



Tunisia's Fragile Democratic Transition

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Thank you, Mrs. Chairwoman and members of the committee, for giving me the opportunity to testify today on Tunisia's transition since its elections late last year—in particular focusing on the jihadi threat to it and the Tunisian and American governments' policies in dealing with the problem. Currently, there are two main groups that are attacking the Tunisian state: an al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb cut-out called Katibat Uqba ibn Nafi (KUIN), mainly based in Jebel Chaambi on the western border with Algeria, and the Islamic State, which has a safe haven in Libya as well as cells inside of Tunisia.

Background on Terrorism-Related Activity and Actions in Response

Since the presidential elections were conducted late last year, there have been a number of terrorism-related activities and actions taken in response inside of Tunisia. There have been eleven publicly known terrorist attacks either claimed or believed to be conducted by KUIN and the Islamic State since December 1, 2014.¹ In response to this as well as proactive measures done by the state, there have been twenty-one occasions of arrests of those suspected of planning attacks or being connected to attacks that had already occurred.² In addition to terrorist attacks and arrests, the Tunisian military has also been involved in offensive and defensive operations against insurgents ten times in this time span.³ This illustrates that the threat from jihadis is very real, but also that the Tunisian state has been quite proactive in attempting to stem any more attacks whether in the form of terrorism or insurgent activity.

The Islamic State Comes to Tunisia

In mid-December last year, the Islamic State had its first overt message directed at the Tunisian state and its people.⁴ In particular, Aboubaker el-Hakim (who went by Abu al-Muqatil in the video) claimed responsibility

¹ Attacks by month: December, 1; January, 2; February, 1; March, 3; April, 1; May, 1; and June, 2.

² Arrests by month: December, 3; January, 1; February, 4; March, 5; April, 3; May, 2; June, 2; and July, 1.

³ Military actions by month: February, 2; March, 3; April, 2; May, 1; June, 1; and July, 1.

⁴ The Islamic State, "Message to the People of Tunisia," *al-Itisam Media*, December 17, 2014.

for the assassination of Tunisia's secular leftist politicians in 2013: "Yes, tyrants, we're the ones who killed Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi." This confirmed the Ennahda-led government at the time's accusation that el-Hakim was involved. Beyond calling for more violence and for Tunisians to remember its imprisoned brothers and sisters, he also called upon the Tunisian people to pledge *baya* (allegiance) to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, noting that they should raise the banner of *ta'wheed* (pure monotheism) high and rip the flags of Charles de Gaulle and Napoleon down (alluding to colonialism and the historically close relations between Tunisia and France).

More recently, on April 7, Abu Yahya al-Tunisi of the Islamic State's Wilayat Tarabulus (Tripoli) in Libya urged Tunisians to come join the Islamic State in Libya,⁵ the intention being to gain training and knowledge so that they will then return to Tunisia in order to establish and extend the writ of the Islamic State there. Only two days later, a new media account was created called Afnad al-Khilafah bi-Ifriqiya (Soldiers of the Caliphate in Ifriqiya) Media Foundation. While unofficial, it was foreshadowing that the Islamic State was beginning to target Tunisia, in the same way it built up excitement and signaled a relationship with Boko Haram when it established al-Urwah al-Wuthqa (The Indissoluble Link) Media on the organization's behalf two months prior to the official pledge of *baya* from Abu Bakr Shekau to al-Baghdadi.⁶

Besides the Islamic State's claim of responsibility for the Bardo National Museum attack (which the government claims KUIN was responsible for),⁷ Afnad al-Khilafah bi-Ifriqiya Media announced the Islamic State's first claim of responsibility for an insurgent attack that occurred in Jebel al-Meghila near the town of Sbeitla where they conducted an ambush killing four and injuring twelve Tunisian soldiers on April 8.⁸ Additionally, Afnad al-Khilafah bi-Ifriqiya Media has claimed responsibility on April 22 for a separate attack in Jebel Salloum, southeast of Kasserine City, leading to the death of one its fighters from Algeria, illustrating that Tunisians are not the only ones in the ranks of the Islamic State in Tunisia.⁹ Moreover, Islamic State official media disseminators are now claiming responsibility for attacks in Tunisia since May 2.¹⁰ In addition to the most recent large-scale attack on the beach resort in Sousse in late June, it is believed that the Islamic State was also involved with the Bouchoucha Barracks attack on May 25.¹¹

