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TUNISIAN FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

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Tunisia should really open its embassy in Raqqa, not Damascus. That's where its people are.

—ABU KHALED, AN ISLAMIC STATE SPY[1]

THE PAST FEW YEARS have seen rising interest in foreign fighting as a general phenomenon and in fighters joining jihadist groups in particular. Tunisians figure disproportionately among the foreign jihadist cohort, yet their ubiquity is somewhat confounding. Why Tunisians? This study aims to bring clarity to this question by examining Tunisia's foreign fighter networks mobilized to Syria and Iraq since 2011, when insurgencies shook those two countries amid the broader Arab Spring uprisings.

Along with seeking to determine what motivated these individuals, it endeavors to reconcile estimated numbers of Tunisians who actually traveled, who were killed in theater, and who returned home. The findings are based on a wide range of sources in multiple languages as well as data sets created by the author since 2011. Another way of framing the discussion will center on Tunisians who participated in the jihad following the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. Perhaps most important, this paper will explore the roles, actions, and leadership positions held by Tunisians in various groups including Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State, among others. Finally, it will examine the returnees to Tunisia and the reasons they decided to come home. Altogether, the discussion is aimed at offering a holistic explanation of the broader Tunisian foreign fighting phenomenon in Iraq and Syria, thereby reducing confusion and offering a path forward for policymakers.

Evolution of Tunisian Participation in the Iraq Jihad

Although the involvement of Tunisians in foreign jihad campaigns predates the 2003 Iraq war, that conflict inspired a new generation of recruits whose effects lasted into the aftermath of the Tunisian revolution. These individuals fought in groups such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (JTWJ) and its successor organizations al-Qaeda in the Land of Two Rivers (AQI), Majlis Shura al-Mujahedin (MSM), and the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). Later imprisoned in Tunisia either through rendition from Syria or arrest upon their return, virtually all were released in the prisoner amnesties following the Tunisian revolution in early 2011. Their networks included Tunisians recruited via European networks as well as those closer to home in Algeria and Tunisia.

KEY POINTS

- Historical Tunisian logistical and facilitation networks for the Iraqi jihad provided easy connections for the Syrian jihad.
- Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia helped incubate and sanction foreign fighting abroad.
- The Tunisian government did not proactively seek to prevent individuals from traveling abroad to fight until 2014.
- In the recent jihad, in both Syria and Iraq, fewer Tunisians were involved than observers generally assume (2,900 versus around 6,000); still, a grand total of some 30,000 either participated or were mobilized but never made it to the conflict zone.
- Tunisia's foreign fighter mobilization was a national phenomenon and not specific to a particular city or region.
- Although Tunisian foreign fighters at first joined Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), most ended up joining the Islamic State (IS) once it openly announced its presence in Syria in April 2013.
- Among the many motivations and structural reasons for Tunisians traveling to Iraq and Syria were altruism, anti-colonialism, bandwagon effect, disillusionment with Tunisian post-revolution politics, pursuit of economic opportunity, establishment of the Caliphate, impressionability, open conditions, personal tragedy, prison radicalization, recidivism, desire for redemption, sense of religious void, and sectarianism.
- Tunisian women played an important role in the development of the al-Khansa Brigade, an IS women's fighting group.
- Tunisian men and women alike were prominent in the administration of the IS caliphate as well as holding senior roles in JN.
- According to the Rescue Association of Tunisians Trapped Abroad, 970 Tunisians have returned home from Iraq and Syria.[2]
- The future of the Tunisian jihadist movement is now brewing in the country's prison system.

Even before the Iraq war, Tunisians demonstrated an eagerness to go to the country, attracted by the new base established by Zarqawi in the Kurdistan Region in 2002. That fall, a half-year before the U.S. invasion, the first known foreign fighters to assemble at Zarqawi's Kurdistan base, excepting those who had arrived from their prior safe haven in Afghanistan, consisted of eight Tunisians and three Iraqis, all of whom were residents of Marseilles.[3] Additionally, in terms of post-revolution relevance, Hassan Ben Brik, who would become Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia's (AST's) head of *dawa* after 2011, traveled to join JTWJ in 2003. Like many others, he did not actually make it into Iraq, but rather took charge of a safe house in Syria, where individuals were vetted before proceeding to Iraq.[4] Brik was among those who would be arrested in Syria and sent to prison back in Tunisia.

