

Statement



Risks in the Expansion by HTS, Classified as a Terrorist Entity by UNSC Resolutions, Over About 560 Square Kilometers in the Past Few Days

Any Provision of Support to or Coordination with HTS Exposes the Provider to the Risk of Terrorist Classification by the UNSC

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First: HTS (An-Nusra Front) controls large areas previously controlled by armed opposition factions/the Syrian National Army:

On October 11, 2022, the Third Legion took control of the headquarters of the Hamza Brigade, known as “al-Hamzat” (one of the Syrian National Army’s factions) in al-Bab city; this followed the Hamza Brigade’s involvement in the killing of media activist Muhammad Abu Ghannoum, and his pregnant wife. Hay’at Tahrir al Shaam (HTS, formerly known as Al-Nusra Front) took advantage of this conflict among the Syrian National Army’s forces to launch a large-scale military offensive aimed at expanding its areas of control at the expense of the areas controlled by armed opposition factions (consisting mainly of the Third Legion and the National Front for Liberation and Construction, both part of the Syrian National Army). It seems that HTS has been preparing to seize control of new areas at the expense of the armed opposition factions since the failure of its last attack last September. This indicates the size of the attacks and the level of expansion of the areas under HTS’ control.

HTS launched its offensive from several points within areas already under its control, the most important of which are the town of Atma in the suburbs of Idlib governorate and the towns of Ghazawiya, and Deir al Ballout in Jabal Sam’an in western Aleppo governorate. The military operations between the opposition factions and HTS extended to large areas of the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate. The HTS military operation, which has lasted since 12 December up until the moment of preparing this statement, led to the group controlling large areas of the northern suburbs of Aleppo governorate, estimated at about 560 km² in total, including dozens of villages and districts, the most important of which are Afrin city and Jendeires town, and the villages of Ein Dara, Qerzaihel, Babilit and Me’rata, with the group also attempting to take over Kafr Janneh town in the Azaz district of the northern suburbs of Aleppo.

According to what the SNHR team has been able to document to date, the clashes between the fighting parties, from 12 to 17 October 2022, resulted in the following:

- 1- Six civilians - of whom four women and one child - were killed on October 12 and 13, 2022.
- 2- Approximately 13,000 people were displaced from areas where the military operations were concentrated. SNHR further notes that this displacement was not limited to the camp residents, with hundreds of residents of villages and towns displaced before these were taken over by HTS.



Families sleep in the open in Afrin suburbs/ Aleppo to escape the areas where clashes were taking place - the night of October 13, 2022

3- At least 12 IDP camps were directly affected by the military operations, most notably the Kuwait al-Rahma camp in the Afrin area, the Water Camp in Burj Abdalu village east of Afrin city, and the Deir al Ballout and Muhammadiyah Camps in the Jendeires sub-district. A fire, which broke out on the evening of October 14 in the [Kortek Camp](#) near Mashalah village in the Kafr Janneh district in the suburbs of Afrin, completely destroyed six tents for displaced people, while about 25 other tents were partially damaged by the clashes between the two parties.

4- The health, food and education sectors were adversely affected in dozens of other camps located in the areas affected by the military operations, whose residents are dependent for survival on periodic humanitarian aid, part of which is provided on a daily basis such as bread and water, due to the road closure, the interruption of supply routes and the inability of relief teams to reach the camps, caused by the fighting.

5- The educational process stopped in the areas of clashes, while accessing medical services and medical centers became very difficult; some of the ambulance teams were targeted while trying to reach the wounded in the camps and villages.

6- Approximately 170 detainees who were being held in the Syrian National Army's Me 'rata civilian prison, located near Me 'rata village, in the suburbs of Afrin, were released by persons we have so far been unable to identify.

7- Markets saw a rise in the prices of food and a reduction in supplies due to the disruption of most supply routes due to the clashes.

Second: HTS is still An-Nusra Front because its leader is classified by Security Council resolutions as a terrorist

HTS went through a series of stages and developments until it reached its current form. Its founding nucleus belongs to the An-Nusra Front, which was announced in January 2012, and its general commander was Abo Mohammad al-Jolani. In April 2013¹, al-Jolani announced his separation from ISIS, and An-Nusra pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda². An-Nusra continued until July 28, 2016 when al-Jolani announced its disengagement from al-Qaeda and changed its name to "Fatuh al-Sham Front". On January 28, 2017³, the establishment of HTS was announced⁴, formed from Fatuh al-Sham Front, along with a number of fundamental Islamist organizations⁵, such as Jaysh al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar.

As these points make clear, HTS is An-Nusra Front. Changing the names is not useful in changing the essence because the leader of An-Nusra Front was Abo Mohammad al-Jolani, who is also the leader of HTS, whose extremist ideology has not changed, and which has not disowned such ideology in word or deed which is the most important point. We emphasized this pivotal point in our [expanded report](#) on HTS' violations, in which we documented many types of HTS violations against the Syrian people, especially in the areas controlled by the group. Most importantly, it is classified according to several UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, the most prominent of which are: [2170](#), [2178](#), [2199](#), [2249](#), [2253](#), [2368](#), as a terrorist organization. In these resolutions the name of An-Nusra is associated with ISIS, which still classified as a terrorist organization up to the present day.

Any participation in any way in supporting, financing, encouraging or assisting HTS is a sufficient reason to include individuals and entities on the Security Council's terrorism lists. We have repeatedly warned of the seriousness and sensitivity of this issue. Less than seven days after the establishment of the HTS group, the SNHR issued a [statement](#) calling on all the armed opposition factions which joined HTS to disengage from it, because anyone joining the An-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda or any other faction classified on the terrorism lists will be considered supportive of it, and will be targeted on the same level.

The presence of HTS in any area is considered a severe structural threat and a danger to the people of these areas, and a cause of tremendous hindrance to relief operations and civilian bodies in those areas. Since its establishment, it has become clear that HTS does not care about any of these issues as its sole aspiration is to exert absolute control, and to rule with iron and fire, without regard for the catastrophic violations and repercussions on the population of these areas in various economic, social and humanitarian fields.

¹ Syria TV, Stations in the Life of [Abu Muhammad al-Julani, Hussam Jazmati](#).

² Reuters, Jabhat al-Nusra Syrian Ta'ayat al-Zawhari al-Qaeda leader

³ al-Jazirah, al-Nusra Front separates [from al-Qaeda and changes its name](#).

⁴ BBC, 'Tahrir al-Sham', [the latest al-Qaeda in Syria](#).

⁵ We base our classification of extremist or terrorist organizations primarily on the [descriptions contained in the reports of the International Commission of Inquiry](#), as well as on Security Council resolutions: [Resolution 2170 of 2014](#), [Resolution 2249 of 2015](#), [Resolution 2258 of 2015](#).

Third: Recommendations

The SNHR condemns all violations by all parties and emphasizes the need to avoid any cooperation or support for the individuals, bodies, states, or factions involved in HTS, because this will expose those providing such cooperation or support to the risk of being placed on the terrorism lists. All peoples must unite to expel HTS from all Syrian territory, since it poses a fundamental threat to all the Syrian people, in addition to the s many risks it poses to the people in areas already under HTS control.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights calls on the international community and the UN Security Council to implement Security Council resolutions 2118 and 2245 regarding the political solution in Syria, in order to prevent the expansion of the threat of terrorism, in light of no apparent hope of any imminent political solution in Syria, further noting that the Security Council bears responsibility for implementing the resolutions issued by it and ending the armed conflict in Syria.