

Jihadi “Counterterrorism”: Hayat Tahrir al-Sham Versus the Islamic State

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Feb 2023

Also published in CTC Sentinel

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Articles & Testimony

An in-depth look at how the Syrian group has sought to differentiate itself from other jihadist terrorist organizations, but with only partial success despite a decade’s worth of political evolution.

Once allies in the same organization, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and the Islamic State have an interesting history that turned them into “frenemies” from April 2013 to February 2014, and then outright enemies over the past nine years. This led to a broader global jihadist fight, with HTS continuing to tread its own path. From spring 2014 to summer 2017, the main avenue by which HTS and its predecessor group, Jabhat al-Nusra, dealt with the Islamic State was insurgent infighting. Since summer 2017, however—as HTS consolidated control over areas in northwest Syria and developed a governance apparatus—it has favored a “lawfare” approach to dealing with Islamic State cells in its territory. Surveying the data on its arrest campaign over the past half-decade suggests that HTS has been successful in countering the Islamic State. Yet even if this fight is deemed a net positive, the group’s continued support for terrorism abroad and its authoritarian governance in Syria have made Western governments hesitant about removing it from their terrorism lists or deeply engaging with its leaders...

To read the full article, download the PDF above or [visit the CTC Sentinel website \(https://ctc.westpoint.edu/jihadi-counterterrorism-hayat-tahrir-al-sham-versus-the-islamic-state/\)](https://ctc.westpoint.edu/jihadi-counterterrorism-hayat-tahrir-al-sham-versus-the-islamic-state/). ❖

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