STATISTICS ON TUNISIANS WHO FOUGHT IN IRAQ

As the conflict in Iraq simmered, more and more Tunisians signed up for roles within Zarqawi's network. Some analysts began to quantify casualties: Evan Kohlmann found that between March 2003 and June 2005, 1.7 percent of the foreign fighters killed in Iraq were Tunisian, while Reuven Paz calculated that Tunisians constituted 1.3 percent of foreign fighters killed between January and March 2005.[5] Furthermore, in June 2005, the U.S. military disclosed that Tunisians were among the top ten foreign nationalities fighting in what was then AQI.[6] And Tunisians were the eighth most (or 3.2%) detained foreign national group by coalition forces between April and October 2005. As of April 7, 2008, Tunisians likewise made up 3.2 percent of foreign fighters held at the infamous Camp Bucca, a U.S. military detention facility in southern Iraq.[7]

Most notably, Tunisians showed up in large numbers in the so-called Sinjar Records, which the U.S. military recovered in an October 2007 raid on an ISI compound. The records documented foreign fighters who joined MSM/ISI between August 2006 and August 2007. Tunisians were the seventh highest foreign fighter group to have passed through Syria on the way to Iraq.[8] In per-capita terms, Tunisians were the third most represented group, behind only Libyans and Saudis.[9] The most common routes traveled by Tunisians to Iraq were Turkey–Syria, Germany–Turkey–Syria, Saudi Arabia–Syria, and Libya–Syria.[10] Of the thirty-one Tunisians found in the Sinjar Records, seventeen noted hometown, a finding that does not allow for significant statistical deductions. Therefore, instead of setting out those numbers and extrapolating more than is statistically significant, one might simply note that Tunisians came from Ariana, Ben Arous, Bizerte, Gabes, Mateur, Nabeul, Tunis, and Zarzouna.

ROLES

Many of the Tunisians who joined JTWJ/AQI/MSM/ISI were facilitators or recruiters, but others were fighters, suicide bombers, and even leaders. The facilitator/recruiter role provides an important insight into why so many Tunisians have fought in Syria since 2011. In particular, the highly connected nature of their Tunisian brethren allowed for easier access to the networks that provide logistics for those wanting to fight. Furthermore, because the networks facilitated travel through Turkey and Syria to Iraq between 2002 and 2010, a knowledge base was already in position when—starting in mid-2011 and in earnest by 2012—jihadists began to exploit events in Syria.

The case of Abu Umar al-Tunisi is instructive. His name appears repeatedly in the Sinjar Records as a major facilitator helping direct individuals through Syria into Iraq.[11] This suggests he was a key middleman between the recruitment and logistics networks in the Arab world and Western Europe, on one side, and the operatives on the ground inside Iraq, on the other. It was later learned that Tunisi's real name was Tariq bin al-Tahar bin al-Falih al-Awni al-Harzi, and that he was still recruiting and facilitating the travel of foreign fighters to the jihadist group in 2013, after its reemergence as the Islamic State.[12] What's most noteworthy, though, in terms of relevance to Tunisia's post-revolution scene is that Tariq's brother Ali bin al-Tahar bin al-Falih al-Awni al-Harzi—who had fought in Iraq during the previous decade—belonged to AST, participated in the 2012 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, and helped train individuals in Libya to fight in Syria. Ali would eventually join his brother in Iraq and Syria sometime in late 2013.[13] This is but one case of a Tunisian involved in ISI's recruitment, facilitation, and logistics network, allowing the conclusion of continuity between the networks assisting foreign fighters going to Iraq in 2002–10 and to Syria post-2011.

