khaled al-Homsi, May 31, 2017.

51. Interview between the author and Waleed al-Fahdawi, June 4, 2017.

52. "Satellite Dishes Reconnect Post-IS Mosul to World," AFP, April 20, 2017.

53. Author interview via Skype with Ahmed, a Syrian journalist, February 2018.

54. Author interview via Skype with Ahmed, a Syrian journalist, February 2018.

55. Enab Baladi, "The administration of Bab al-Hawa crossing confiscates Enab Baladi newspaper because of an article criticising al-Nusra," Enab Baladi, January 31, 2017.

56. al-Souria Net, "al-Nusra executes a second woman on charges of prostitution and Ahrar al-Sham confiscates pro-opposition newspapers," al-Souria Net, January 20, 2015.

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59. Mustafa Hussien, "Radio Fresh suspends its broadcasting due to threats from al-Nusra," Smart-News Agency, June 16, 2016.

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62.   Haid Haid, "Resisting Hayat Tahrir al-Sham: Syrian Civil Society on the Frontlines," Adopt a Revolution, November 10, 2017.

63.   Ibid.

64.   Author interview via Skype with Mustafa, a freelance trainer focusing on peace-building, February 2018.

65.   Rania Abouzeid, "Interview with Official of Jabhat al-Nusra, Syria's Islamist Militia Group," Time Magazine, December 25, 2012.

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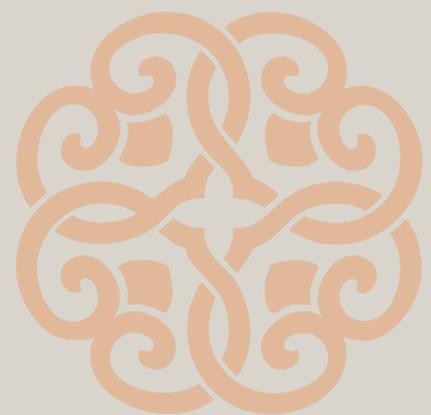
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