Tunisian Jihadism after the Sousse Massacre

By Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Bridget Moreng

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Executive Summary: This article assesses the state of Tunisian jihadism after the Sousse massacre. After providing a brief history of jihadism’s growth in Tunisia following former President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali’s fall, the article explains the serious challenges the beach attack has placed upon the Tunisian state—especially given the strong reliance of Tunisia’s economy on the tourism industry. The article goes on to explore the major jihadist players in Tunisia, including those affiliated with both the Islamic State and al-Qa`ida, as well as the state’s response to this new phase in its jihadist challenge. The article concludes with a discussion of the possible future of Tunisian jihadism, including the potential for the country to become a theater of increased competition between al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State.

Tunisia’s counterterrorism authorities have faced a growing domestic threat since the January 2011 fall of President Zine El Abedine Ben Ali, the gravity of which was underscored by the gruesome March 2015 attack on Tunis’s Bardo museum. The country received another shock on June 26, 2015, when a gunman massacred 38 tourists on the beach at the popular destination Port El Kantaoui. About five miles from Sousse, Port El Kantaoui was built in 1979 for the explicit purpose of attracting and hosting tourists. Spectacular attacks on Tunisia’s tourism industry, which sits at the heart of the country’s economy, pose an existential threat to the state. And the Sousse massacre, perpetrated by a jihadi affiliated with the Islamic State, may signal escalating competition in Tunisia between the Islamic State and al-Qa`ida.

Several factors contributed to the growth in Tunisian jihadism after Ben Ali’s fall. One factor was the release of militants imprisoned by the old regime. Abu Iyad al-Tunisia (born Saifallah Ben Hassine), the emir of Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia (AST), was one of the key figures released early after the revolution. He had been arrested in Turkey in 2003 and extradited to Tunisia, where Ben Ali’s regime sentenced him to 43 years of imprisonment. According to Hassan Ben Brik, who headed AST’s *dawa* (evangelism) committee, the founding members of AST had “experiences abroad” prior to their return to Tunisia, meaning that they were involved in transnational jihadism.[[1]](#endnote-1) This group of founders was imprisoned after returning to Tunisia. “We got to know each other in prison, and we began our work from there,” said Ben Brik.[[2]](#endnote-2) AST became the first jihadist organization with a national reach to operate openly in Tunisia after the revolution.

A second factor in the growth of Tunisian jihadism was the permissive environment that initially existed after the revolution, when jihadis were able to conduct *dawa* openly. AST was a major player in such activities. As an unannounced al-Qa`ida affiliate,[[3]](#endnote-3) it seems the major reason AST disguised its organizational ties to al-Qa`ida was to allow it to operate openly.

A third factor that allowed jihadism to flourish was that toppling Ben Ali did not resolve the country’s deep social problems. Youth unemployment and lack of opportunity were particularly acute,[[4]](#endnote-4) providing fertile ground for extremism, which often flourishes when problems loom large and society seems unresponsive. It is no coincidence that the bulk of AST’s *dawa* efforts focused on areas that were underserviced by the Tunisian state—both geographic areas on the country’s periphery and also poorer urban areas away from city centers.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Although salafi jihadis were able to operate openly during these early years, they frequently engaged in violence as well. The movement’s early attacks in 2011 and 2012 could largely be categorized as *hisba* (vigilante activities designed to enforce religious norms), rather than jihad-related violence.[[6]](#endnote-6)

The clearest inflection point for the growth in jihadist attacks against the state was December 2012, when militants shot and killed Anis Jelassi, an adjutant in the Tunisian National Guard, in the Kasserine governorate.[[7]](#endnote-7) This incident prompted Tunisian authorities to identify, for the first time, a militant group known as Katibat Uqba ibn Nafi (KUIN), which both Tunisian authorities and the group itself have described as a battalion of al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).[[8]](#endnote-8) Jelassi’s killing prompted intensified police operations in western Tunisia, particularly around Jebel el-Chaambi. These operations resulted in occasional firefights between Tunisian forces and militants running arms and other items across the border. There were several escalations in violence by militants in western Tunisia, including an intensifying use of improvised explosive devices against security forces.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Another escalation was the jihadist assassination of Tunisian politicians. On February 6, 2013, gunmen shot and killed secularist politician Chokri Belaïd outside his home in Tunis. For more than a year prior to his killing, Belaïd had been subjected to a campaign of surveillance and intimidation. Six months after Belaïd’s murder, on July 25, the secularist politician Mohammed Brahmi was gunned down in Tunis, while in a car outside his home. The gunmen reportedly fired 11 shots before fleeing on a motorbike. This second assassination occurred the same week that a jihadist ambush in Jebel el-Chaambi left “eight soldiers dead—five with slit throats.”[[10]](#endnote-10) These two bloody incidents, occurring so close together, represented a point of no return. Tunisia banned AST and launched a full-scale crackdown on domestic jihadist networks.[[11]](#endnote-11)