Moreover, because Tunisians played key roles in recruitment, facilitation, and logistics for ISI, the opening up of Tunisia following the revolution and AST's ability to operate without governmental harassment—while jihad-

ists enjoyed a safe haven next door in Libya—allowed Tunisians a larger role in the post-2011 jihadist mobilization than they might have had otherwise. One of the first Tunisian-related jihadist incidents during this period occurred January 25, 2011, when authorities in Egypt arrested a group of Tunisians and Libyans attempting to fight in Iraq with ISI.[14] Months later, on December 14, 2011, Yusuf Nur al-Din became one of the first post-revolution Tunisians killed abroad as a foreign fighter, during a raid by Iraqi security forces on the Syrian border.[15] As for the larger claim that Tunisians in the Syrian jihad had prior fighting experience, this is borne out by the author's data archive on killed Tunisian foreign fighters in Syria as well as Islamic State border documents in Syria (detailed later). According to these materials, Tunisians had previously fought in Libya (11), Afghanistan (4), Iraq (3), Mali (3), the Gaza Strip (1), and the Sinai Peninsula (1). These numbers are likely depressed since they come from open sources, with yet-to-be-discovered IS documents sure to augment the count.

These incidents and information suggest that irrespective of Tunisia's 2011 revolution, Tunisians likely would have continued their involvement in foreign fighting and jihadism. But as it happened, conditions in Tunisia, fertile regional opportunities for foreign fighting, and the revolutions in Libya and Syria attracted especially high numbers of recruits.

AST Sanctioning and Incubation of Foreign Fighting

Most researchers recognize that jihadist networks and groups began recruiting individuals for the Syrian jihad in 2012, but as already noted, recruitment to fight in Iraq had been ongoing, making for an underappreciated dynamic. As a result, recruits (and recruiters) could easily adjust from a focus on ISI in Iraq to its front group in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra. And because the foreign jihadist route to Iraq usually traveled through Syria, the journey entailed one less leg, with that much less risk. Yet it still allowed the same exact recruitment, facilitation, and logistics networks to take advantage of the historic opportunity presented by Syria and the vicious response by President Bashar al-Assad to his country's initially peaceful uprising.

Relatedly, in 2011, AST leader Abu Iyad al-Tunisi became an early advocate of joining with ISI. In supporting this travel to the east, he was on the vanguard of world jihadist leaders. Abu Iyad, in a December 2011 interview, noted that "if you come to me and say 'I want to go to Iraq,' I will not prevent you, because if I do I will be sinful because you want to realize one of the obligations, which is supporting Muslims and fighting the enemies of our religion."[16] This excitement for jihad and Tunisians' involvement in it did not wane over time. In February 2013, Abu Iyad exclaimed in an interview with Mosaique FM journalist Nasr al-Din bin Hadid that "Tunisians can be found everywhere in the land of jihad. The ways of going are easy and we don't stop our people from leaving."[17] It is no surprise, then, that AST's official Facebook page would shift focus to Syria as well and post content in support of groups like JN and later ISI's successor, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). AST's official media outlet released a video praising the jihad as a gift to JN leader Abu Muhammad al-Julani.[18] Likewise, AST posted pictures from children of members who had written notes congratulating JN on its battlefield successes.[19] Finally, when AST members died fighting in the Syrian jihad, the group's official Facebook page would glamorize their martyrdom.[20]

Furthermore, AST members like Bilal Chaouachi served as a public face for jihad promotion in Syria. Chaouachi did this through his rhetoric on the streets of Tunisia, in interviews with foreign journalists, and on Tunisian television debates.[21] He would be arrested for involvement in the September 2012 U.S. embassy attack in Tunis and, after his release from prison, became a sharia official for IS in Syria.[22] In June 2012, he had told the Associated Press that it was a duty to support jihad in Syria.[23] Chaouachi would eventually urge his fellow Tunisians and others to join IS after the announcement of the caliphate in late June 2014: "I call all Muslims in the world to give *baya* to the Amir al-Mouminin, Caliph al-Qurayshi Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi."[24]

Tunisians in the Syrian theater who had already heeded the call also encouraged Tunisians at home to carry out jihad in Syria. For example, in July 2013, Abu Abdullah al-Tunisi, a member of the foreign-fighter-dominated group Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar,[25] advised "the Muslim youth in general and the youth of Tunisia in particular to join the fight" and called on Muslim "mothers and sisters" to "incite the youth for jihad and deployment."[26]

The Tunisian government crackdown on AST in spring 2013 and the group's eventual designation as a terrorist organization in August 2013, as well as the rise of the Islamic State starting in April 2013, helped

accelerate the outflow of jihadists to Syria, and IS ranks in particular. For instance, according to Islamic State border documents, Abu Yusuf al-Tunisi, Abu Mujahid al-Tunisi, and Abu Mariya al-Hammamati worked in AST's media office prior to joining IS.

