FROM REBELS TO RULERS: JABHAT AL-NUSRA'S TRANSFORMATIONS AND THE POLITICS OF ISLAMIST RULE

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Abstract

This article examines the transformation of *Jabhat al-Nusra* (JN) into *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham* (HTS) within the broader context of Syria's protracted conflict. Drawing on Wiktorowicz's *Islamic Activism* theory, the study explores how ideological framing, political opportunity structures, and strategic adaptations shaped the group's evolution from a jihadist movement to a governing authority in Idlib and in Syria. Using a qualitative case study approach, it analyzes the group's ideological shifts, organizational pragmatism, and engagement with local governance mechanisms. Rather than passing normative judgement, the article highlights the complexities and contradictions of HTS's transition, offering insights into how Islamist movements negotiate the tension between revolutionary ideals and the practical realities of governance.

Keywords: Jabhat al-Nusra, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, Political Islam, Syria.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji transformasi Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) menjadi Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) dalam konteks konflik Suriah yang berkepanjangan. Dengan menggunakan teori *Islamic Activism* dari Wiktorowicz, studi ini menelusuri bagaimana framing ideologis, struktur peluang politik, dan adaptasi strategis membentuk evolusi kelompok tersebut dari gerakan jihad menjadi otoritas pemerintahan di Idlib dan di seluruh Suriah. Melalui pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis pergeseran ideologi, pragmatisme organisasi, dan keterlibatan kelompok dalam mekanisme pemerintahan lokal. Tanpa memberikan penilaian normatif, artikel ini menyoroti kompleksitas dan kontradiksi dalam transisi HTS, serta memberikan wawasan tentang bagaimana gerakan Islamis menavigasi ketegangan antara ideal revolusioner dan realitas praktis pemerintahan.

Kata kunci: Jabhat al-Nusra, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, Islam Politik, Suriah.

INTRODUCTION

The Arab Spring, which swept across the Arab world in 2011, that began in Tunisia and eventually reached Syria was a truly remarkable event in the Arab modern history, where ordinary citizens took to the streets and confronted their corrupt and dictatorial leaders (Lister, 2015). In March 2011, widespread protests broke out across Syrian cities, including the capital Damascus, as Syrians took to the streets to demand democratic reforms (Bayat, 2017). The protests unequivocally expressed the population's discontent with President Bashar al-Assad's authoritarian Ba'athist regime, which marks a pivotal moment in the country's modern history. While the Moroccon revolution ends in what is called 'a win-win solution'. It was relatively peaceful also in Egypt and Tunisia. However, the

Syrian, Yemeni, and Libyan revolutions took a devastating turn and transformed into a brutal and bloody civil wars (Lynch, 2012).

The brutal crackdown by Assad's forces during these events leads to the huge number of civilian casualties and detentions, this spawned the emergence of different resistance militias that are mainly inspired by Salafi-Jihadi orientation (Lister, 2015). Among these groups is *Jabhat al-Nusra* which originally is an Al-Qaeda affiliate (Lister, 2015), and shall be the primary focus of this article. The article studies the evolution of *Jabhat al-Nusra* (hereafter JN), its formation and initial ideologies, then its subsequent transformation into *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham* (hereafter HTS). Special attention is paid to the change and shift in their ideologies, mechanisms, affiliations, and their pragmatic approach, particularly regarding their role in toppling the Assad regime in December 2024 (Haenni, 2025).

Through an analysis of the group's ideological underpinnings, strategic shifts, and pragmatic adaptations, this article presents the multi-layered perspective on its development, particularly with regard to the ideology, while also offering a unique reading of the toppling of Assad's regime and its connection to the evolution of HTS. This article examines JN's dynamics, tracing its development from Iraq to Idlib and Damascus, and its transformation from radicalization to reconciliation, transnational to local, and puritanical to political.

