

## Friends or Foes? The Complex Relationships Among Jihadi Groups



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# Common Q&A's

## **What is the different between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State?**

Both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State are Sunni jihadi groups, sharing the same pedigree (the Islamic State emerged from al-Qaeda), seeking shariah rule and the restoration of the caliphate. However, they differ in their views about the timing to establish a caliphate, their views on the limits of permissible violence, the scope of the practice of Takfir (excommunicating Muslims), the treatment of the Shia.

## **Are al-Qaeda and the Islamic State allies or enemies?**

The two groups are rivals, even enemies. However, their branches have engaged in diverse relationships, moving between cooperation, deconfliction, and direct fighting. These interactions between the branches of the two groups have at times been divorced from the relationship between these groups' central leaderships.

## **Is Hayat Tahrir a-Sham (HTS), which led the forces that toppled the Assad regime in Syria a jihadi threat?**

HTS started as Jabhat a-Nusra, a branch of the Islamic State (then the Islamic State of Iraq and a-Sham, ISIS) and a subordinate of al-Qaeda. In 2013 it broke away from the Islamic State, and by early 2017 also from al-Qaeda. It then fought agents of both groups in Syria. Early on it announced that it is focused on fighting the Syrian regime and does not mean to carry out attacks outside of Syria. Over time it carried out outreach activities to minorities in the territory it had controlled. While its leadership still comprises of Islamists, at this point it is wrong to label it a jihadi group and a threat.

# Key Takeaways

- ✓ The Jihadi movement is weaker than the sum of its parts.
- ✓ Jihadi groups regularly argue, and sometimes even fight.
- ✓ Conflict among jihadis can result from ideological disagreements, strategic differences and personality clashes.
- ✓ There are important differences between the central leadership of the transnational jihadi groups al-Qaeda and the Islamic State and their branches.
- ✓ Jihadi groups are more likely to gain acceptance when they shed their jihadi ideology and moderate their actions.

*The views expressed by the speaker don't necessarily reflect Chai Mitzvah's official position.*