

## *Hurras al-Din*

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**Name:** Hurras al-Din

**Type of Organization:**

- Non-state actor
- religious
- terrorist
- national
- violent

**Ideologies and Affiliations:**

- Jihadist
- pan-Islamist
- Salafist
- Sunni
- takfiri

**Place of Origin:**

Syria

**Year of Origin:**

February 28, 2018

**Founder(s):**

Khaled al-Aruri, Samir Hijazi, Sami al-Oraidi

**Places of Operation:**

Syria

**Overview**

*Also Known As:*

- Al-Qaida in Syria<sup>1</sup>
- AQ-S<sup>2</sup>
- Guardians of Religion<sup>3</sup>
- Hurras al-Deen<sup>4</sup>
- Tandhim Hurras al-Deen<sup>5</sup>
- Tanzim Hurras al-Din<sup>6</sup>
- Sham al-Ribat<sup>7</sup>

*Executive Summary:*

Hurras al-Din (HaD) was formed on February 27, 2018, by a merger of seven hardline Syrian rebel factions.<sup>8</sup> Ten more minor rebel factions joined the group in the months following its formation, all with a history of ideological and leadership ties to [al-Qaeda](#) [1].<sup>9</sup> At least half of the group's 700-2,500 members are foreigners.<sup>10</sup> HaD is avowedly loyal to al-Qaeda and its leadership is dominated by non-Syrian al-Qaeda veterans.<sup>11</sup> HaD's leadership is split along two ideological currents: one following the teachings of al-Qaeda scholar [Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi](#) [2] and the other following the Libyan cleric Jamal Ibrahim Ashityawee al-Musratti.<sup>12</sup> Both currents, however, view al-Qaeda leader [Ayman al-Zawahiri](#) [3] as their "defining authority."<sup>13</sup>

Despite its small size, HaD claims to have carried out over 200 attacks in Syria's Idlib, Latakia, Hama, and Aleppo provinces, often in conjunction with other Syrian rebel factions.<sup>14</sup> The group holds no territory and largely uses small arms

## *Hurras al-Din*

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and light weapons such as mortars and technicals in its raids of Syrian regime positions.<sup>15</sup> While HaD's core leadership and fighters are mostly defectors from the former Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate the [Nusra Front](#) [4], now known as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the two groups do work together to carry out combat operations against the Syrian regime.<sup>16</sup>

On September 10, 2019, the United States listed HaD and its founding leader, Samir Hijazi, as Specially Designated Global Terrorists.<sup>17</sup> These listings came just 10 days after the U.S. executed its third airstrike in two months against the organization in Syria's Idlib province.<sup>18</sup> On June 14, 2020, the United States reportedly carried out a fourth targeted airstrike on the group, killing its overall leader Khaled al-Aruri (a.k.a. Abu al-Qasim al-Urduni) and another senior commander Bilal al Sanaani.<sup>19</sup> However, a spokesman for the U.S.-led international coalition stated that the coalition "has not conducted any airstrikes in northwestern Syria in recent weeks."<sup>20</sup> U.S. officials believe that, given enough freedom to plan and prepare, HaD will carry out attacks against American interests domestically and abroad.<sup>21</sup>

### *Doctrine:*

The United Nations assesses that al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri is the "defining authority" for HaD and that the group has a "more international outlook" compared to most other opposition groups in Syria, which have directed their efforts against each other and the Syrian regime.<sup>22</sup> An International Crisis Group profile of HaD states the group "embraces an uncompromising global jihadist worldview."<sup>23</sup> The hardline faction of HaD leaders follow the ideological outlook of al-Qaeda-linked scholar Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, one of the most prominent Salafist figures worldwide.<sup>24</sup> According to Syrian-based Islamist figures, HaD leaders have repeatedly expressed a desire to conduct external attacks against the United States.<sup>25</sup>

### *Organizational Structure:*

In mid-2019, analysts estimated that HaD consisted of 16 local factions that together comprise between 700 and 2,500 fighters, half of whom were foreigners.<sup>26</sup> HaD foreign fighters come from most Middle Eastern and North African countries, such as Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, and Algeria, as well as from Central Asia.<sup>27</sup> The group's factions operate in Aleppo, Latakia, Idlib, and north Hama. The group has also allied itself with other Syrian militants for specific operations. These partners have ranged from small pro-al-Qaeda groups like Jabhat Ansar al-Din and Jamaat Ansar al-Islam to major local factions like Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.<sup>28</sup>

Syrian activists have accused HaD of running four secret detention centers where it holds at least 113 prisoners, including local aid workers.<sup>29</sup>

### *Financing:*

Despite the harsh rhetoric between the leaderships of HTS and HaD, the former does provide some limited material support to the group, especially when the two groups participate in joint combat operations.<sup>30</sup> HaD also raises funds through online campaigns, stating that "money is the backbone of jihad, and the abilities of the mujahedin would be weakened without it."<sup>31</sup> Prospective donors are given details for bank accounts in which they can deposit funds.<sup>32</sup>

### *Recruitment:*

Most of HaD's members appears to be defected fighters from other Syrian rebel factions, including a large percentage of foreign fighters dissatisfied with the less-hardline ideology they believe HTS has adopted.<sup>33</sup>

HaD also conducts extensive outreach programs, pushing its ideology on locals and other militants through Friday

## *Hurras al-Din*

sermons, youth lectures, public *dawa* (outreach) forums, *dawa* tours, cultural courses, and hospital visits.<sup>34</sup>

### *Training:*

HaD operates at least four military-training camps in the greater Idlib area, three of which are named after prominent al-Qaeda loyalists who died in Syria: Abu Khalad al-Muhandis, Shaykh Abu Firas al-Suri, and Shaykh Abu Islam.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Designation of Hurras al-Din as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist," U.S. Department of State, September 19, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/09/19/2019-20251/designation-of-hurras-al-din-as-a-specially-designated-global-terrorist> [5].