Multiple studies have been written about the Arab Spring in Syria in 2011 and the emergence of Islamist movements, including the works of Marc Lynch (2012), Gelvin James L. (2012), Lister Charles (2015, 2017), Philips Christopher (2016), Asef Bayat (2017), etc. These studies offer diverse insights into the causes, dynamics, and trajectories of the Syrian conflict. Other studies deal specifically with the Jihadist movements in Syria, their politics, governance, and dynamics, such as those by Drevon and Haenni (2021) and W. Grant (2023). Fast forward, the most relevant and up-to-date study in this regard in Haenni and Drevon's *Transformed by the People* (2025). This significant work was only published after this manuscript had been completed and submitted for publishing. However, during the review period, I was able to write these sentences and draw some insights from their analysis to enrich my discussions.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research employs a quantitative methodology with a case study approach. Data collection primarily comes from interviews, newspapers, books, and articles. While the data analysis utilizes thematic analysis which systematically allows identifying recurring themes and connections across the dataset (Willig & Rogers, 2017). Three core analytical themes borrowed from Wiktotowicz structured the discussion: Political Opportunity Structures, Ideological Framing and Narratives, and Strategic Adaption and Political Maneuvering (Wiktorowicz, 2004).

This combined theoretical and methodological approach enables a nuanced understanding of HTS's transformation and its role in shaping the Syrian landscape.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts the Islamic Activism theory developed by Quintan Wiktorowicz (Wiktorowicz, 2004). Although the theory has certain limitations (Bayat, 2005), its specific focus on Islamic movements within the broader field of social movement theory makes it particularly suitable for my analysis, to which I contribute and engage where necessary to render my analysis more nuanced. The theory represents a decolonial contribution to the field of social movement theories. It argues that the socio-political complexities of Muslim societies make it difficult to arrive at accurate conclusions using broader social movement theories; therefore, it proposes an alternative framework that is more attuned to Islamic contexts (Wiktorowicz, 2002).

This framework enables a direct examination of contentious politics, political opportunities, framing processes, etc. It also helped in providing a clear analytical lens for studying the genesis, transformation, and governance practices of JN and HTS.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Political Opportunity Structures: The Evolution of Jabhat al-Nusra

This term "political opportunity structure" refer to the arrangements or set of conditions and events that either facilitate or hinder the achievement of aims and objectives of political actors including social movements or interest groups (Wiktorowicz, 2004). It simply suggests that all social movements don't operate in a vacuum, rather factors like change of power or public opinion, government policies, or the influence of elites, contribute to unfolding events (Tarrow, 2012).

Street arts that any passer-by could see in Damascus, al-Hasakah, and other parts of Syria, with the iconic phrase of "*al-sha'b yurīd iskāṭ-l-niẓām!*" meaning "The public want to topple the regime!" (Gelvin, 2015), made the Assad's regime freak out! How could people be so bold uttering such very clear statements?! The regime therefore began to use all kinds of torture against the Syrian protesters and labeled the revolution as a foreign conspiracy (Güçtürk, 2014). This brutal crackdown against peaceful protesters created a temporary lull in the demonstrations, which in turn opened a political opportunity for the Syrian veterans that already had gained military experience fighting in Iraq, Palestine, and Afghanistan to emerge and actualize themselves in their homeland.

This war, particularly, "provides Jabhat al-Nusra an ideal environment"(Cafarella, 2014) for their activities. Although, Al-Qaeda

primarily was not interested in the Arab spring when it started for two reasons: the revolution is not armed because the protesters believe that peace can overthrow a regime, and that protesters are raising the flags of democracy which Al-Qaeda ideologically disagree with (Al-Mustapha, 2013). However, they were able to emerge in it and take the political opportunity. Here I must acknowledge that the formation of a militant opposition was not inclusively from the Jihadist factions, but also from the hundreds of angry prisoners from Sednayya prison who were released by the regime amnesty in a move to reconcile with the protesters at the beginning. However, these groups were inspired by the Jihadists, and in many cases, even go on to fight alongside Jihadists forces.(C. R. Lister, 2015)

Here Al-Qaeda successfully achieved in Syria what it failed to achieve in Yemen and Mali. That is the formation of a strong branch that will implement Al-Qaeda's Jihad mission of what is named later 'Transnational Jihad'.(C. Lister, 2017) Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, a member of Al-Qaeda who fought the American invasion in Iraq, returned to his fatherland, Syria, and formed JN. He clearly disassociated himself with ISIS, but affirmed that his movement is a branch of Al-Qaeda and declared his *bay'ah* (an oath of allegiance to a higher religious/political authority) to Ayman al-Zawahiri.(Zelin, 2022)