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's Tunisian Gambit

Although KUIN was first identified as a Tunisian cut-out for AQIM in December 2012 by then Tunisian Interior Minister Ali Larayedh, it was not until mid-January this year that the battalion publicly acknowledged itself as being associated with AQIM.¹² It once again recognized its status as a unit of AQIM following the death of its leader Khalid Shaaib (Abu Sakhr Lukman) in late March to consolidate strength since there had been false rumors KUIN might switch sides to the Islamic State. These rumors emanated in part from a statement by KUIN showing support for IS, though there was no indication of *baya*—even AQAP released a

⁵ The Islamic State, "Message to Our Brothers in Tunisia," *Wilayat Tarabulus Media Office*, April 7, 2014.

⁶ Aaron Y. Zelin, "The Clairvoyant: Boko Haram's Media and the Islamic State Connection?," *Jihadology*, January 27, 2015, <http://jihadology.net/2015/01/27/the-clairvoyant-boko-harams-media-and-the-islamic-state-connection/>.

⁷ The Islamic State, "Adopting the Bardo Museum Operation in Islamic Tunisia," *Idha'at al-Bayan*, March 19, 2015.

⁸ Jund al-Khilafa bi-Tunis, "Statement on the al-Meghila Operation," *Afnad al-Khilafah bi-Ifriqiya Media*, April 14, 2015 and the Islamic State, "Akhbar al-Yawm: al-Jumu'ah, 21 Jumadi al-Akhirah 1436 H," *Idha'at al-Bayan*, April 9, 2015.

⁹ Abu Jihad al-Jaza'iri, "On the Martyrdom of the Brother 'Abd al-Jabar Abu Zana," *Afnad al-Khilafah bi-Ifriqiya Media*, April 21, 2015 and "About the Jebel al-Salloum Operation," *Afnad al-Khilafah bi-Ifriqiya Media*, April 22, 2015.

¹⁰ The Islamic State, "Akhbar al-Yawm: al-Sabt, 13 Rajab 1436 H," *Idha'at al-Bayan*, May 2, 2015; The Islamic State, "Akhbar al-Yawm: al-Ahad, 14 Rajab 1436 H," *Idha'at al-Bayan*, May 3, 2015; and The Islamic State, "Akhbar al-Yawm: al-Sabt, 10 Ramadan 1436 H," *Idha'at al-Bayan*, June 27, 2015.

¹¹ "Tunisia: Monitoring the Presence of Security and Armored Vehicles in the Capital," *Wilayat Tunis Media Office*, June 2, 2015.

¹² Andrew Lebovich, "Confronting Tunisia's Jihadists," *Foreign Policy*, May 16, 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/05/16/confronting-tunisias-jihadists/>.

statement in support of IS in Iraq after the fall of Mosul last year, illustrating the importance of differentiating between general support and a religiously binding pledge of allegiance.

KUIN has also identified with Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia (AST) when announcing martyrs, highlighting how some of its fighters are former members. Yet for all intents and purposes, AST has become defunct with members either being arrested, going abroad to fight and train in Syria and Libya, or joining up with KUIN since it was designated by the Tunisian government as a terrorist organization in late August 2013.¹³

Since it first came into the public fore, KUIN has decided to remain obscure, though we do know it has been actively involved in a low-level insurgency with the Tunisian military for 2.5 years in Jebel Chaambi adjacent to the Algerian border and west of Kasserine. Members have also been arrested over the years for attempted attacks in different cities of Tunisia as well as for weapons smuggling. More recently, since mid-July last year, it has increased its online profile, at first through the Fajr al-Qayrawan Facebook and Twitter account and then Ifriqiya Media, a well-known nonpartisan aggregator of online jihadi releases from all Africa-based jihadi organizations. Only this past weekend did KUIN create an official media outlet for itself called al-Fatih (the conqueror). Up until then, the main content it released was showing pictures of its fighters, martyrs, training camps, and graphics with quotes from the Quran on them as well as claiming responsibility for attacks. KUIN even showed off a bunch of *ghanaim* (spoils of war) from its past operation in Hanchir Ettala.¹⁴ KUIN's last known publicly claimed attack took place in mid-June when a Tunisian National Guard officer was killed and another four were injured in Ghardimaou in Jendouba Governorate.¹⁵