<sup>2</sup> "Designation of Hurras al-Din as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist," U.S. Department of State, September 19, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/09/19/2019-20251/designation-of-hurras-al-din-as-a-specially-designated-global-terrorist> [5].

<sup>3</sup> "Designation of Hurras al-Din as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist," U.S. Department of State, September 19, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/09/19/2019-20251/designation-of-hurras-al-din-as-a-specially-designated-global-terrorist> [5].

<sup>4</sup> "Designation of Hurras al-Din as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist," U.S. Department of State, September 19, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/09/19/2019-20251/designation-of-hurras-al-din-as-a-specially-designated-global-terrorist> [5].

<sup>5</sup> "Designation of Hurras al-Din as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist," U.S. Department of State, September 19, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/09/19/2019-20251/designation-of-hurras-al-din-as-a-specially-designated-global-terrorist> [5].

<sup>6</sup> "Designation of Hurras al-Din as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist," U.S. Department of State, September 19, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/09/19/2019-20251/designation-of-hurras-al-din-as-a-specially-designated-global-terrorist> [5].

<sup>7</sup> "Designation of Hurras al-Din as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist," U.S. Department of State, September 19, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/09/19/2019-20251/designation-of-hurras-al-din-as-a-specially-designated-global-terrorist> [5].

<sup>8</sup> Tore Refslund Hamming and Pieter Van Ostaeyen, "The True Story of al-Qaeda's Demise and Resurgence in Syria," Lawfare, April 8, 2018, <https://lawfareblog.com/true-story-al-qaedas-demise-and-resurgence-syria> [6]; Josko Baric, "Syrian War Daily - 28th of February 2018," Syrian War Daily, <https://syrianwardaily.com/2018/02/28/syrian-war-daily-28th-of-february-2018/> [7].

<sup>9</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, "Huras al-Din: The Overlooked al-Qaeda Group in Syria," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 24, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/huras-al-din-the-overlooked-al-qaeda-group-in-syria> [8]; Charles Lister, "The Syria Effect: Al-Qaeda Fractures," Hudson Institute, December 11, 2019, <https://www.hudson.org/research/15533-the-syria-effect-al-qaeda-fractures> [9].

<sup>10</sup> "Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities," UN Security Council, June 27, 2019, 7-9, <https://undocs.org/S/2019/570> [10]; *The Best of Bad Options for Syria's Idlib*, International Crisis Group, March 14, 2019, 18, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/197-the-best-of-bad-options%20.pdf> [11]; Charles Lister, "The Syria Effect: Al-Qaeda Fractures," Hudson Institute, December 11, 2019, <https://www.hudson.org/research/15533-the-syria-effect-al-qaeda-fractures> [9].

<sup>11</sup> "Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities," UN Security Council, June 27, 2019, 7-8, <https://undocs.org/S/2019/570> [10]; Charles Lister, "The Syria Effect: Al-Qaeda Fractures," Hudson Institute, December 11, 2019, <https://www.hudson.org/research/15533-the-syria-effect-al-qaeda-fractures> [9].

<sup>12</sup> "Hardliner Wing of 'Hurras al-Din' Loses Its Most Influential Figures," Enab Baladi, July 4, 2018, <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2019/07/hardliner-wing-of-guardians-of-religion-loses-its-most-influential-figures/#ixzz65J3MS9o5> [12]; "Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities," U.N. Security Council, June 27, 2019, 7, <https://undocs.org/S/2019/570> [10].

<sup>13</sup> "Hardliner Wing of 'Hurras al-Din' Loses Its Most Influential Figures," Enab Baladi, July 4, 2018, <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2019/07/hardliner-wing-of-guardians-of-religion-loses-its-most-influential-figures/#ixzz65J3MS9o5> [12]; "Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities," U.N. Security Council, June 27, 2019, 7, <https://undocs.org/S/2019/570> [10].

<sup>14</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, "Huras al-Din: The Overlooked al-Qaeda Group in Syria," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 24, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/huras-al-din-the-overlooked-al-qaeda-group-in-syria> [8].

<sup>15</sup> *The Best of Bad Options for Syria's Idlib*, International Crisis Group, 18, March 14, 2019, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/197-the-best-of-bad-options%20.pdf> [11].

<sup>16</sup> *The Best of Bad Options for Syria's Idlib*, International Crisis Group, 17, March 14, 2019, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/197-the-best-of-bad-options%20.pdf> [11].

<sup>17</sup> "Designation of Faruq al-Suri as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist," U.S. Department of State, September 19, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/09/19/2019-20277/designation-of-faruq-al-suri-as-a-specially-designated-global-terrorist> [13]; "Designation of Hurras al-Din as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist," U.S. Department of State, September 19, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/09/19/2019-20251/designation-of-hurras-al-din-as-a-specially-designated-global-terrorist> [5].