After the state’s decision, jihadist attacks were confined for some time mainly to the western part of Tunisia, near the border with Algeria. But by October 2013, their desire to kill tourists in urban centers was made clear. And by 2015, two major attacks on tourist targets had shocked the country and the world.

Tourist Industry as a Terrorist Target

Tourism is essential to Tunisia’s economy. The World Travel and Tourism Council estimates the direct contribution of travel and tourism to Tunisia’s GDP as 7.4 percent, and calculates tourism and travel’s total contribution (including indirect effects) as 15.2 percent of GDP. Similarly, the council estimates that travel and tourism directly supports 6.8 percent of Tunisia’s total employment, and that its total contribution is 13.9 percent of the country’s employment.[[12]](#endnote-12) Thus, it was foreseeable that terrorists would try to kill foreign tourists: Scaring them away could pose an existential threat to the government of Tunisia.

Bardo and Port El Kantaoui were not the first attempted attacks. Jihadists planned a simultaneous bombing in Sousse and Monastir on October 30, 2013. Attentive security guards thwarted a would-be bomber at Sousse’s four-star Riadh Palms Hotel, and his bomb detonated as he was chased onto the beach. Explosives experts later discovered that the bomb had been triggered remotely from a cell phone.[[13]](#endnote-13) Almost simultaneously with the attempted bombing in Sousse, authorities arrested an 18-year-old named Aymen Sâadi Berchid outside the mausoleum of Habib Bourguiba, the country’s secular-minded first president. Berchid’s backpack was full of explosives. The interior ministry claimed that both attackers belonged to AST.[[14]](#endnote-14) In December of the same year, Tunisian authorities disrupted a plot that was believed to target the island of Djerba, another popular tourist destination.[[15]](#endnote-15)

In 2015, jihadists successfully executed two major attacks against tourist targets. In March 2015, an attack at the Bardo National Museum in Tunis left 21 tourists and a Tunisian dead.[[16]](#footnote-1) It was followed just three months later by the horrific beach shooting that killed 38. These incidents place the tourist industry in jeopardy, and also fundamentally threaten Tunisia’s future. Tunisian authorities estimate that the Sousse attack alone could cost the tourism sector $500 million.[[17]](#endnote-16) [[18]](#footnote-2)

Jihadist Players in Tunisia

Al-Qa`ida entered Tunisia soon after the start of the country’s revolution, and its network grew quickly. However, when the Islamic State was expelled from al-Qa`ida in February 2014, Tunisian jihadist organizations faced a dilemma: While the leadership of groups such as AST and KUIN remained loyal to al-Qa`ida, the groups’ foot soldiers instead preferred the Islamic State, in no small part because most of the thousands of Tunisian foreign fighters who went to the Syrian battlefield (more than 4,000 by the majority of estimates) fought for the Islamic State rather than al-Qa`ida’s Syrian affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra.[[19]](#footnote-3) There are several possible reasons for Tunisian jihadists’ preference for the Islamic State over Jabhat al-Nusra. Jabhat al-Nusra has been more difficult to join than the Islamic State, administering a strict vetting process for prospective foreign fighters.[[20]](#endnote-17) Some Tunisians have been drawn in by the Islamic State’s superb propaganda efforts, and were convinced that the group “could offer a higher standard of living, a chance to erase arbitrary borders that have divided the Arab world for a century, or perhaps even the fulfillment of Qur’anic prophecies that Armageddon will begin with a battle in Syria.”[[21]](#endnote-18) Further, discussion in online jihadist forums suggests that some Tunisian jihadists believe Jabhat al-Nusra discriminated against them due to their North African origins.

The pattern of jihadist attacks in Tunisia reflects this dynamic of al-Qa`ida dominating the jihadist landscape early, but the Islamic State winning the loyalty of many foot soldiers in the movement. Early attacks were carried out by groups such as AST and KUIN, while lately there has been a rise in violence attributed to the Islamic State. Though the Islamic State has not yet declared an official *wilayat* (province) in Tunisia, recent attacks claimed by the group and other signals point to its expansion into Tunisia.