The next section looks at the numbers and their evolution over time. Even as tracking foreign fighters cannot be done with 100 percent scientific accuracy, the data to follow will provide some clarity on how many Tunisian foreign fighters mobilized, considering various types of data in the process.

THE NUMBERS

In 2011, before jihadist groups officially announced their presence in Syria, foreign fighters began mobilizing to Syria with the nonjihadist Free Syrian Army. But after Jabhat al-Nusra formally released its first video in January 2012, reports of jihadist involvement by foreign fighters rose dramatically both in the press and within the jihadist movement. This would continue until the flow began waning in 2015–16. As for the announcement of foreign fighter martyrs, this began in February 2012, with the posting of the first recorded martyrdom notice on the jihadist forum Shamukh al-Islam. This announcement was long delayed, with the fighter in question, a Kuwaiti named Hussam al-Mutayri, having died August 29, 2011, while fighting with the FSA in Damascus.[27] Besides the forums, a jihadist-run Facebook page and website called al-Ghuraba (the strangers) began releasing information on foreign fighters killed in Syria. This is when the presence of Tunisians first became widely known. On April 19, 2012, the death of two Tunisians from Ben Gardane, Hussein Mars and Bulababah Buklash, was announced as having occurred in Idlib and Homs, respectively, marking the first known cases of Tunisians dying in the Syrian war.[28]

Over the next five to six years, some 30,000 Tunisians attempted to go to Iraq and Syria, with thousands arriving successfully, hundreds getting killed, and hundreds eventually returning to Tunisia (see Table 1). This means that while 2,900 made it to their desired destination, from the start of the mobilization until about April 2017, the Tunisian government prevented another 27,000 from going. Yet even this figure does not necessarily account for prisoners who themselves would have liked to fight, likely carrying the tally above 30,000. As this paper explores, this is why the potential for future Tunisian jihadist resurgences so worries Tunis and Western capitals.

TABLE 1 *Mobilization of Tunisian fighters to Iraq and Syria.*

DATE	STOPPED	TOTAL	RETURNED	KILLED
04-2012		N/A		
12-2012		100		37
03-2013		300		120
05-2013		800	150	
09-2013	6,000			269
04-2014	8,000	1,800		360
06-2014		2,400		389
07-2014	8,800			
10-2014	9,000	2,560		438
11-2015			300	
02-2016	15,000			508
03-2016			700	
04-2016	16,000			
12-2016		2,900	800	531
04-2017	27,000			
03-2018			970	552

Before telling the story of Tunisians involved in this unprecedented mobilization, which eclipsed the anti-Soviet Afghan jihad of the 1980s, this section will look more closely at the data on Tunisia's foreign fighter mobilization, based on tens of thousands of documents in multiple languages.[29] Thanks to the proliferation of jihadist primary sources on social media and intensive reporting on the war, unparalleled amounts of information have been released on these foreign fighters, including on Tunisian-origin residents of Europe and groups joined by fighters at large, among other areas.

As noted earlier, some observers have estimated Tunisian foreign fighter activity in Iraq and Syria closer to 6,000, but analysis shows that this higher figure just doesn't add up. Even the Tunisian government has never claimed such a number, and organizations such as the Soufan Group have lowered their estimates into the range suggested here.[30]

Most Tunisians who mobilized to join groups in Iraq and Syria did so between March 2013 and June 2014. This date range is perhaps surprising given that it predated the announcement of the IS caliphate. A number of factors explain the surge in this period—and not later:

- The heightening showdown between AST and the Tunisian government in spring 2013, prompting many Tunisian jihadists to seek to fulfill their aspirations in Iraq and Syria.
- The April 2013 announcement of ISIS (as it was then known) operations in Syria, which was just as motivating for recruitment as the later caliphate declaration. After the 2013 news, most Tunisians formerly with JN switched to ISIS.
- The as-yet-unconsolidated efforts by the Tunisian government to prevent prospective jihadists from leaving the country. These efforts intensified only later.
- The rise of the Libyan theater, where by spring and summer of 2014, IS was already sending Tunisian operatives to build up its infrastructure, ahead of its official November 2014 declaration extending its writ beyond Iraq and Syria to outlying "provinces." The jihad in Libya attracted many Tunisian fighters, given its proximity to Tunisia—providing yet another explanation for the peak of foreign fighters prior to the creation of the caliphate.