<sup>18</sup> "Statement from U.S. Central Command on Strike against al-Qaida in Syria," U.S. Central Command, June 30, 2019, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/STATEMENTS/Statements-View/Article/1891697/statement-from-us-central-command-on-strike-against-al-qaeda-in-syria/> [14]; "About 8 Persons Mostly Commanders of Non-Syrian Nationalities Were Killed in Aerial Bombardment Believed to Be Caused by the International Coalition Warplanes That Targeted a Headquarters of Hurras Al-Din Organization in the 'Putin - Erdogan' Area," Syrian Observatory

## *Hurras al-Din*

for Human Rights, July 1, 2019, <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=133022> [15]; Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda Veteran Reportedly Killed in Idlib," Long War Journal, August 22, 2019, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/08/al-qaeda-veteran-reportedly-killed-in-idlib.php> [16]; "Syria's War: US 'Targets al-Qaeda Leaders' in Rebel-Held Idlib," Al Jazeera, September 1, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/08/syria-war-targets-al-qaeda-leaders-rebel-held-idlib-190831185353770.html> [17]; Alexander Sehmer, *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 16, no. 16 (August 10, 2018): 1-2, <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/TM-Aug.-10-2018-Issue-.pdf?x28725> [18].

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "U.S. reportedly targets 2 senior al Qaeda figures in airstrike in Syria," Long War Journal, June 14, 2020, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/06/u-s-reportedly-targets-2-senior-al-qaeda-figures-in-airstrike-in-syria.php> [19].

<sup>20</sup> "Drone Strike in Syria Kills Two Jihadist Leaders: Monitor," Defense Post, June 15, 2020, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/06/15/syria-jihadist-leaders-killed/> [20].

<sup>21</sup> Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Sees Rising Threat in the West from Qaeda Branch in Syria," *New York Times*, September 29, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/29/world/middleeast/syria-qaeda-terrorism.html> [21].

<sup>22</sup> "Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities," UN Security Council, June 27, 2019, 7, <https://undocs.org/S/2019/570> [10].

<sup>23</sup> *The Best of Bad Options for Syria's Idlib*, International Crisis Group, March 14, 2019, 18, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/197-the-best-of-bad-options%20.pdf> [11].

<sup>24</sup> "Hardliner Wing of 'Hurras al-Din' Loses Its Most Influential Figures," Enab Baladi, July 4, 2018, <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2019/07/hardliner-wing-of-guardians-of-religion-loses-its-most-influential-figures/#ixzz65J3MS9o5> [12].

<sup>25</sup> Charles Lister, "The Syria Effect: Al-Qaeda Fractures," Hudson Institute, December 11, 2019, <https://www.hudson.org/research/15533-the-syria-effect-al-qaeda-fractures> [9].

<sup>26</sup> "Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities," UN Security Council, June 27, 2019, 7-8, <https://undocs.org/S/2019/570> [10]; *The Best of Bad Options for Syria's Idlib*, International Crisis Group, March 14, 2019, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/197-the-best-of-bad-options%20.pdf> [11]; Charles Lister, "The Syria Effect: Al-Qaeda Fractures," Hudson Institute, December 11, 2019, <https://www.hudson.org/research/15533-the-syria-effect-al-qaeda-fractures> [9].

<sup>27</sup> "About 8 Persons Mostly Commanders of Non-Syrian Nationalities Were Killed in Aerial Bombardment Believed to Be Caused by the International Coalition Warplanes That Targeted a Headquarters of Hurras al-Din Organization in the 'Putin-Erdogan' area," Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, July 1, 2019, <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=133022> [15]; "Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities," UN Security Council, June 27, 2019, 7-8, <https://undocs.org/S/2019/570> [10].

<sup>28</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, "Hurras al-Din: The Overlooked al-Qaeda Group in Syria," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 24, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hurras-al-din-the-overlooked-al-qaeda-group-in-syria> [8].

<sup>29</sup> "Hurras al Din Group Is Responsible for Kidnapping and Forcibly Disappearing Six Activists Working for Relief Organizations in Idlib," Syrian Network for Human Rights, March 19, 2020, <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2020/03/19/54770/> [22].

<sup>30</sup> *The Best of Bad Options for Syria's Idlib*, International Crisis Group, March 14, 2019, 18, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/197-the-best-of-bad-options%20.pdf> [11].

<sup>31</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, "Hurras al-Din: The Overlooked al-Qaeda Group in Syria," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 24, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hurras-al-din-the-overlooked-al-qaeda-group-in-syria> [8].

<sup>32</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, "Hurras al-Din: The Overlooked al-Qaeda Group in Syria," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 24, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hurras-al-din-the-overlooked-al-qaeda-group-in-syria> [8].

<sup>33</sup> "Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities," UN Security Council, June 27, 2019, 7-8, <https://undocs.org/S/2019/570> [10]; *The Best of Bad Options for Syria's Idlib*, International Crisis Group, March 14, 2019, 17, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/197-the-best-of-bad-options%20.pdf> [11]; Aymenn al-Tamimi, "Hurras al-Din: Interview," Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's blog, July 11, 2019, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2019/07/hurras-al-din-interview> [23].

<sup>34</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, "Hurras al-Din: The Overlooked al-Qaeda Group in Syria," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 24, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hurras-al-din-the-overlooked-al-qaeda-group-in-syria> [8].