Tunisian and U.S. Policy Responses

Since the elections last December, the Tunisian government has both implemented and proposed a number of new policy options to deal with the jihadi problem. Some have been problematic though and should be advised against due to the curtailing of individuals' rights. International and local human rights organizations as well as regular Tunisian citizens are also interpreting some of these measures as a returning to the status quo of the Ben Ali era, which the United States must work and urge the Tunisian government not to succumb to. Otherwise, there is a very real chance that all the progress since 2011 will be lost and Tunisia will become a "shoulda, coulda, woulda" and "what if" case instead of continuing to move toward a consolidated democracy.

Here are the various steps taken by the Tunisian state since the election:

- February 17, 2015: Tunisia's Defense Ministry Farhat Horchani announced that security along the border with Libya has been reinforced to prevent any incursion by jihadis. The army is being backed up by units from the Tunisian National Guard in an integrated operation covering the entire border. Helicopters and warplanes were also being deployed to monitor air, land, and sea in order to stop incursions from Libya.¹⁶
- April 2, 2015: Tunisia said it plans to reopen a consulate in Syria and offered to invite the Syrian ambassador back to Tunisia in part to help track, at the time, an estimated 3,000 Tunisian foreign

¹³ Aaron Y. Zelin, "Tunis Designates Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia," *al-Wasat Blog*, August 28, 2013, <https://thewasat.wordpress.com/2013/08/28/tunis-designates-ansar-al-sharia-in-tunisia/>.

¹⁴ KUIN, "Pictures of Spoils of War of the Mujahidin in the Hanchir Ettala Operation," *Ifriqiyya Media*, December 16, 2014.

¹⁵ Claimed by their official Twitter account on June 16, 2015: https://twitter.com/katibat_obn/status/610838274387628032. This account has since been taken down, but I maintain a copy of the original claim of responsibility on my computer.

¹⁶ Houda Mzioudet, "Tunisia and Algeria send military reinforcements to borders with Libya," *Libya Herald*, February 17, 2015, <http://www.libyaherald.com/2015/02/17/tunisia-and-algeria-send-military-reinforcements-to-borders-with-libya/>.

fighters in Iraq and Syria.¹⁷ When speaking to a parliamentary committee examining an anti-terror bill in mid-April, Tunisian Interior Minister Najem Gharsalli said his ministry had prevented "12,490 Tunisians from leaving Tunisian territory to travel to combat zones" in Iraq, Libya, and Syria since March 2013.¹⁸ As of last week, according to the United Nations, there have been up to 5,500 Tunisian foreign fighters in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Mali, and Yemen.¹⁹

- April 10, 2015: The government sent the "Repression of Attacks against Armed Forces" bill to the parliament. The draft law sets out five years in prison for insulting the morale of the security forces and two years for anyone who publishes information on operations. Publication of any security documents can lead to a sentence of up to 10 years in prison. Many Tunisian political parties and unions have criticized the draft security bill, saying it could harm freedom of expression and other rights. For example, the Journalist Union President Neji Bghouri stated that the "law establishes a police state and dictatorship, we cannot accept this scandal," while the leader of the Popular Front Hamma Hammami argues that "the law is a window to the return of the police state and we categorically reject it."²⁰ On May 13, 2015, a number of human rights organizations including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Carter Center, among others, advocated dropping or amending the draft bill due to many potential human rights violations if implemented.²¹
- May 13, 2015: Tunisia announced that Religious Affairs Minister Battikh Othman was creating a specialized register to keep tabs on those who run and preach at mosques in the country. The government also announced the launch of a religious re-education program in the country's prisons.²²
- June 26, 2015: The state announced that within a week it would close 80 mosques that remain outside the government's control for inciting violence.²³
- July 4, 2015: Tunisia declared a state of emergency, which gives security forces more powers and limits the right of public assembly. After the attack in late June, the government had already tightened security, deploying more than 1,400 armed officers at hotels and beaches.²⁴
- July 8, 2015: The Tunisian government announced plans to build a wall along its border with Libya in order to counter jihadis traversing the border. The wall will be about a third of the 310-mile border and will be finished by the end of the year.²⁵