Likewise, most publicly recorded Tunisian deaths in Iraq and Syria—based on both internal jihadist releases and press reporting in Arabic, English, and French—occurred by September 2014, the start of the U.S.-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS (as known in its later iteration). By the next month, October 2014, when Operation Inherent Resolve was formalized, an estimated 438 Tunisians had been killed of the 552 to die over the entire period ending in 2016. The relatively low overall death count for Tunisians may owe to their high representation in administrative roles, both before and after the announcement of the caliphate. Further, eventual territorial setbacks for the jihadist group in late 2015 and early 2016 drove higher numbers of Tunisian recruits home. By March 2018, according to the Tunisian government, almost a thousand had returned. Additionally, the Rescue Association of Tunisians Trapped Abroad (RATTA) believes 400–500 Tunisians have returned undetected, mainly via the Libyan border.[31] Therefore, of those 2,900 Tunisians to make it to Iraq or Syria, the identities of 1,522 are known, assuming the earlier-noted 970 returned and 552 dead. It is likely that hundreds among the remaining 1,378 moved on to the Libyan battlefield between spring 2014 and December 2016, when IS was operating there, with many hundreds more remaining in Iraq or Syria with IS and, to a lesser extent, al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups active in northwest Syria.

Tunisian-origin fighters from Europe figure much less prominently in open sources than native-born ones, as shown in Table 2. This is in part because European nations do not necessarily classify such individuals by ethnicity or dual nationality. Nor does the local press automatically mention an individual's country of origin. The grand total of these Tunisian-origin fighters is about thirty, hailing from six countries, with France, Italy, and Germany best represented. Of these, the French mobilization was the largest in duration and number. This likely can be traced to the legacy of Boubaker al-Hakim, a French-Tunisian jihadist who belonged to Zarqawi's Iraq network in 2003 and to AST following the Tunisian revolution. Hakim had historical ties to French jihadist networks as well as a senior leadership role within IS after he returned to Syria in 2013. But the flow from France ended as a result of IS territorial setbacks and Hakim's death by a U.S. drone in late November 2016. By way of comparison, fewer Tunisian-origin Europeans went to Iraq and Syria than the number (39) who went to Afghanistan during the period between the end of the Soviet occupation and 9/11 (1990–2001); but the figure exceeded that mobilized to Iraq during the 2002–11 period (20).

TABLE 2 *Mobilization of Europe-based Tunisians to Iraq and Syria.*

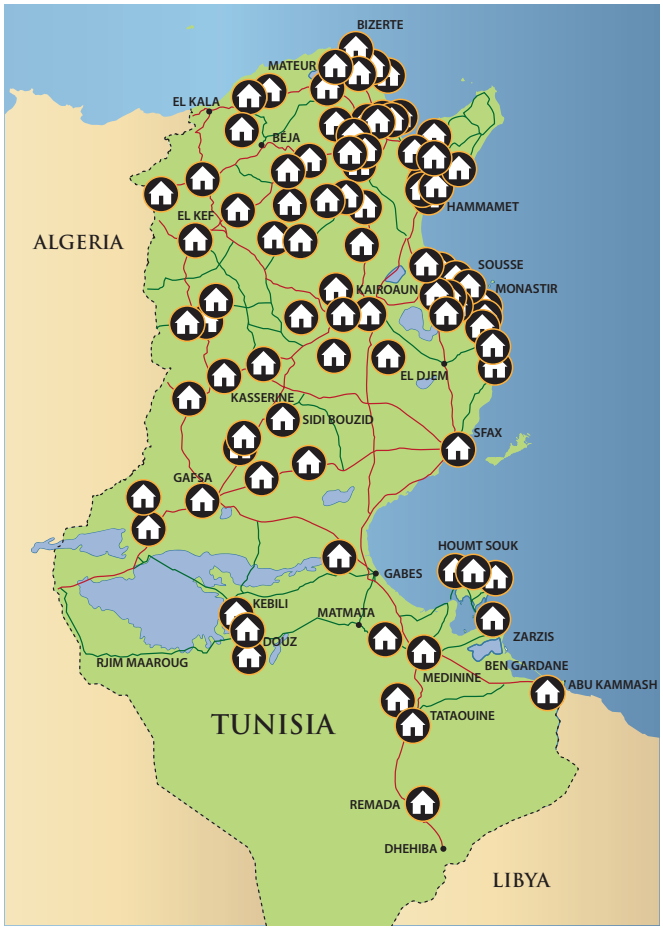
COUNTRY	NUMBER	YEARS
France	11	2012–16
Italy	7	2012–15
Germany	6	2013–15
Sweden	3	2012–14
Denmark	2	2013
Belgium	1	2013