In this stage, it still can be seen that the concept of Islamic state has some place in al-Jolani's mind. In an interview (Al-Jazeera Arabic, 2015b),

Abu Muhammad al-Jolani clarified that while the war now may be *daf' al-sa'il* (repelling the aggressor) instead of *iqamat al-daula* (establishing a state), this is merely a stage in the process. It is clear from his words that the long-term objective remains Islamic state establishment. Also, Al-Jolani strongly believes in an armed resistance. He sees all forms of resistance unarmed futile and ineffective. In fact, he explicitly stated: "The only way is to carry weapons"(Al-Jazeera Arabic, 2015a). Furthermore, JN's hostility towards America, the West in general, and democracy is so evident. Al-Jolani highlighted the key difference between Al-Qaeda and Muslim Brotherhood, he critiques the latter for accepting democracy and parliamentary systems. He gave an example of Mohammed Morsi, who he said failed to govern according to the Sharia and accepted the Camp David Accords. This last point is important and I will come back to it later.

Generally, JN, in its early days, was a relatively straightforward Jihadist group. Although not as extreme as ISIS, but they held fundamentalist views.

The Path to Idlib: A Framing Process in Jabhat al-Nusra

The concept of framing, one of the most important concepts coined in the social movements' academic literature, will explain Jabhat al-Nusra's resistance to external presure. Framing is mostly inspired by Goffman's work (1974) and can be viewed as analytical lenses which enables the categorization of events in the local context and the environment of Jabhat al-Nusra.(Goffman, 1974)

In the context of JN, a strategic framing that establishes a compelling narrative which challenges the Syrian presidency and the foreign military intervention is conducted. It can be said that this framing process in JN context is based on three foundations. The first foundation is the presidency (the *Imamah* in Islamic term) of *kafir* (infidel) over Muslims. Here, Al-Jolani while ruling on the authority of Bashar's presidency draws on the opinions of Muslim scholars regarding the *Nusayriyyah* sect. These scholars view the *Nusayriyyah* as a *batini* (mystical) and *zandaqah* (heretical) sect. His argument goes this way: Since the *Nusayriyyah* are considered as a heretical sect, and such sects are considered infidels, it logically means that Bashar as a *Nusayri* is also an infidel. And therefore, Al-Jolani, and JN extensionally, claim that an infidel cannot rightfully rule over Muslims as their Imam, citing Quranic verses and the consensus of Muslim scholars (Al-Jazeera Arabic, 2015b).

The second foundation that framed JN's position is the foreign intervention in Syria Civil War especially the Russian and the Iranian military interference. Although, the former intervened later, but the latter has been a close strategic ally of the Assad's regime. The third foundation is that of the brutality of Bashar's regime, they believe that a Muslim must resist oppression and injustice viewing that as a commandment from God. Probably, this idea was not only their path to Idlib, but also to the streets of Damacus, as they named the operation that toppled the regime *ṣad al-'udwān* (Repelling Aggression) (Al-Jazeera Arabic, 2015b).

This claim of authority by JN to engage in a resistance, or rather a holy war, is very related to the basis and causes of Jihad as established by Muslim jurists. They presented themselves as the custodians of God's slaves in a Godly and Holy land of Sham, with so much emphasis on Islamic narrations on the virtue of Sham and the prophecy of Jihad in the land of Sham. With the aforementioned justifications by JN, as mentioned earlier, they asserted their authority. Although, some Salafi's factions did not acknowledge this authority, especially after JN disassociated itself with ISIS and its leader, Abubakar al-Baghdadi. But the same political opportunity that emerged at the first place emerges again, in the benefit of JN. This time the Russian military intervention in Syria against all the Jihadists awaken their need to unite again. They united and JN been the most powerful faction had to lead the big militant opposition, in the name of *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham* (Drevon & Haenni, 2021).

This unification paved way for JN to great achievements, HTS became the dominant force in North-West Syria, namely Idlib. And later on, formed an autonomous government there named: The Syrian Salvation Government (hereafter SSG)' (Cook et al., 2023). Therefore, this claim of authority does not only justify their resistance but also mobilizes resources for them, both human and financial resources.