Much of the focus from the American perspective has been to grant more military assistance, aid, and training to the Tunisian state. While this is certainly important, the United States must not lag in providing other types of aid that will help Tunisia continue on its path to a consolidated democracy (which I will discuss more in my recommendations below). Since the beginning of the Tunisian uprising, the United States has provided \$570

¹⁷ Tarek Amara, "Tunisia says plans to renew ties with Syria to help track fighters," *Reuters*, April 2, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/02/us-mideast-crisis-syria-tunisia-idUSKBN0MT14420150402>.

¹⁸ "Tunisia blocks more than 12,000 would-be jihadists: minister," *AFP*, April 17, 2015, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Apr-17/294878-tunisia-blocks-more-than-12000-would-be-jihadists-minister.ashx>.

¹⁹ "Almost 5,500 Tunisians in jihadist ranks: UN experts," *AFP*, July 10, 2015, <http://news.yahoo.com/almost-5-500-tunisians-jihadist-ranks-un-experts-201625340.html>.

²⁰ Tarek Amara, "Draft security law raises concerns about rights in new Tunisia," *Reuters*, April 20, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/20/tunisia-security-rights-idUSL5N0XH1CB20150420>.

²¹ Amnesty International et al., "Tunisia: Drop or Amend Security Bill," May 13, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/05/13/tunisia-drop-or-amend-security-bill>.

²² Conor Sheils, "Game Over For Tunisia's Extremist Preachers?," *Tunisia Live*, May 13, 2015, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2015/05/13/tunisia-extremist-preachers-2/>.

²³ "Tunisia government says to close 80 mosques for inciting violence, after hotel attack," *Reuters*, June 26, 2015, <http://news.yahoo.com/tunisia-government-says-close-80-mosques-inciting-violence-004824930.html>.

²⁴ "Tunisia beach attack: State of emergency declared," *BBC News*, July 4, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33394847>.

²⁵ Aditya Tejas, "Tunisia To Build Libya Border Wall After ISIS Attacks," *International Business Times*, July 8, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/tunisia-build-libya-border-wall-after-isis-attacks-1999063>.

million in aid to Tunisia, including about \$175 million for security assistance and \$80 million for democracy programs.²⁶ Here are the various steps taken by the United States since Tunisia's election:

- February 27, 2015: The United States announced that Tunisia would get eight Black Hawk helicopters for its fight against jihadis.²⁷
- April 10, 2015: Washington announced that it would increase military aid to Tunisia threefold this year and help train its troops. U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken gave no figure for military aid, which he said would rise 200 percent in 2015. Another American official claimed that last year's package was \$60 million. Additionally, Blinken said it would provide Tunisia with more equipment, weapons, and technical support, as well as training the Tunisian army in border management.²⁸
- May 14, 2015: The United States sent the Tunisian military its first batch of promised military equipment upgrades, including fifty-two Humvees and a twenty-meter patrol boat. The patrol boat is the first of four to be delivered to improve Tunisia's maritime security, joining a fleet of twenty-two other boats manufactured by the United States. The fifty-two Humvees are to improve the Tunisian army's mobility and response along its borders with Algeria and Libya.²⁹
- May 21, 2015: Following President Obama's meeting with Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi, it was announced that Tunisia will be named a "major non-NATO ally" of the United States. This designation provides it access to extra military assistance.³⁰
- June 3, 2015: The United States and Tunisia signed a loan guarantee agreement allowing Tunisia to access up to \$500 million in financing from international capital markets.³¹