SOURCE Based on Jytte Klausen, Western Jihadism Project database, Brandeis Univ., http://www.brandeis.edu/klausen-jihadism/.

Based on leaked IS border control documents,[32] which provide a plethora of information on crossers, Tunisians came from these locales, besides Tunisia, prior to joining IS: France (16), Germany (4), Denmark (1), Belgium (1), and Sweden (1), as well as Austria (1) and Britain (1). Other Tunisian-origin fighters had lived in Libya (2), Saudi Arabia (2), Afghanistan (1), Pakistan (1), Bahrain (1), and Chechnya (1). Unsurprisingly, the two Tunisians based in Afghanistan and Pakistan had been fighting in those countries' insurgencies before going to Syria.

These IS border documents are extremely useful in garnering details on the individuals who joined the group. For example, in a recent report, David Sterman and Nate Rosenblatt examine the socioeconomic backgrounds of individuals based on their city/town of origin, educational background, and prior jobs.[33] Still, not all news organizations and researchers appear to be working from the full data set provided by the border documents, based on a look at the distillation by Sterman and Rosenblatt, which is notably transparent about its information sources relative to other studies. For instance, when stripping out the duplicates and data on Tunisians living abroad, the author's numbers show 639 Tunisians in the IS border control documents (see Map 1 and the appendix for a breakdown by governorate and city), versus 589 in the Sterman and Rosenblatt report. When broken down by governorate, Sterman and Rosenblatt offer more data for some governorates (Tunis, Sousse, Sidi Bouzid, al-Qayrawan, Gabes, Sfax, and Jendouba), while this author's data set contains more information for others (Bizerte, Ariana, Kasserine, Medenine, Gafsa, Manouba, Mahdia, Kebili, Ben Arous, Monastir, Tataouine, Nabeul, Siliana, Zaghouan, Kef, and Beja). All in all, anyone looking at such information should recognize that different authors (and their publications) draw from different parts of the data set. Therefore, no particular source should be taken as gospel. Still, the large amounts of data available allow for an excellent snapshot of trends.