AST and KUIN

In the 2011 to 2013 period, the most visible Tunisian jihadist organization was AST. The relationship between AST, KUIN, and AQIM was rather cloudy, but in many ways has become clearer recently.

As previously noted, both Tunisian authorities and KUIN have identified KUIN as one of AQIM’s battalions. Tunisian authorities were the first to publicly make this connection, in December 2012, and KUIN did not declare itself part of AQIM until early 2015. AST still has not publicly clarified its position within the al-Qa`ida organization. Instead, the group denies that it is a part of al-Qa`ida, even though it simultaneously affirms that it maintains “loyalty to Qaedat al-Jihad and the jihadi formations.”[[22]](#endnote-19) Tunisia’s evidence, however, paints AST as subordinate to AQIM within al-Qa`ida’s Africa hierarchy. Tunisian authorities have provided information to the regional press concerning a handwritten “Allegiance Act” between AST emir Abu Iyad al-Tunisi and AQIM leader Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud.[[23]](#endnote-20) Regional press reporting suggests that Abu Iyad has pledged *bay`a* (an oath of allegiance) to Abdel Wadoud or another AQIM official.[[24]](#endnote-21)

The relationship that both AST and KUIN have with AQIM is suggestive also of the relationship that they have with each other. The prevalence of AST members in KUIN has long been noted, but it seems that the two are not actually distinct, but rather are different facets of the same organization. It seems that AST was the political front group: It did not participate in elections or the political process, but took advantage of its professed non-violent approach to openly engage in *dawa*. Meanwhile, it appears that KUIN was the organization’s military wing.

This relationship between AST and KUIN has not been announced, but is suggested by four factors: both groups’ geographic focus on Tunisia, the subordinate relationship both have with AQIM, the prevalence of AST members in KUIN, and the division of the groups’ responsibility into separate functions (with AST handling *dawa* and KUIN handling military efforts). If this is indeed their relationship, it helps explain AST’s marked decline in visibility since the Tunisian state banned it and cracked down. Tunisia’s crackdown has no doubt thinned AST’s numbers, and the majority of members who were not arrested have gone underground. Even AST’s emir, Abu Iyad, has fled the country, and some press reporting suggests that he may have been killed in a U.S. airstrike in Libya.[[25]](#endnote-22) If AST’s main function was serving as a militant organization’s political front group, the fact that space no longer exists for the group to function openly calls its purpose into question. But as the organization’s military arm, KUIN’s purpose remains clear, and KUIN has continued to claim attacks.

The Islamic State

The Islamic State’s potential for growth in Tunisia has long been clear due to the large number of Tunisians who fought under its banner in the Syria-Iraq theater. But this year, the group’s claims of responsibility for the Bardo museum attack and Sousse beach massacre have propelled the group further into the spotlight in the country.

The Islamic State is louder and more overt than is al-Qa`ida and, in fact, this is an essential part of the group’s expansion strategy.[[26]](#endnote-23) The Islamic State works to foster the perception that it possesses enormous momentum in an effort to attract new recruits, and even entire organizations, into its orbit. The Islamic State established a social media presence before claiming these two major attacks in 2015. In December 2014, Ifriqiyah Media, a well-known media foundation that disseminates propaganda from Africa-based jihadist groups, released a statement pledging *bay`a* to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.[[27]](#endnote-24) A week later, a group calling itself “Jund al-Khilafa in Tunisia” released an audio recording pledging allegiance to the Islamic State.[[28]](#endnote-25) The group—which has a similar name to Algeria’s Jund al-Khilafa, which defected from AQIM to the Islamic State—is believed to be comprised of pro-Islamic State defectors from KUIN. Following Jund al-Khilafa’s pledge, Islamic State propaganda focusing on Tunisia included the December 17, 2014 video, “Message to the People of Tunisia,” which urged Tunisians to pledge *bay`a* to the Islamic State and carry out attacks.[[29]](#endnote-26) In April 2015, another pro-Islamic State media outlet, Ajnad al-Khilafa b-Ifriqiya, was established, and soon began claiming Islamic State attacks in Tunisia.[[30]](#endnote-27)