Towards Shifting Dynamics: The Autonomous State of Idlib

Idlib was one of the poorest and most rural areas in Syria since before the revolution (Abu-Ismail et al., n.d.). It was often overlooked, marginalized and neglected. This province shares a very long border with Turkey, and consists of Muslim majority, with a number of Druze, Shia, and, Christian minorities. Idlib was among the first provinces to join the Syrian revolution when it started in the Summer of 2011, after many series of events the rebels destroyed the FSA (Free Syrian Army) factions in Idlib and Hama in October 2014. And this arguably made the formation of the autonomous Idlib government (Heller, n.d., p. 3).

The article aims here to investigate the factors that facilitated the efficacy of Idlib's governance structure, which potentially laid the groundwork for subsequent successes, including the quite sudden capture of Damascus. Specifically, I shall explore Idlib's governance model, perhaps its judicial and economic systems, as well as its relationship with local opposition groups and treatment of minority populations.

Due to HTS being the umbrella of various Islamist groups, it has continued to press the agenda of Sharia Law under the SSG. To achieve that, courts were established under the name of *Dār al-Qadā'* (the court house) and are structured consisting of eight components, some of which are: the *dīwān* (an office responsible for documentations of cases), the *salāh* (an office responsible for reconciling between disputed parties), the *malakāt*

(an office responsible for settling financial disputes and issuing ownership documentations), and the *ḥudūd* (an office responsible for processing criminal cases); (Cook et al., 2023).

The fair operation within the *Dār al-Qaḍā'* and the general achievements of the JN shifted it positively and transformed the group from an elitist al-Qaeda into a closer-to-populist HTS mass movement (Lister, n.d.). JN started as an elite movement willing to redirect the Syrian revolution into the Islamic direction. According to Lister, the need for factions to unite spelled the need for JN to transit into a mass movement (Lister, n.d.). This is also evident in the government relationship with minorities in Idlib.

When HTS took control of Idlib, Orthodox Christians feared what the jihadists had done in some areas, especially what ISIS did in the village of al-Ghassaniyah, turning the church into a detention center and then a cemetery, this image made thousands of Christians flee Idlib even before the authority was stabilized. The same peaceful coexistence also exists in their relations with the Druze, who have a presence and villages in Idlib (Bakur & Sahtut, 2022). Ahmed Mansour, an Egyptian journalist, after a visit to several areas in Syria, recounted that he met in Homs with Bishop Hanna Jallouf, the Apostolic Vicar of the Vatican in Aleppo and its environs, and he testified about the sensitivity of the Salvation Government in the matter of redressing grievances and justice to everyone in the autonomous Idlib (Ahmed Mansour, 2024).

Initially, I wanted not to talk about the conflicts between HTS and ISIS, but we could notice a change in the organization when it established the Idlib state, as al-Jolani did not announce an establishment of an Islamic emirate, the way the Jihadist did in Iraq and Northern Mali (Al-Mustapha, 2013).

Opportunities and Constraints- Can Hayat Tahrir al-Sham reaches Damascus?

Opportunities and Constraints is an insightful framework from Wiktorowicz, if "political opportunity structure" explains that all social movements have motives and causes, this framework explain the social situations that gives action and inaction to all social movements. It considers all activities as actions which are located in a social environment and context by encompassing the effects of external factors and co-occurring structures of opportunity and constraints (Wiktorowicz, 2004).

This framework will help me in addressing a relevant question: What were the reasons to the Islamists' delayed success in overthrowing the regime, which persisted for 13 years but was brought down in just 13 days? This inquiry aims at finding out to what factors have made this change happened, the new opportunities that have arisen, and the previous obstacles that hindered their success. I will focus here more on the obstacles, as the opportunities were explored somewhere earlier.

