



Analysis

Terrorism—Social Media Promote Jihadist Group, Attacks in Syria

OSC has recently observed two Facebook pages and a popular blog that promote the recently established Syrian jihadist group Al-Nusra Front and jihadist attacks in Syria. As these pages are the top results for a Google search in Arabic of "Al-Nusra Front," they are likely to be visited by Arabic-speaking Internet users interested in the group. Observed activity on these pages suggests expanding interest in Al-Nusra Front.

The two Facebook pages -- *Insaru Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham* and *Jabhat al-Nusra l-Ahal al-Sham* -- and a Syria-focused jihadist blog -- *Ansar al-Sham Network* -- have become the top three Arabic-language Google search results for "Al-Nusra Front,"¹² a Syrian jihadist group first announced in Januaryⁱ that has claimed several attacks against regime targets there.^{iiiiiv} This suggests the pages are becoming primary locations for Arabic-language material glorifying Al-Nusra Front.

- All three pages host Al-Nusra Front's official statements and the Facebook pages have been observed to further promote it by posting graphics, banners, and video compilations devoted to it.
- The pages all attempt to incite anger at the Al-Asad regime, with *Insaru Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham* posting content such as photographs of children reportedly killed in Syria and *Jabhat al-Nusra l-Ahal al-Sham* and *Ansar al-Sham Network* prominently displaying articles and videos on Syrian "martyrs."
- The Facebook pages also encourage attacks in Syria, by hosting basic military training materials, such as an instructional sniper video found on *Insaru Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham*. Similarly, *Jabhat al-Nusra l-Ahal al-Sham* posts instructions for detonating a bomb without using a telephone trigger.

Facebook Activity Suggests Increasing Interest in Al-Nusra Front

¹ This is likely in part because the pages include the group's name in their titles and mention Al-Nusra Front frequently, which are some of the factors that contribute to Google's page ranking (www.google.com/competition/howgooglesearchworks.html).

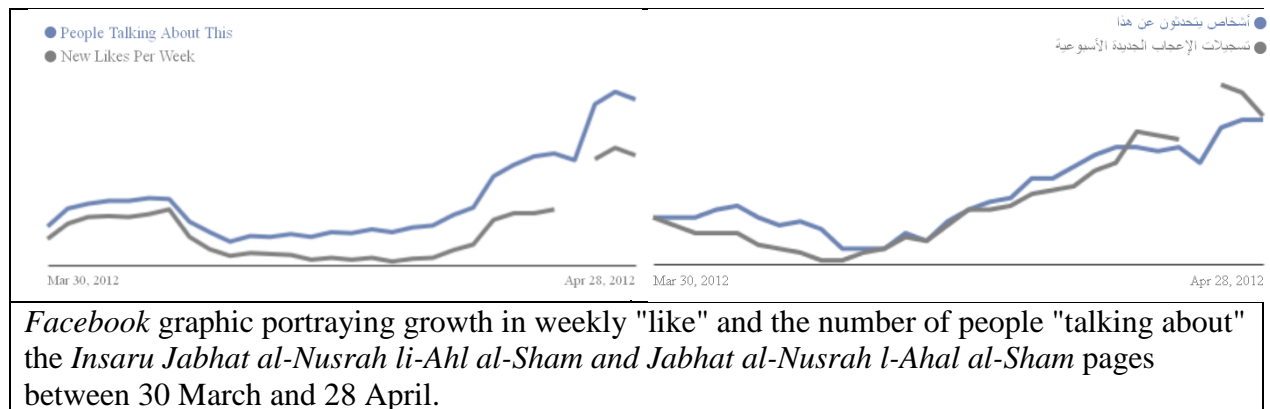
² See Appendix for profiles.

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Although, thus far, users have indicated approval of the *Facebook* pages -- by clicking the "like" buttons -- relatively few times, the trend is increasing, suggesting heightened interest in Al-Nusra Front. Statistics on readership of the pages are not available.