<sup>35</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, Twitter Post, November 20, 2018, 9:02 a.m., <https://twitter.com/azelin/status/1064881577468006400> [24]; Aaron Y. Zelin, Twitter post, December 2, 2018, 9:27 a.m., <https://twitter.com/azelin/status/1069236694539530240> [25]; Aaron Y. Zelin, Twitter post, November 6, 2019, 9:33 a.m., <https://twitter.com/azelin/status/1192087673684549632> [26].

*Hurras al-Din*

**Key Leaders**



**Khaled al-Aruri (a.k.a. Abu al-Qasim al-Urduni)**  
Overall leader, deceased



**Samir Hijazi (a.k.a. Abu Hamam al-Shami or Faruq al-Suri)**  
Shura Council member, former leader



**Sami al-Oraidi**  
Shura Council member



**Bilal al Sanaani**  
Senior commander, deceased



**Bilal Khuraysat (a.k.a. Abu Hudhayfah al-Urduni, a.k.a. Abu Khadija al-Urduni)**  
Shura Council member, deceased



**Faraj Ahmad Nanaa**  
Shura Council member



**Abu Abd al-Karim al-Masri**  
Shura Council member



**Abu Abdullrahman al-Maki**  
Senior religious figure



**Abu al-Bara' al-Tunisi**  
Senior religious figure



**Iyad Nazmi Salih Khalil (a.k.a. Abu Julaybib al-Urduni)**  
Unidentified role, deceased



**Abu Omar al-Tunsi**  
Sharia judge, deceased



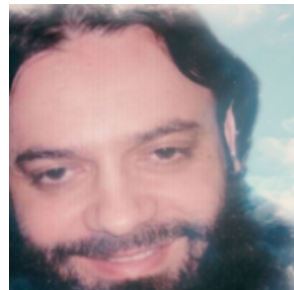
**Abu Thar al-Masri**  
Senior figure, deceased