Jund al-Khilafa’s claims of attention-grabbing attacks in Tunisia are designed to raise the Islamic State’s profile in the country, and may be an attempt to persuade the senior leadership to recognize it as an official *wilayat*. The Islamic State immediately claimed responsibility after the Bardo museum attack, and in a subsequent March 29 audio release, Jund al-Khilafa re-declared its allegiance to the Islamic State. Jund al-Khilafa declared three days before the Bardo attack that “glad tidings of what will bring you joy and bring joy to the Muslims in general” would soon arrive, but KUIN also issued ominous statements before the museum attack that could similarly be interpreted as foreshadowing it. Tunisia’s later investigation attributed the terrorist incident to KUIN, and identified the group’s emir Luqman Abu Saqr as the mastermind. Open source information does not resolve which of the two groups is culpable, but if the Islamic State did indeed exaggerate its role in the Bardo attack, such exaggerations are consistent with its momentum-based strategy for expansion. After all, the Islamic State was able to claim the attack while the carnage of Bardo still dominated the news cycle.

The Islamic State claimed a number of attacks after Bardo, culminating in the extraordinarily bloody shooting spree on the beach at Sousse. The Islamic State’s rising profile in Tunisia has the potential to rally the foot soldiers who are loyal to that organization, and the continuing competition between the Islamic State and al-Qa`ida in that country should be carefully watched.

Tunisia’s Response to the Jihadist Threat

In the wake of the Bardo and Sousse attacks, Tunisia has significantly bolstered its domestic counterterrorism efforts. Tunisia’s immediate response after the attack at Port el Kantaoui involved a mixture of policing measures and attempts to shutter the incubators of extremism. Tunisia claims that it deployed 100,000 members of the security forces, 3,000 of whom were tasked with defending tourist destinations and archaeological sites.[[31]](#endnote-28) Within two weeks of the Sousse attack, Tunisian authorities had reportedly carried out more than 700 security operations, arresting at least 127 people.[[32]](#endnote-29) The government also announced plans to close 80 mosques thought to be operating illegally or fostering extremism.[[33]](#endnote-30)

A week after the attack, President Beji Caid Essebsi declared a state of emergency, warning that, “if attacks like Sousse happen again, the country will collapse.”[[34]](#endnote-31) The state of emergency gave officials the authorization to address potential threats. The temporary law allowed the state to “restrict the right of public assembly,” including protests deemed to be a danger to public safety.[[35]](#endnote-32) On October 2, Tunisian state media said the government was lifting the state of emergency.[[36]](#endnote-33) The government’s move to lift the state of emergency was unsurprising. At the end of July 2015, the Tunisian government extended the state of emergency for two months.[[37]](#endnote-34) Prime Minister Habib Essid explained in mid-September that the main rationale for lifting the state of emergency would be “improvement of the security situation.”[[38]](#endnote-35)

But the situation is in many ways beyond Tunisia’s control because the center of gravity for jihadism in North Africa lies outside its borders. The Bardo and Sousse attackers trained in Libya, though it is unclear if they were in the same location. Tunisian interior ministry official Rafik Chelli said in June 2015 that all three attackers trained in Sabratha, a jihadist hub 60 miles from the Tunisian border, while other reports suggest that the Bardo attackers trained in the eastern Libyan city of Derna.[[39]](#endnote-36) Further, the failed October 2013 attackers in Sousse and Monastir also trained in Libya before returning to Tunisia.[[40]](#endnote-37)

While the thousands of Tunisian foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq get the bulk of public attention, an estimated 1,000 to 4,000 have joined the Islamic State or al-Qa`ida in Libya.[[41]](#endnote-38) Libya provides a place to flee crackdowns, to train, and to plan future attacks on Tunisian soil. In an effort to address this, the Tunisian government announced plans to seal its border with Libya by building a 100-mile barricade along the frontier, which it will equip with surveillance centers and electric fences, in an effort to stop the flow of militants.[[42]](#endnote-39)

Tunisia had been working to deal with its flow of foreign fighters even prior to the high-profile attacks. Since 2013, Tunisia has imposed a travel ban that authorities claim has prevented more than 12,000 Tunisians from travelling to militant hubs such as Iraq, Syria and Libya.[[43]](#endnote-40)

In what appears to be an expedited process following the Sousse attack, Tunisia passed a new counterterrorism law on July 24, just one month after the massacre.[[44]](#endnote-41) Tunisia’s new law provided stronger punishments for terrorist-related activity, including the death penalty. Human rights groups criticized the new legislation as overly broad and ambiguous, just as they had voiced concerns about the 2003 law before it.[[45]](#endnote-42) The concern is that the state may use this legislation to target legitimate forms of expression or dissent.