Recommendations

Strengthening the Rule of Law

As alluded to above, Tunisia's draft security bill is highly controversial and has major critics inside and outside of the country. More than a decade ago, in 2003, Ben Ali passed a terrorism law that was regarded as against human rights as well. It had many loose definitions and unjustly led to many arrests that had nothing to do with terrorism. From 2003 to 2011, a number of individuals arrested were not terrorists at first, but became radicalized while in prison, in part because if one person in a given family was a suspect, then fathers, brothers, uncles, and cousins related to this individual might also be thrown into prison. These types of actions are a recipe for creating new unnecessary enemies. As we saw after the March 2011 prisoner amnesty following the creation of a transitional government, many of the individuals who had been radicalized in prison were then involved in the spreading of global jihadi ideology with Ansar al-Sharia.

²⁶ "US, Tunisia boost security ties," *AFP*, May 20, 2015, <http://news.yahoo.com/us-tunisia-boost-security-ties-193651752.html>.

²⁷ "Tunisia to get 8 Black Hawks for fight against militants," *AFP*, February 27, 2015, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/africa/2015/02/27/Tunisia-to-get-8-Black-Hawks-for-fight-against-militants-.html>.

²⁸ Tarek Amara, "U.S. to triple military aid to Tunisia," *Reuters*, April 10, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/10/us-tunisia-us-idUSKBN0N122E20150410>.

²⁹ Jennifer Ciochon, "US Delivers First Chunk of Tunisia's Anti-Terror Kit," *Tunisia Live*, May 14, 2015, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2015/05/14/us-delivers-first-chunk-of-tunisias-anti-terror-kit/>.

³⁰ Nahal Toosi, "U.S. to upgrade Tunisia's ally status," *Politico*, May 21, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/05/tunisia-us-major-non-nato-ally-118187.html>.

³¹ "United States signs \$500 million Loan Guarantee Agreement with Tunisia | U.S. Agency for International Development," *USAID*, June 3, 2015, <http://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/june-3-2014-united-states-signs-500-million-loan-guarantee-agreement-tunisia>.

Only last week, Human Rights Watch reported that since March 2015, the Tunisian government has been restricting travel for those under the age of thirty-five.³² No doubt there are security concerns, but actions such as these are quite easy to abuse, which seems to already be occurring. Therefore, if the security bill is passed, it will only lead to a repeat of what has already occurred, which would suggest the Essebsi-led government has not learned anything from the past—hardly a surprise though given that many of the leaders including Essebsi were previously part of the Ben Ali regime.

Moreover, since the uprising in 2011, there have still been a number of cases of activists and bloggers being arrested for alleged speech violations. Most recently, in March, satirist Migalo, whose real name is Wassim Lahrissi, and television host Moez Ben Gharbia were arrested for offending the president.³³ There are still laws on the books which state that an offense against the president is punishable by three years in prison. These and similar laws need to be revoked or highly reformed; they do not live up to free speech or the ideals of a country hoping to become a consolidated democracy. Following Essebsi's election last December, he wrote an op-ed in the *Washington Post* articulating his three goals for the country. Among them was "strengthen[ing] our young democracy." It is important for the United States to make sure he keeps to his words. Therefore, it is incumbent on Washington to put maximum pressure on the government to not fall into this trap. Otherwise, many in a few years will be wondering how this all went wrong and what happened to Tunisia, the so-called "darling" of the Arab uprisings.