**Abu Yahia al-Jaza'aeri**  
Senior figure, deceased



**Abu Dujanah al-Tunissi**  
Senior figure, deceased



**Abu Khalad al-Muhandis (a.k.a. Sari Shihab)**  
Senior figure, deceased



## *Hurras al-Din*

### History:

- **June 14, 2020:** A U.S. airstrike in northern Syria targets and kills Khaled al-Aruri, the group's overall leader, and senior commander Bilal al Sanaani.  
Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "U.S. reportedly targets 2 senior al Qaeda figures in airstrike in Syria," Long War Journal, June 14, 2020, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/06/u-s-reportedly-targets-2-senior-al-qaeda-figures-in-airstrike-in-syria.php> [19].
- **June 12, 2020:** HaD forms a new operations room alongside four other small, hardline militant groups in Idlib. The new operations room is named "And Be Steadfast" and includes the previous HaD operations room "Incite the Believers." Source: Elizabeth Tsurkiv, Twitter Post, June 12, 2020, 2:58pm, <https://twitter.com/Elizrael/status/1271517276307697668> [27].
- **December 22, 2019:** A U.S. airstrike in northern Syria targets and kills Bilal Khuraysat.  
Source: "Jihad and Terrorism Threat Monitor (JTTM) Weekend Summary: December 21-28, 2019," MEMRI, December 28, 2019, <https://www.memri.org/reports/jihad-and-terrorism-threat-monitor-jttm-weekend-summary-december-21-28-2019> [28].
- **October 27, 2019:** Members of HaD are killed during the U.S. raid that killed ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in Idlib.  
Source: Martin Chulov, "Nowhere Left to Run: How the US Finally Caught Up with Isis Leader Baghdadi," *Guardian* (London), October 27, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/27/nowhere-left-to-run-how-the-us-finally-caught-up-with-isis-leader-baghdadi> [29].
- **September 10, 2019:** The U.S. Department of State designates HaD and former HaD leader Faruq al-Suri as Specially Designated Global Terrorists and offers a \$5 million reward for information leading to his arrest.  
Sources: "Designation of Hurras al-Din as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist," U.S. Department of State, September 19, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/09/19/2019-20251/designation-of-hurras-al-din-as-a-specially-designated-global-terrorist> [5]; "Designation of Faruq al-Suri as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist," U.S. Department of State, September 19, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/09/19/2019-20277/designation-of-faruq-al-suri-as-a-specially-designated-global-terrorist> [13]; "Wanted: Faruq al-Suri," U.S. Department of Justice, September 10, 2019, [https://rewardsforjustice.net/english/faruq\\_al\\_suri.html](https://rewardsforjustice.net/english/faruq_al_suri.html) [30].
- **August 31, 2019:** U.S. missiles strike a building in Idlib that HaD and Ansar al-Tawhid were allegedly using as a training camp.  
As many as 40 militants are killed. Source: "Syria's War: US 'Targets al-Qaeda Leaders' in Rebel-Held Idlib," Al Jazeera, September 1, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/08/syria-war-targets-al-qaeda-leaders-rebel-held-idlib-190831185353770.html> [17].
- **August 22, 2019:** Abu Khalad al-Muhandis, a senior HaD figure, is assassinated in Idlib city by unknown assailants using a car bomb.  
Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda Veteran Reportedly Killed in Idlib," Long War Journal, August 22, 2019, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/08/al-qaeda-veteran-reportedly-killed-in-idlib.php> [16].
- **June 30, 2019:** The U.S. strikes a building in southwest Aleppo in which HaD commanders were meeting attempting to resolve internal disputes.  
Six commanders are killed, including one of the group's judges, Abou Omar al-Tunsi, and senior leaders Abu Thar al-Masri, Abu Yahia al-Jaza'aeri, and Abu Dujanah al-Tunissi. Fourteen HaD members are wounded. The killed commanders come from Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, and Syria. Sources: "Statement from U.S. Central Command on Strike against al-Qaida in Syria," U.S. Central Command, June 30, 2019, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/STATEMENTS/Statements-View/Article/1891697/statement-from-us-central-command-on-strike-against-al-qaeda-in-syria/> [14]; "About 8 Persons Mostly Commanders of Non-Syrian Nationalities Were Killed in Aerial Bombardment Believed to Be Caused by the International Coalition Warplanes That Targeted a Headquarters of Hurras Al-Din Organization in the 'Putin-Erdogan' Area," Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, July 1, 2019, <http://www.syriaahr.com/en/?p=133022> [15]; "Hurras al-Din Hit by International Coalition Strike," Syrian Observer, July 2, 2019, <https://syrianobserver.com/EN/news/51448/hurras-al-din-hit-by-international-coalition-strike.html> [31]; "Hardliner Wing of 'Hurras al-Din' Loses Its Most Influential Figures," Enab Baladi, July 4, 2018, <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2019/07/hardliner-wing-of-guardians-of-religion-loses-its-most-influential-figures/#ixzz65J3MS9o5> [12].
- **March 14, 2019:** HaD releases a one-page statement praising the Taliban's recent suicide attacks against U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan.  
Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda-Linked Group in Syria Praises Taliban, Shabaab Operations," Long War Journal, March 14, 2019, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/03/al-qaeda-linked-group-in-syria-praises-taliban-shabaab-operations.php> [32].
- **December 28, 2018:** Senior HaD figure and veteran al-Qaeda member Iyad Nazmi Salih Khalil is reportedly killed in Dara'a.  
The circumstances of his death and his exact role within HaD are unclear. Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "Jihadis Claim US-Designated Terrorist Killed in Syria," Long War Journal, December 29, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/12/jihadis-claim-us-designated-terrorist-killed-in-syria.php> [33].
- **October 14, 2018:** Under a negotiated deal between Turkey and Russia, Turkey agrees to create a demilitarized zone in Idlib from which HaD and other armed groups will withdraw.  
In exchange, Russia agrees not to launch an offensive with Syrian forces in Idlib against HTS forces. HaD rejects the proposal. Sources: Suhail AlGhazi, Twitter post, October 14, 2018, 1:30 p.m., <https://twitter.com/putintintin1/status/1051525565889597440> [34]; Mariya Petkova, "After the Sochi Agreement, HTS Is Facing Internal Divisions," Al Jazeera, September 27, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/turkey-idlib-180924191442969.html> [35].
- **October 2018:** HaD allies with HTS and pro-al-Qaeda groups Ansar al-Din and Jamaat Ansar al-Islam to form the Incite the Believers (*Wa-Hardh al-Muminin*) Operations Room.  
Sources: Aaron Y. Zelin, "Hurras al-Din: The Overlooked al-Qaeda Group in Syria," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 24, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hurras-al-din-the-overlooked-al-qaeda-group-in-syria> [8]; "Military Groups Calling Themselves 'The Finest Factions of the Levant' Form Joint Operations Room," Syria Call, October 15, 2018, <http://nedaa-sy.com/en/news/9078> [36].
- **April 28, 2018:** ISIS accuses HaD of apostasy (*takfir*) in an issue of *Naba*, its official magazine.

*Hurras al-Din*

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Source: Aaron Y. Zelin, Twitter post, April 28, 2018, 9:24 a.m., <https://twitter.com/azelin/status/990220086656077824> [37].

- **April 2018:** HaD allies with the ex-ISIS faction Ansar al-Tawhid to form the Hilf Nusrat al-Islam operations room.  
Source: Aaron Y. Zelin, "Hurras al-Din: The Overlooked al-Qaeda Group in Syria," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 24, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hurras-al-din-the-overlooked-al-qaeda-group-in-syria> [8].
- **February 28, 2018:** Jaysh al-Malahim, Jaysh al-Badiya, Jaysh al-Sahel, Saraya al-Sahel, Saraya Kabul, Jund al-Sharqiya, and remnants of Jund al-Aqsa unite to form Hurras al-Din as an explicitly pro-al-Qaeda militant faction in Syria under the command of Samir Hijazi.  
Sources: Tore Refslund Hamming and Pieter Van Ostaeyen, "The True Story of al-Qaeda's Demise and Resurgence in Syria," Lawfare, April 8, 2018, <https://lawfareblog.com/true-story-al-qaedas-demise-and-resurgence-syria> [6]; Josko Baric, "Syrian War Daily - 28th of February 2018," Syrian War Daily, <https://syrianwardaily.com/2018/02/28/syrian-war-daily-28th-of-february-2018/> [7].