Conclusion

The jihadist threat to Tunisia has continued to feature prominently following the Sousse attack. On August 19, two gunmen shot a Tunisian policeman in Sousse, who later died in hospital.[[46]](#endnote-43) The government has uncovered alleged plots to detonate car bombs in the capital.[[47]](#endnote-44)

Further, Tunisia has continued to experience militant attacks in the Kasserine region. This was one of the first regions in Tunisia to experience a surge in jihadist violence. Since the start of 2015, at least 14 members of the Tunisian security forces have been killed, and eight wounded, in fights with militants in Kasserine. For example, on February 18 militants killed four Tunisian police officers in a pre-dawn attack near the city of Kasserine, shooting them while they were driving.[[48]](#endnote-45) On April 7, around 30 militants attacked a military checkpoint in the town of Sbitla in central Kasserine, killing four soldiers and wounding three.[[49]](#endnote-46) Some of the attacks in Kasserine have been claimed by KUIN, others by the Islamic State, and others have not been claimed at all.[[50]](#endnote-47) Kasserine has traditionally been an area of KUIN strength, and one factor adding credence to its claims of responsibility is its release of videos that feature action montages documenting its various attacks.[[51]](#endnote-48)

Overall, Tunisia faces serious challenges, given the collapse of its tourism sector following the Sousse attack. Jihadis recognize the tourist industry’s centrality to the country’s economy, as well as its vulnerability. While AST has declined in the wake of the state’s crackdown, this does not appear to be a counterterrorism success so much as the political front group’s decline once it could no longer operate openly.

Groups like KUIN and the Islamic State will continue to target Tunisia, including tourist destinations, with the aim of crippling the country’s economy. Seeing no alternative, the Tunisian government is likely to continue its crackdown. But since jihadist networks have spread beyond Tunisia’s borders, the government’s efforts can at best contain but not solve the problem.

The Islamic State will continue to attempt to expand into Tunisia, a move that would come at al-Qa`ida’s expense, and Tunisia may become a theater for intense competition between the two groups.

