

HTS's Offline Propaganda: Infrastructure, Engagement and Monopoly

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Propaganda has long been central to violent jihadi groups as a means to disseminate their ideology, terrify their enemies, attract recruits and collect donations.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) has been more prolific than other groups in its deployment or use of offline propaganda and public diplomacy.

Instead of prioritising online communication, HTS prefers to share its ideological principles and sociopolitical values through long-term education and outreach activities.

Such activities have tended to rely heavily on already-extant structures such mudafat, du'at al-jihad, sawaed al-khira and the Salvation Government, which continue to operate semi-autonomously.

By outsourcing such functions, the group has been able to save resources, thereby becoming a more decentralised— and elusive—target.

Similarly, the group has been actively distancing itself from its somewhat in-house propaganda institutions, such as the Ebaa network and Dawa and Guidance Office.

This approach aims to enable its proxies to propagandise on its behalf while masquerading as independent actors.

While it remains far out of reach of a true information monopoly, the targeted damage HTS has inflicted upon the public discourse in its territories is likely to have lasting consequences.

Those who want to counter HTS should develop a better understanding of the various narratives and tactics the group uses to increase its legitimacy, credibility and popularity.