## *Hurras al-Din*

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### **Violent history:**

- **April 26, 2018:** HaD seizes several Syrian regime positions in al-Hamamiyat, Hama province, alongside Ansar al-Tawhid and Jaish al-Izza.<sup>36</sup>
- **June 5, 2018:** HaD attacks Syrian regime forces in Tell Sultan, Idlib province, alongside HTS.<sup>37</sup>
- **July 9, 2018:** HaD militants kill seven Syrian regime soldiers in a raid on Tel Bizam, Hama province.<sup>38</sup>
- **August 3, 2018:** HaD militants raid Syrian regime positions in Jurin, Hama province, using mortars and heavy machine guns.<sup>39</sup>
- **November 16, 2018:** HaD militants raid Syrian regime positions in Jabal Akrad, Latakia province, killing 18 soldiers.<sup>40</sup>
- **November 18, 2018:** HaD militants raid Syrian regime positions in Tal Alloush, Aleppo.<sup>41</sup>
- **April 2019:** HaD launches a series of attacks against Syrian regime forces in Hama, Latakia, and Aleppo, claiming to kill 30 and wound 17 in response to peace talks.<sup>42</sup>
- **May 14, 2019:** HaD militants participate in a raid on Syrian regime positions in Latakia, killing several soldiers.<sup>43</sup>
- **March 19, 2020:** Syrian activists accuse HaD of kidnapping and imprisoning at least six local aid workers in the first three months of 2020.<sup>44</sup>
- **March 20, 2020:** The Syrian opposition website Zaman al-Wasl accuses HaD of targeting a Turkish military patrol in Idlib with an IED, killing two Turkish soldiers. HaD does not claim responsibility.<sup>45</sup>
- **May 10, 2020:** HaD militants attack a Syrian regime garrison in Tanjarah, northwest Hama, killing at least 18 soldiers and temporarily seizing control of the town.<sup>46</sup>
- **June 10, 2020:** HaD militants take part in a second attack on Tanjarah, briefly seizing it and a neighboring town before being forced to retreat by Russian jets.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> "After Military Operation for It, Violent Attack by Horas Al-Din and Ansar Al-Tawheed and Jaysh Al-Izza in Northern Hama and Heavy Aerial and Ground Shelling Target the Area," Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, April 26, 2018, <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=90411> [38].

<sup>37</sup> "Two Days after Arresting Tens of Citizens Southeast of Idlib, the Turkistanis, Hayyat al-Sham, and Hurras al-Dien [sic] Attack Sites of the Regime Forces in the Area," Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, June 5, 2018, <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=94362> [39].

<sup>38</sup> Alexander Sehmer, *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 16, no. 16 (August 10, 2018): 1-2, <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/TM-Aug.-10-2018-Issue-pdf?x28725> [18].

<sup>39</sup> Alexander Sehmer, *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 16, no. 16 (August 10, 2018): 1-2, <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/TM-Aug.-10-2018-Issue-pdf?x28725> [18].

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda-Linked Operations Room Continues to Attack Assad Regime," Long War Journal, November 19, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/11/al-qaeda-linked-operations-room-continues-to-attack-assad-regime.php> [40].

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda-Linked Operations Room Continues to Attack Assad Regime," Long War Journal, November 19, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/11/al-qaeda-linked-operations-room-continues-to-attack-assad-regime.php> [40].

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda-Linked Operations Room Counterattacks as Bombs Fall in Northern Syria," Long War Journal, May 6, 2019, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/05/al-qaeda-linked-operations-room-counterattacks-as-bombs-fall-northern-syria.php> [41].

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "Assad's Forces Battle Jihadists for Key Terrain in Latakia," Long War Journal, May 20, 2019, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/05/assads-forces-battle-jihadists-for-key-terrain-in-latakia.php> [42].

<sup>44</sup> "Hurras al Din Group Is Responsible for Kidnapping and Forcibly Disappearing Six Activists Working for Relief Organizations in Idlib," Syrian Network for Human Rights, March 19, 2020, <http://sn4hr.org/blog/2020/03/19/54770/> [22].

<sup>45</sup> "Hurras al-Din Attacks Turkish Forces in Northwest Syria," al-Sharq al-Awsat, March 20, 2020, <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2189971/hurras-al-din-attacks-turkish-forces-northwest-syria> [43].

<sup>46</sup> "Northwest Syria clashes reportedly kill dozens in biggest toll since March truce," Middle East Eye, May 10, 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/northwest-syria-clashes-kill-22-highest-toll-truce-monitor> [44]; Gregory Waters, Twitter Post, May 21, 2020, 9:39am, <https://twitter.com/GregoryPWaters/status/1263464311034392577> [45].



*Hurras al-Din*

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<sup>47</sup> Qalaat al-Mudiq, Twitter Post, June 8, 2020, 12:57pm, <https://twitter.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1270037286600794117> [46]; Qalaat al-Mudiq, Twitter Post, June 8, 2020, 2:34pm, <https://twitter.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1270061613392027653> [47].

*Hurras al-Din*

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**Designations:**

**Designations by U.S. Government:**



September 10, 2019: The Department of State designates Hurras al-Din as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>“Designation of Hurras al-Din as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist,” U.S. Department of State, September 19, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/09/19/2019-20251/designation-of-hurras-al-din-as-a-specially-designated-global-terrorist> [5].