- As of 2 May, *Insaru Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham* readers have clicked "like" 481 times, and *Jabhat al-Nusra l-Ahal al-Sham* users have done so 344 times.
- However, marking a substantial increase, during the week ending on 27 April, *Insaru Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham* received 143 "likes," with 202 "people talking about" it. In contrast, during the week ending on 30 March --the earliest period for which data is available -- the page received only 47 "likes," with 60 users "talking about it."
- *Jabhat al-Nusra l-Ahal al-Sham* has experienced similar growth in activity. During the week ending on 27 April, it received 57 "likes" with 48 "people talking about" it, up substantially from 25 "likes" and 25 "people talking about it" in the week ending on 30 March.

The blog *Ansar al-Sham Network* reported between 33,000 and 78,000 views between 27 April and 5 May. Although it is not clear how the site calculates traffic, it appears to count visits on a daily, rather than cumulative basis. This high viewership offers further evidence of online interest in Al-Nusra Front.



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Appendix: Profiles of Top Three Google Rated Pages for Al-Nusra Front

Insaru Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham



This page is currently the first-listed *Google* search result for "Al-Nusra Front" in Arabic. Its title translates to "Support Al-Nusra Front for the People of Greater Syria" and it is located at www.facebook.com/jabhat.annosra. Since its creation on 17 February, the page has hosted Al-Nusra Front statements and other material promoting the group in addition to general jihadist material such as an essay by ideologue Abdallah Azzam and a picture of Al-Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.

According to *Facebook* statistics, the page is most popular with 18-34 year olds and it is most commonly viewed from Tunis, Tunisia.

Jabhat al-Nusra l-Ahal al-Sham



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This page is currently the second-listed *Google* search result for "Al-Nusra Front" in Arabic. It was created on 29 January and its title translates to "Al-Nusra Front for the People of Greater Syria." It is located at facebook.com/pages/141598092626283/جبهة-النصرة-لأهل-الشام. It has less content and appears to have fewer readers than *Insaru Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham*, though it hosts a similar mix of Al-Nusra Front propaganda and general jihadist materials and images of Sunni suffering in Syria.

Jabhat al-Nusra l-Ahal al-Sham is also most popular with 18-34 year olds and is most commonly viewed from Tunis, Tunisia, according to *Facebook* statistics.

Ansar al-Sham Network



This page is currently the third-listed *Google* search result for "Al-Nusra Front" in Arabic and is located at alnusraa.blogspot.com. The site was established in mid-December 2011. Its name translates as "Supporters of Greater Syria Network."

The site provides links to apparently affiliated *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Google+* and *YouTube* accounts which post and promote material supportive of Syrian jihad and link back to alnusraa.blogspot.com, extending the blog's reach.

- The *Facebook* page is located at www.facebook.com/ahnusra.
- The *Twitter* feed is located at twitter.com/#!/alnusra.
- The *Google+* account is accessible at plus.google.com/115028212139781004550/posts#115028212139781004550.
- The *YouTube* channel is accessible at www.youtube.com/user/kald1981304.

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- ⁱ [OSC | | GMP20120127586003 | 27 January 2012 | | Al-Nusrah Front Video Announces Formation of 'Free Ones of the Levant Brigades' | | (U//FOUO) | (U//FOUO) |]
- ⁱⁱ [OSC | | GMP20120227405002 | 26 February 2012 | | Al-Nusrah Front Releases Video Claiming Responsibility for 10 Feb Aleppo Bombing | | (U//FOUO) | (U//FOUO) |]
- ⁱⁱⁱ [OSC | | GMP20120208586002 | 08 March 2012 | | Bin Ladin Urges 'Jihad to Stop Aggression Against Gaza' | | (U//FOUO) | (U//FOUO) |]
- ^{iv} [OSC | | GMP20120321194001 | 21 March 2012 | | Al-Nusrah Front Claims 17 Mar Damascus Bombings, Says Christians 'Not Targeted' | | (U//FOUO) | (U//FOUO) |]
- ^v [OSC | | GMP20120430586001 | 30 April 2012 | | Al-Nusrah Front Claims 24 Apr Attack on Iranian Cultural Office in Damascus | | (U//FOUO) | (U//FOUO) |]

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