1. See interview with Ben Brik in Sergio Galasso, “Intervista ad Hassan Ben Brik: ‘Non crediamo nella democrazia, ma senza appoggio del popolo niente jihad,’” *Limes*, October 11, 2012. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. For evidence that AST was a front organization for al-Qa`ida, see Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Bridget Moreng, and Kathleen Soucy, *Raising the Stakes: Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia’s Shift to Jihad* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague, 2014), pp. 13–15. AST’s relationship with al-Qa`ida will also be discussed further subsequently in this article. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Mongi Boughzala, Youth Employment and Economic Transition in Tunisia (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2013).  [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, field research in Tunisia, April 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. For discussion of *hisba*, see Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For documentation of salafist vigilante attacks in Tunisia during this early period, see for example Sarah Leah Whitson, “Letter to Tunisian Minister of Interior and Minister of Justice,” Human Rights Watch, October 14, 2012; Alexander Smoltczyk, “Islamist Intimidation: The Battle for the Future of Tunisia,” *Der Spiegel*, December 5, 2012; “Tunisie—De nombreuses agressions à Zarzis dont celle de deux Italiens,” Businessnews.com.tn, March 21, 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. “Tunisie: Décès de l’adjudant Anis Jelassi dans des affrontements à Feriana,” Global Net, December 11, 2012. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. “Groupes armés, Larayedh sonne l’alerte,” Tunis Afrique Presse, December 21, 2012 (describing interior minister Ali Laarayedh’s statements about Katibat Uqba ibn Nafi). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. For examples of this escalation, see Andrew Lebovich, “Confronting Tunisia’s Jihadists,” *Foreign Policy*, May 16, 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Paul Schemm, “Jihadis Threaten Tunisia’s Arab Spring Transition,” Associated Press, July 31, 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. See “Tunisia Declares Ansar al-Sharia a Terrorist Group,” BBC, August 27, 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. See World Travel and Tourism Council, “Travel and Tourism Economic Impact 2015.” [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. “Selon les premiers éléments de l’enquête, la bombe aurait été déclenchée à distance,” DirectInfo, November 1, 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Noureddine Baltayeb, “Tunisia: Ansar al-Sharia Inaugurates Era of Suicide Bombers,” *Al Akhbar*, November 1, 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Monica Ghanmi, “Tunisia Thwarts New Suicide Bombing,” All Africa, December 10, 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. [footnote] On May 19, 2015, Tuil Abdelmajid was arrested in Italy for his alleged involvement in planning the Bardo attack, after arriving in the country by boat with almost 100 migrants. Tunisia had issued an international arrest warrant for Abdelmajid. As of mid-June, Milan’s appellate court refused Abdelmajid’s request to be placed under house arrest as opposed to remaining in custody, deeming the 22-year-old to be a flight risk. “Attentat du Bardo: Détention prolongée de Abdelmajid Touil,” *Kapitalis*,June 18, 2015. The court held that he should continue to be confined to the San Vittore prison until the Tunisian government provided evidence to support the charges against him. “Strage al Bardo, Touil resta in carcere: ‘Elevato pericolo di fuga,’” *Repubblica* (Milan), June 16, 2015. As of late August, Abdelmajid continued to maintain his innocence, while fighting extradition. Mark Trevelyn, “Militants Posing as Migrants? Unlikely, Say European Experts,” Reuters,August 28, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
17. “Tunisia’s President Declares State of Emergency After Hotel Attack,” Zaman al-Wasl, July 4, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
18. [footnote]The World Travel and Tourism Council assesses that tourism in Tunisia “is likely to suffer well into 2016 and possibly beyond.” World Travel and Tourism Council, “June 2015 Monthly Economic Impact,” June 2015. Tunisia’s agricultural sector has also been hit hard, with prices dropping 35 percent due to the steep reduction in the number of tourists buying food. Michael J. Totten, “How to Destroy a City in Five Minutes,” *World Affairs,* August 25, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
19. [footnote] Confusion about KUIN’s loyalty to al-Qa`ida has been created by Islamic State supporters within the organization who have issued statements designed to augment the Islamic State’s perceived support. For example, a September 2014 statement released by KUIN’s Kairouan branch, which was intended to appear to speak for the whole organization, said that KUIN would “show support, help and aid for the State of the Islamic Caliphate,” and urged “the ranks of the mujahedin” to unite “in every place.” Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, “Bay’ah to Baghdadi: Foreign Support for Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State Part 2,” Syria Comment, September 27, 2014. Despite the confusion sowed by such statements, KUIN leaders later made it clear that their organization was a part of AQIM. See, e.g., Katibat Uqba ibn Nafi, post to Twitter, September 5, 2015 (describing KUIN as a battalion of AQIM); Katibat Uqba ibn Nafi, post to Twitter, April 10, 2015 (pledging *bay`a* to “the *umma*’s wise man, our ascetic mujahid shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri”). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
20. Mary Anne Weaver, “Her Majesty’s Jihadists,” *New York Times*,April 14, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
21. David D. Kirkpatrick, “New Freedoms in Tunisia Drive Support for ISIS,” *New York Times*,October 21, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
22. Thomas Joscelyn, “Ansar al-Sharia Responds to Tunisian Government,” Long War Journal, September 3, 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