*Hurras al-Din*

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**Associations:**

**Ties to Extremist Entities:**

*Hurras al-Din*



Al-Qaeda [1]

HaD is explicitly loyal to al-Qaeda and the U.S. government considers it part of al-Qaeda in Syria.<sup>49</sup> HaD leaders and rank and file repeatedly make statements reiterating their support for both the Taliban and al-Qaeda.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, HaD views al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri as its “defining authority.”<sup>51</sup>

HaD’s leadership has close ties to al-Qaeda. HaD’s current leader, Khaled al-Aruri, is a long-time al-Qaeda member, released from an Iranian jail in a prisoner swap with AQAP [48].<sup>52</sup> HaD shura council members Iyad Nazmi Salih Khalil (now deceased), Sami al-Oraidi, Bilal Khuraysat (now deceased), and Faraj Ahmad Nana’a are also all veteran members of al-Qaeda.<sup>53</sup>



Hayat Tahrir al-Sham [4]

HaD’s core leadership and fighters are comprised of defectors from the former Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate the Nusra Front, now known as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).<sup>54</sup>

The two groups have a contentious relationship, often hurling accusations at one another while also cooperating on the battlefield. According to interviews carried out by Syria expert Aymenn al-Tamimi, HaD’s disputes with HTS are largely at the leadership level and center on HTS’s disavowal of al-Qaeda and HaD’s loyalty to al-Qaeda.<sup>55</sup>

On November 27, 2017, Nusra Front leader Abu Mohammad al-Golani ordered the arrests of Sami al-Oraidi, the former head of the group’s Sharia Council; Abu Julaibib al-Urduni, former Nusra Dara’a commander; Iyad Nazmi Salih Khalil, former Jabhat Fateh al-Sham commander; Abu Khadija al-Urduni; and Abu Mussaab al-Libi. All four were prominent Nusra leaders with strong ties to al-Qaeda.<sup>56</sup> Following these arrests, several members of HTS, the current incarnation of the Nusra Front, resigned, and several large factions threatened to break away, prompting Golani to renew negotiations with al-Qaeda that ultimately led nowhere.<sup>57</sup> On December 4, 2017, HTS released Urduni in a bid to ease tensions within the group. Urduni immediately renewed his pledge to al-Qaeda upon release.<sup>58</sup>

Subsequently, several subgroups of devoted al-Qaeda supporters defected from HTS. On December 5, 2017, HTS faction Jaish al-Badia defected, creating a new Telegram channel devoted to al-Qaeda.<sup>59</sup> Jaish al-Malahem followed three weeks later, also indicating support for al-Qaeda in its new Telegram channel, while on February 7, 2018, a new al-Qaeda-supporting group, Jund al Shariah, announced its formation.<sup>60</sup> On February 28, 2018, these three groups, along with three other small militant factions, announced a merger under the name Hurras al-Din, or Guardians of the Religion, and declared themselves an unofficial affiliate of al-Qaeda.<sup>61</sup> Oraidi and Urduni both joined HaD’s Shura council and have reportedly begun talks with al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri to make HaD the official al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria. HaD remains at odds with HTS.<sup>62</sup>

Despite this severe ideological divide, the two groups formed a joint operations room in October 2018.<sup>63</sup> HTS and HaD militants use this room to conduct offensive and defensive military actions against Syrian regime forces in Latakia, Idlib, Hama, and Aleppo.<sup>64</sup>



ISIS [49]

There has been much debate about the nature of the HaD-ISIS relationship following the U.S. killing of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.<sup>65</sup> The *New York Times*’ Rukmini Callimachi claimed to have received receipts proving that ISIS paid HaD for the explicit purpose of harboring Baghdadi in Idlib.<sup>66</sup> If so, the al-Qaeda affiliated group cooperated with ISIS, the terrorist organization famously denounced by al-Qaeda in February 2014.<sup>67</sup> Aymenn al-Tamimi, the premier expert on ISIS documents, was allowed to assess half of the documents used by the *Times* and raised serious issues regarding the legitimacy of the receipts, stating that there were glaring problems with basic naming and format conventions that would not appear in any real ISIS document.<sup>68</sup> Rather, it appears that a former HaD senior figure, Abu Mohammed al-Halabi, had harbored Baghdadi himself after being expelled from HaD for his pro-ISIS sympathies.

HaD regularly conducts anti-ISIS operations within Idlib alongside HTS.<sup>69</sup>