In August 2013, at the beginning of the Syrian uprising, renowned security expert Dr Edward N. Luttwak penned an op-ed in The New York Times, alarming the White House that "In Syria: America Loses if Either Side Wins" (Luttwak, 2013). This may seem like a banal title, just an article written by an academic in a newspaper. But if we know that the writer served as a contractual strategic consultant for the US government, we will take it seriously. It is indeed a signal to the US authorities to take a neutral stance in the Syrian conflict, neither helping Assad to stabilize nor helping the people to overthrow him and establish a democratic state. But why? According to Luttwak, Taliban-style Salafists, Sunni extremists, and Assad backed by Iran and Russia, all of them fighting each other, is a precious chance for America to watch its four enemies bleeding. He strategically explains that the Syrian conflict will either result in Assad's victory what would dramatically affirm the power and charisma of Iran, or result in a rebel victory which is extremely dangerous for America because the rebels, particularly Jabhat al-Nusra, would certainly form a government hostile to Israel, the United States, and its allies. The last option that himself while proposing called "a tragic one" but argues it's the best for the United States is maintaining a prolonged stalemate by arming the rebels when it seems that Assad's forces are ascendant and not supplying the rebels if they actually seem to be winning. Shortly after Luttwak's proposal, BBC reported that "Obama asked Congress for money to fund a program allowing US personnel to train rebels in Jordan so that they could return to Syria and fight" (McKelvey, n.d.). Dramatically, the United States seems to apply the proposed "Give War a Chance" stratagem.

In summary, this unfavorable strategic environment is one of the most significant factors for the failure or delayed victory of the revolution, but how did it succeed now? The reader may think that I went a little off topic, no I did not. The success of the revolution is related to the dynamism of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. If we reflect carefully on Luttwak's writeup, he argues that Turkey as a country with a powerful army and a long boarder with Syria was uniquely positioned to influence the outcome of the conflict even before the emergence of the jihadists' groups. However, Turkeys' inaction because of its concerns over internal security and the potential unrest of some of its large minorities, allowed the situation to spiral out of control, and Erdogan stood as "an impotent spectator of the civil war on his doorstep" (Luttwak, 2013). Nevertheless, according to Luttwak, Turkey can still contribute in resolving the conflict. He clearly proposed that "United States could have supported with weapons, intelligence, and advice a Turkey-based and Turkish-supervised rebellion" only if the war is not waged by any petty warlords and dangerous extremists. It would be appropriate here to note that Luttwak using his position as a consultant to the US government is not only warning the US authorities about the unravelling situation but also calling for a US-Turkey-rebel fighting forces strategic cooperation so as to tackle what he describs as more orgy of violence. It could be stated that Luttwak actually recommends that Turkey be in charge of a non-extremist rebellion while at the same time being concerned about its own restive ethnic minorities. On the other hand, rebels should also aim at a reconciliation between its Islamist agenda and the modernity or the embracing of a moderate equivalent to the Salafist

'jihadi' in its rightful call for its goals – transitioning from a radical Salafist orientation towards more reasonable militant approach manifest in its language and actions.

The Damascus's Gateway: How Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham Reframe Its Processes

Building on prior passage that examined the framing process. Here, I will introduce the concept of 'reframing'. I mean by reframing a secondary process in social movements that emerged in response to an initial framing to evaluate or update it. This concept is employed to denote a secondary and adaptive framing process in HTS distinct from JN's frame.

In his book, Wictorowicz, classified the Islamist groups based on their different strategies and tactics into classes such as missionary movements, political movements, and revolutionary or militant movements (Wiktorowicz, 2004). Notably, the concept of 'intra-movement framing' which means the existence of multiple prognostic frames that he coined would have been useful, provided "Political Jihadism" is not coined by Aaron Y. Zelin (Zelin, 2022). In practicing this Political Jihadism, HTS reframed its process to a more indigenous one for a more effective mobilization. Wictorowicz said: "Where a movement frame draws upon an indigenous cultural symbols, language, and identities, it is more likely to reverberate with constituents, thus enhancing mobilization"(Wiktorowicz, 2004). HTS seems to have understood this strategy well and therefore

sought to indigenize its struggle, that is why in all their recent moves they are moving further away from Salafist identity which is mostly influenced by Saudi-Afghan cultures to a Syrian indigenous identity (Khaled, 2014).

Commenting on al-Jolani's dress code may seem trivial or obstinate, but it is essential to recognize the significant link between dress and identity, a concept extensively explored by scholars like Stone (1962), Goffman (1963,1971), and Stryker (1980). They all argued that dress serves as a primary indicator of identity (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). Chukwuemeka explained how attire, particularly turbans and veils, are used by Boko Haram, a jihadist group in Northern Nigeria, as objects of devotion and deviance to construct a different identity amid people (Chukwuemeka, 2019).