23. “Tunisia Says Ansar al-Sharia was Planning More Assassinations, Bombings,” Tunis Afrique Presse, August 29, 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
24. On this point, see, e.g., “Tunisie: Abou Yadh, marionnette de Abou El Hammam!” Investir en Tunisie, November 21, 2013 (reporting that captured KUIN founding member Riadh Toufi described Abu Iyad as a “marionette” of AQIM’s emir for the Sahara area). [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
25. Carlotta Gall and Eric Schmitt, “Jihadist from Tunisia Died in Strike in Libya, U.S. Official Says,” *New York Times*, July 2, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
26. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Jason Fritz, Bridget Moreng and Nathaniel Barr, *The War Between the Islamic State and al-Qaeda: Strategic Dimensions of a Patricidal Conflict* (Washington, DC: Valens Global, 2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
27. SITE Intelligence, “Jihadi Media Group Afriqiyah Media Pledges Allegiance to IS,” December 1, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
28. SITE Intelligence, “Alleged Group ‘Jund al-Khilafah in Tunisia’ Pledges to IS,” December 8, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
29. “Message to the People of Tunisia,” al-I’tisaam Media Foundation, December 17, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
30. Aaron Y. Zelin, “Tunisia’s Fragile Democratic Transition,” testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, July 14, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
31. “Tunisia Deploys 100,000 Security Personnel to Avert Attacks,” Associated Press,July 11, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
32. “Tunisia Says 127 Arrests Since Jihadist Beach Massacre,” Agence France Presse,July 11, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
33. “Tunisia Government Says to Close 80 Mosques for Inciting Violence, after Hotel Attack,” Reuters,July 26, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
34. Bouazza Ben Bouazza and Lori Hinnant, “Tunisia Imposes State of Emergency After Deadly Beach Attack,” Associated Press,July 4, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
35. Eileen Byrne, “Tunisia’s President Declares State of Emergency Following Terrorist Attack,” *Guardian* (U.K.),July 4, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
36. “Tunisia to Lift State of Emergency,” BBC, October 2, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
37. “Tunisia Extends State of Emergency for Two More Months – Presidency,” Reuters, July 31, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
38. “Government Examines Possibility to Lift Emergency State (Habib Essid),” Tunis Afrique Presse*,* September 13, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
39. “Tunisia Beach Killer Trained with Museum Gunmen,” Associated Press, June 30, 2015 (quoting Chelli); “Tunis Bardo Museum: Nine Suspects Arrested for Links to Attack,” BBC, March 20, 2015 (citing unnamed al-Qa`ida operative’s claim that Bardo attackers trained in Derna). [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
40. Carlotta Gall, “Worry in Tunisia Over Youths Who Turn to Jihad,” *New York Times*, December 18, 2013; Patrick Markey and Tarek Amara, “Tunisia Islamists Seek Jihad in Syria with One Eye on Home,” Reuters, November 18, 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
41. Compare Tim Lister, “Tunisia Scrambles to Seal Border Amid Growing IS Threat,” CNN, July 13, 2015 (citing between 1,000 to 1,500 Tunisians in Libya), with John Zarocostas, “More than 7,000 Tunisians Said to Have Joined Islamic State,” McClatchy, March 17, 2015 (noting that 4,000 Tunisians are “believed fighting in Libya”). [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
42. “Tunisia to Build ‘Anti-Terror’ Wall on Libya Border,” BBC, July 8, 2015; Carlotta Gall, “Tunisia Plans to Build Antiterrorism Wall Along Border With Libya,” *New York Times*,July 8, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
43. “Tunisia Banned Over 12,000 from Travelling to Terrorist Hubs,” Middle East Monitor,April 18, 2015; “Najem Gharsalli: 12 mille tunisiens ont été interdits par les autorités de rejoindre des organisations terrorists,” FM,April 18, 2015. This ban has met with sharp criticism from organizations such as Human Rights Watch, which characterized the restrictions as arbitrary. Human Rights Watch,“Tunisia: Arbitrary Travel Restrictions, Apparent Effort to Prevent Recruiting by Extremists,” July 10, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
44. “Tunisia Adopts Tougher Counter-Terrorism Law in Wake of Attacks,” Agence France Presse,July 24, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
45. Human Rights Watch, “Tunisia: Flaws in Revised Counterterrorism Bill,” April 8, 2015; see also criticisms in Monica Marks, “The Repressive Instincts of Tunisia’s Leaders Will Only Encourage Radicalization,” *Guardian* (U.K.),July 2, 2015 (arguing that Tunisia has not addressed the root causes of radicalization, while “freedom of expression, the chief gain of the revolution, is increasingly threatened by anti-terrorism measures”). [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
46. “Tunisia Policeman Shot Dead in Sousse Resort,” Agence France Presse, August 20, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
47. “Tunisia Warns of Car Bomb Plot in Tunis, Imposes Traffic Bans,” Reuters, September 7, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
48. “Tunisia ‘Qaeda’ Attack Kills Four Policemen,” Agence France Presse**,** February 18, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
49. “Four Tunisian Soldiers Killed in Militant Attack on Checkpoint,” Reuters, April 7, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
50. See, e.g., SITE Intelligence Group, “Uqba bin Nafi Battalion Claims Attack on Tunisian National Guards,” February 18, 2015 (KUIN’s claim of responsibility for February 18 shooting of police officers); SITE Intelligence Group, “Alleged IS-Supporting Group in Tunisia Claims Attack in Jebel Salloum,” April 22, 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
51. For example, in May 2015 KUIN released the video “And Incumbent Upon Us Was Support of the Believers,” showing several attacks in the Kasserine region.

Footnotes [↑](#endnote-ref-48)