## *Hurras al-Din*

- <sup>49</sup> Aymenn al-Tamimi, "Hurras al-Din: Interview," Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's blog, July 11, 2019, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2019/07/hurras-al-din-interview> [23]; *The Best of Bad Options for Syria's Idlib*, International Crisis Group, March 14, 2019, 17, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/197-the-best-of-bad-options%20.pdf> [11]; Nathan A. Sales, "Keeping the Pressure on al-Qaida," U.S. Department of State, September 12, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/keeping-the-pressure-on-al-qaida> [50].
- <sup>50</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda-Linked Group in Syria Praises Taliban, Shabaab Operations," Long War Journal, March 14, 2019, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/03/al-qaeda-linked-group-in-syria-praises-taliban-shabaab-operations.php> [32]; Aymenn al-Tamimi, "Hurras al-Din: Interview," Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's blog, July 11, 2019, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2019/07/hurras-al-din-interview> [23].
- <sup>51</sup> "Hardliner Wing of 'Hurras al-Din' Loses Its Most Influential Figures," Enab Baladi, July 4, 2018, <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2019/07/hardliner-wing-of-guardians-of-religion-loses-its-most-influential-figures/#ixzz65J3MS9o5> [12]; "Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities," UN Security Council, June 27, 2019, 7-8, <https://undocs.org/S/2019/570> [10].
- <sup>52</sup> "Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities," UN Security Council, June 27, 2019, 7-8, <https://undocs.org/S/2019/570> [10].
- <sup>53</sup> "Twenty-Fourth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities," UN Security Council, June 27, 2019, 7-8, <https://undocs.org/S/2019/570> [10].
- <sup>54</sup> *The Best of Bad Options for Syria's Idlib*, International Crisis Group, March 14, 2019, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/197-the-best-of-bad-options%20.pdf> [11].
- <sup>55</sup> Aymenn al-Tamimi, "Hurras al-Din: Interview," Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's blog, July 11, 2019, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2019/07/hurras-al-din-interview> [23].
- <sup>56</sup> Mona Alami, "HTS Continues to Evolve," Syria Source, December 1, 2017, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/hts-continues-to-evolve> [51].
- <sup>57</sup> "Weekly Conflict Summary, November 30-December 6, 2017," Carter Center, December 6, 2017, [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.11.30-12.05.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.11.30-12.05.pdf) [52].
- <sup>58</sup> "Weekly Conflict Summary, November 30-December 6, 2017," Carter Center, December 6, 2017, [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.11.30-12.05.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/weekly-conflict-summary-2017.11.30-12.05.pdf) [52].
- <sup>59</sup> Tore Refslund Hamming and Pieter Van Ostaeyen, "The True Story of al-Qaeda's Demise and Resurgence in Syria," Lawfare, April 8, 2018, <https://lawfareblog.com/true-story-al-qaedas-demise-and-resurgence-syria> [6].
- <sup>60</sup> Tore Refslund Hamming and Pieter Van Ostaeyen, "The True Story of al-Qaeda's Demise and Resurgence in Syria," Lawfare, April 8, 2018, <https://lawfareblog.com/true-story-al-qaedas-demise-and-resurgence-syria> [6].
- <sup>61</sup> Tore Refslund Hamming and Pieter Van Ostaeyen, "The True Story of al-Qaeda's Demise and Resurgence in Syria," Lawfare, April 8, 2018, <https://lawfareblog.com/true-story-al-qaedas-demise-and-resurgence-syria> [6].
- <sup>62</sup> Tore Refslund Hamming and Pieter Van Ostaeyen, "The True Story of al-Qaeda's Demise and Resurgence in Syria," Lawfare, April 8, 2018, <https://lawfareblog.com/true-story-al-qaedas-demise-and-resurgence-syria> [6].
- <sup>63</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, "Huras al-Din: The Overlooked al-Qaeda Group in Syria," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 24, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/huras-al-din-the-overlooked-al-qaeda-group-in-syria> [8]; "Military Groups Calling Themselves 'the Finest Factions of the Levant' Form Joint Operations Room," Syria Call, October 15, 2018, <http://nedaa-sy.com/en/news/9078> [36].
- <sup>64</sup> Aymenn al-Tamimi, "Hurras al-Din: Interview," Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's blog, July 11, 2019, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2019/07/hurras-al-din-interview> [23]; Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda-Linked Operations Room Continues to Attack Assad Regime," Long War Journal, November 19, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/11/al-qaeda-linked-operations-room-continues-to-attack-assad-regime.php> [40].
- <sup>65</sup> Martin Chulov, "Nowhere Left to Run: How the US Finally Caught Up with Isis Leader Baghdadi," *Guardian* (London), October 27, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/27/nowhere-left-to-run-how-the-us-finally-caught-up-with-isis-leader-baghdadi> [29].
- <sup>66</sup> Rukmini Callimachi "Experts Divided on Authenticity of Islamic State Receipts," *New York Times*, November 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/14/world/middleeast/islamic-state-receipts-debate.html> [53].
- <sup>67</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda's General Command Disowns the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham," Long War Journal, February 3, 2014, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/02/al-qaedas-general\\_co.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/02/al-qaedas-general_co.php) [54].
- <sup>68</sup> Aymenn al-Tamimi, "The New York Times and Alleged Payments to Hurras al-Din: Clarification," Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's blog, October 31, 2019, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2019/10/the-new-york-times-and-alleged-payments-to-hurras> [55].
- <sup>69</sup> Martin Chulov, "Nowhere Left to Run: How the US Finally Caught Up with Isis Leader Baghdadi," *Guardian* (London), October 27, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/27/nowhere-left-to-run-how-the-us-finally-caught-up-with-isis-leader-baghdadi> [29].



**Media Coverage:**

*Hurras al-Din*

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**Rhetoric:**



[56]

[Hurras al-Din member, July 2019](#) [56]

“[Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham] have left the amirship of the learned hafiz sheikh al-Zawahiri (may God protect him). They broke their allegiance to the organization. And we did not come to Syria to be independent or break a pact and covenant.”<sup>70</sup>



[57]

[Official Hurras al-Din release, March 2019](#) [57]

“In the past few days...the soldiers of God in Afghanistan [Taliban]...killed more than 350 crusaders [U.S. coalition forces] and apostates [Afghan security forces] in a major breakthrough...with their blood [the Taliban] took revenge for the violation and desecration of sanctities.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Aymenn al-Tamimi, “Hurras al-Din: Interview,” Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi’s blog, July 11, 2019, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2019/07/hurras-al-din-interview> [23].

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, “Al Qaeda-Linked Group in Syria Praises Taliban, Shabaab Operations,” Long War Journal, March 14, 2019, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/03/al-qaeda-linked-group-in-syria-praises-taliban-shabaab-operations.php> [32].