Security Sector Reform

Many Tunisians think that nothing drastic will change unless major steps are taken to address the corruption in the Ministry of Interior (MoI). Very little has been done in terms of making reforms or purging elements from the Ben Ali era.³⁴ Further, the new minister Najem Gharsalli was a judge under Ben Ali who has been accused of deep corruption by many within civil society.³⁵ Many of the old practices of the former regime are creeping back, including within the prison system. For example, the Tunisian Organization Against Torture (OCTT) is currently investigating almost seventy torture cases from 2015. OCTT chief Mondher Cherni has warned about this "epidemic" and how it is a return to the Ben Ali police state, and about the government's "reluctance" to investigate torture claims adequately,³⁶ highlighting the MoI's impunity. Torture is an easy way to radicalize anyone—this must end, and the United States should not stand by idly and ignore this wretched trend that is rearing its head again. As a result, prison reforms have to take place; otherwise, prisons will likely continue to be an incubator and training ground for jihadism as they were from 2003 to 2011.³⁷

Moreover, many arbitrary arrests are once again occurring, even if they have no connections to jihadi networks or attacks. I personally know someone who was arrested in the past few weeks after the attack in Sousse who had nothing to do with it. Such abuses could be a source of radicalization or re-radicalization for those who

³² "Tunisia: Arbitrary Travel Restrictions," *Human Rights Watch*, July 10, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/07/10/tunisia-arbitrary-travel-restrictions>.

³³ "Tunisia arrests comedian, TV host for 'offending' president," *AFP*, March 13, 2015, <http://news.yahoo.com/tunisia-arrests-comedian-tv-host-offending-president-155125851.html>.

³⁴ Monica Marks, "Plagued by Insecurities," *Sada Journal*, March 5, 2013, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2013/03/05/plagued-by-insecurities/foa1>.

³⁵ Monica Marks, "Tunisia opts for an inclusive new government," *Monkey Cage*, February 3, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/02/03/tunisia-opts-for-an-inclusive-new-government/>.

³⁶ Zeineb Marzouk, "#Back_To_Ben_Ali: Tunisian Cops Love Torture," *Tunisia Live*, June 5, 2015, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2015/06/05/return-tunisia-police-state/>.

³⁷ Louisa Loveluck, "Planting the seeds of Tunisia's Ansar al Sharia," *Middle East Channel*, September 27, 2012, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/09/27/planting-the-seeds-of-tunisia-ansar-al-sharia/> and Aaron Y. Zelin, "Tunisia: Uncovering Ansar al-Sharia," *Think Africa Press*, October 25, 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/tunisia-uncovering-ansar-al-sharia>.

had previously quit jihadi movements in the past few years. If they continue, the pool of potentially reactivated jihadis would create an even larger problem for the state. Therefore, it is imperative that the United States works with Tunisia on professionalizing the MoI and its police forces. They need to better learn the art of intelligence gathering and, once a case starts, doing the proper paperwork for preparing a case to go to court. A major retraining and reeducation could be something the United States helps with in terms of capacity building. It is true that the FBI has already been assisting along these lines, but this type of effort will take a long time since it will require years to reverse the rot and corruption from forty-five years of authoritarian rule. Further, just like training soldiers and security forces, just because one provides training to national and local law enforcement in Tunisia does not necessarily mean it will stick or that those who receive it will utilize it, as we saw in the case of Iraqi troops withdrawing from Islamic State attacks in Mosul in June 2014.

A perfect case of this is the fact that, according to a Tunisian colleague, many police officers are seen sleeping on the job when they are allegedly supposed to be protecting and guarding the state and individuals from harm.³⁸ Moreover, there was a major delay in the deployment of more police to the scene of the terrorist attack in Sousse. The attack took place over almost 35 minutes, and the gunman was able to return to kill some of the wounded before the police arrived.³⁹ Therefore, it is crucial for there to be a sense of duty and discipline instilled within the police force for any of this to work out. Throwing money at the problem will not fix this; what is needed is concerted and patient training as well as a willingness on the part of the Tunisian government to reform these deficiencies. The key is to transform the body of the force so that it is seen as a protector, and not as a force that takes away individuals' rights or becomes involved in abuses of power.

Related to this, many courts, police stations, and police equipment were destroyed during the uprisings.⁴⁰ Therefore, instead of only providing money, it would be worthwhile if the United States funded specific rebuilding projects. That way, it would cut down on potential corruption from the government and also provide new jobs for locals since the economy remains the most important issue for the average Tunisian. This would provide more soft power for the United States since it would be specifically engaging locals, while also rebuilding capacity and allowing law enforcement and the judiciary to more efficiently get its job done as well as have a location to actually do it. Additionally, beyond rebuilding, the United States can help with new projects as well, which would push things forward even more by providing tangible benefits that the local populace can see instead of monetary promises that are not as readily visible.