Figure 1: Abu Muhammad al-Jolani (Rebel) and Ahmad al-Shara'
(Revolutionary Leader)

These two pictures exemplified the transformation of al-Jolani where he replaced his jihadist camo attire for a casual Syrian-outfit, contrary to what the Western news agencies said that he adopted a more Western style

wardrobe. Syrians are generally wearing shirts and trousers, and mostly bareheaded. Also, the change of his well-known nom de guerre, Abu Muhammad al-Jolani which is more of a medieval name that signals the spirit of conservation and fundamentalism to Ahmad al-Sharaa, a name as common as any Syrian born in the twentieth century, all these strengthen my reframing argument.

Most importantly, let's reflect on statements made by Ahmad al-Shara' and officials of the Syrian Caretaker Government within the first four weeks in office to get a glimpse on the ideological reframing in HTS. To keep it focused, let's explore the manifestations of pragmatism on the issues of democracy, Israel, and the Arab rulers.

In the case of Democracy, I earlier mentioned al-Jolani's critiques of Muslim Brotherhood for accepting democracy. This idea persists in this movement until the last days in Idlib. For example, in an interview in 2013 while responding to queries about Syria's future if Damascus falls, al-Jolani boldly stated that the existing Idlib model shall be expanded. He repeatedly emphasized (over five times) that Syria shall be governed with Sharia, and it shall be an Islamic government on the prophetic path. When discussing the minorities' rights, al-Jolani indicated that their treatment would align with the Kitab and Sunnah, as if he is implying that liberated Syria shall impose jizya taxes on non-Muslim Syrians (Al-Jazeera Arabic, 2013). However, in his interview with CNN, the leader of the interim administration, Ahmad al-Shara' skirted a direct question about his Sharia

vision, which he was so enthused about. Instead of addressing the topic head-on, he took a convoluted approach as he sidesteps the term "Sharia" altogether. Al-Shara' emphasizes the role of history and customs in shaping Syria's future government and elaborates on the importance of justice and *shura* in the governing system (CNN, 2024). Regarding the Idlib model, Ahmad Shara' unexpectedly shocking decision now is that even though the Idlib model may serve as the foundation for establishing a new Syria, it would not be ideal for Syria as a whole (AlArabiya, 2024).

Similar to the decision of changing his name, al-Jolani as well as the rebels, also address the country they previously referred to as al-Sham, Syria now. Notably, al-Sham encompasses not only Syria, but also other areas, including Israel. This name likely indicate that their local jihad was not only aimed at Assad but also targets any oppressive, sectarian, racist and authoritarian regime in the whole Sham region. This could also explain why Israel is discomfort with the new administration in Damascus, unlike other nations, including the U.S. However, al-Shara' and his followers have demonstrated a significant change in their stance towards Israel. Firstly, they did not fall for the Israeli provocation on their southern border and in the Golan heights, which shows their strategic wisdom. Had it been they reacted as Israel wanted, the operation could have not ended as peaceful as it did. Furthermore, al-Shara' assured that they would not pose a threat to any country in the region. In my opinion, he deliberately used the term "region" to include Israel. This was further clarified and supported by Prime Minister Mohammed al-Bashir's statement that signals a clear shift

towards a more pragmatic and political movement (AlJazeera Arabic 2024).

CONCLUSION

The Syrian experience offers a strong case study on the emergence of Islamists groups during populist revolutions in Muslim countries that might not be initially motivated by an Islamic agenda. It also gives a wonderful model in transmitting from rebellion to governance that offers strategical lessons for other Islamist movements. For example, adaptability to political opportunity structures is the first key held by the Syrian Islamists, which implies that any movement shall know the right time to emerge. Also, ability to recalibrate ideologies to align with local context is an important lesson for movements that seek to sustain legitimacy, any movement shall speak the language ordinary people can understand. Furthermore, adaptability mechanism is always needed by movements to continuously assess, modify, refresh and optimize their strategies. Such constructive criticism will help not only in building networks with stakeholders and players but also in striking a balance between the dream and the possible. Finally, considering the choice of realistic, rather than ideal, approach allows for employing less strict and more efficient strategies of interaction with the existing currents in the international arena. However, such sudden pragmatism may be strategic, masking deeper ideological aims, yet it remains a lesson in adaptive political maneuvering for Islamist movements.

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