Public Relations and Transparency

One of the things that the Tunisian government has had difficulty with since the uprising—an issue that has plagued all governments, including the Ennahda-led one, the technocratic one, and the Nidaa Tounes-led one—is the poor ability to properly communicate after attacks have occurred. In all high-profile cases, including the attack on the U.S. embassy, the assassinations of leftist politicians Shukri Belaid and Muhammad Brahmi, the Bardo Museum attack, and the Sousse Beach attack, the government has been slow at articulating transparently what occurred and what authorities are doing about it. If it wants to solidify its democratic bona fides, it needs to move away from the more shadowy, murky, and secretive aspects of reporting on investigations. The public has a right to know and deserves the most professional and transparent understanding of what has occurred.

³⁸ See for example:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=903699459691369&set=a.214720398589282.51744.100001539708105&type=1&pnref=story>.

³⁹ "Tunisia attack: Sousse police slow to respond - PM Essid," *BBC News*, July 4, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33387382>.

⁴⁰ Monica Marks, "Plagued by Insecurities."

Two recent examples in the aftermath of the Sousse Beach attack highlight these deficiencies. First, when Essebsi announced the reimplementation of the "State of Emergency," he said that "if similar attacks occur again, the state will collapse."⁴¹ Not only was this comment the height of irresponsibility, it was also quite amateurish. Instead of reassuring the public, he was using fear as well as essentially egging on jihadis to conduct another attack to test Essebsi's theory. Moreover, on the same day, the MoI spokesman explained that it did not want to blame the attack in Sousse on the Islamic State because advertising their involvement would radicalize the public.⁴² Instead it blamed AST, which has more or less been defunct for a year now—this in the face of evidence that the Islamic State conducted the attack while providing pictorial proof that the perpetrator had been with them as well. Similarly, when the attack on Bardo occurred, the government blamed KUIN, even though the Islamic State claimed responsibility and provided the names of those involved. This illustrates a major public relations and transparency gap as well as lack of trust in the public to remain vigilant and resilient. The United States can provide advice on how to better professionalize the government's public persona and ability to articulate properly to the public.

Conclusion

Beyond reforming issues related to the security front, everyone is well aware that Tunisia needs serious economic reforms that affect the entire country and not just those on the coasts. Removing the red tape for starting a business or allowing foreign companies to hire and invest, undertaking infrastructure projects in the interior, and building up the tourism industry in the interior are a few things that could be done. The reality is, at the end of the day, most Tunisian citizens just want to support their family and help their children grow up in a normal environment, live a relatively easy life, and be able to travel within their country without feeling insecure. Not all is lost, and the Tunisian government can right this ship, but it needs to do a lot more, and not fall back on old habits from the Ben Ali era, which have already proven failures. It also needs to have a vision that goes beyond rhetoric. It needs to inspire the younger generation; otherwise individuals who have connections or are well off will move to Germany, France, and elsewhere for better opportunities, while those that might not have those opportunities could be swayed more easily into joining the jihadis, who could provide guidance and a vision even if the individual does not necessarily agree with the ideology from the beginning. The United States should be there to lend a helping hand based off our own experiences and best practices with transitioning countries in Asia, South America, and Eastern Europe. The Tunisian people deserve an honest and good ally; the United States can be that. Let's help the Tunisian people complete their dream that started more than four years ago—the hope remains, and America can provide guidance and assistance.

⁴¹ Conor McCormick-Cavanagh, "Tunisia's president warns of state collapse if another attack takes place," *Middle East Eye*, July 4, 2015, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/tunisia-president-warns-state-collapse-if-another-attack-takes-place-677003900>.

⁴² "Masu'ul hukumi: ansar al-sharia wara' hujum sussah al-irhabi," *Jawhara FM*, July 4, 2015, <http://www.jawharafm.net/ar/article/%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A4%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%8A/105/32282>.