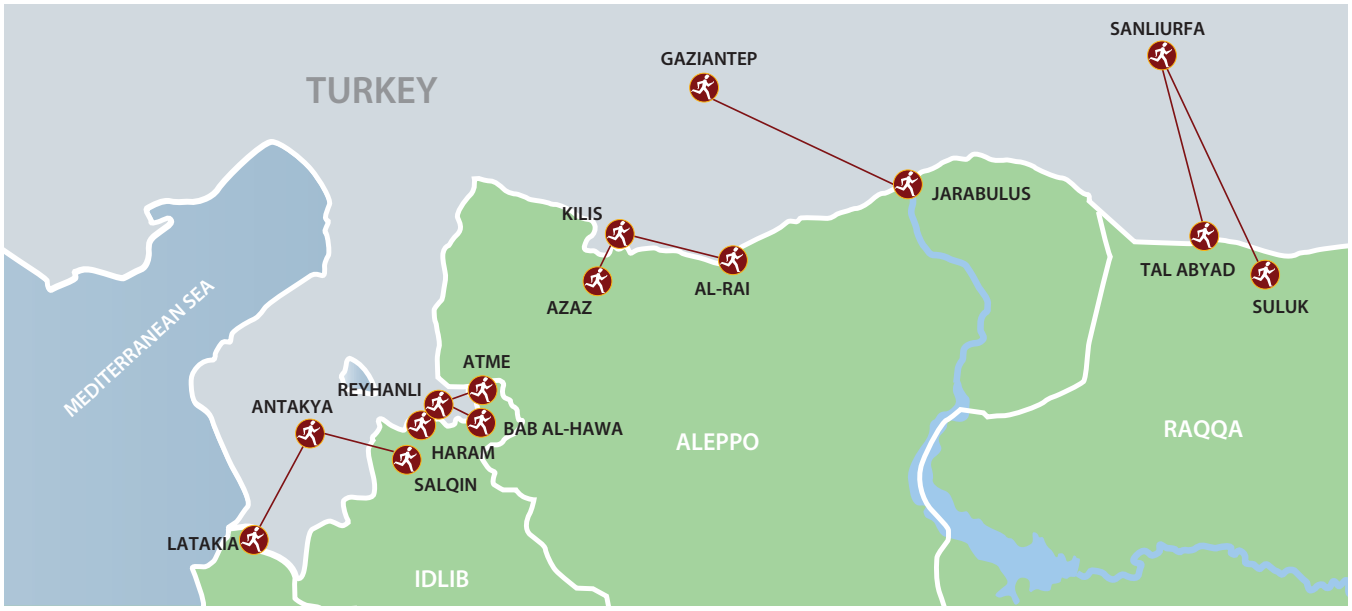
Keeping in mind these imperfections, the data is especially useful as it relates to facilitation networks. The information in the IS border documents helps elucidate where and how Tunisians moved from Turkey into Syria (see Map 2). Particularly interesting is the revelation that the IS infrastructure spanned both the Turkish and Syrian sides of the border, with Tunisians checked on both. Thus, while IS did not control or claim territory in Turkey, it did man a vital parastatal point of



MAP 1 *Origin of Tunisian fighters per IS border documents.* CLICK ON MAP TO ZOOM IN.

operations leading fighters to Syria. On the Turkish side were five main stops for Tunisians and other prospective fighters: Antakya, Reyhanli, Kilis, Gaziantep, and Urfa. Most Tunisians were based in Urfa before passing into Syria, with the largest check-ins occurring in Tal Abyad (204), followed by Reyhanli–Atme (149) and Kilis–Azaz (122).

In addition to these specific cities, some files note the individuals who facilitated border crossings, a task that differs from recommending the individual and giving IS assurance (*tazkiya*) of his legitimacy. Along with other nationalities, nine Tunisians were listed as holding this facilitation role: Abu Umar al-Tunisi, Abu Muhammad al-Tunisi, Abu al-Abbas al-Tunisi, Abu Ubaydah al-Tunisi, Abu Dujanah al-Tunisi, Abu Said al-Tunisi, Abu Basir al-Tunisi, Abu Zaid al-Tunisi, and Abu Hamzah al-Tunisi. Although these are noms de guerre and therefore difficult to link with actual individuals, the available evidence ties Abu Umar with Tariq al-Harzi, as mentioned earlier. It is also possible, though unconfirmed since a common *kunya* (nickname), that the Abu Muhammad



MAP 2 *Tunisian points of entry into Syria from Turkey.*
CLICK ON MAP TO ZOOM IN.

al-Tunisi listed here helped with facilitation between Syria and Iraq during the last decade, when an individual so named provided access to foreign fighters from France.[34] In any case, this material illustrates that a number of Tunisians took part in border facilitation networks between Turkey and Syria when IS was at its peak.

COUNTING THE DEAD

Of the 552 recorded Tunisian deaths in Iraq and Syria since 2012, information on 446 came from internal jihadist announcements, with the other 106 sourced from press reports. Breaking these numbers down further, within the jihadist announcements, 343 were of Tunisians who died in Syria and 103 in Iraq. Announcements on those killed in Iraq were released exclusively by the Islamic State and its predecessor groups ISI and ISIS and not any other organization. Because IS does not normally release information on these individuals, unless they are granted a martyr biography in the weekly *al-Naba* newsletter—a distinction usually reserved for senior leaders—very little is known about who they are and where they came from beyond the possible location killed. Based on the system of "provinces" established by IS, Tunisians in Iraq died in ten of these provinces, with the location of five deaths remaining unknown. The most deaths occurred in Anbar (32), with others relatively evenly distributed among Nineveh (14), Diyala (13), Shamal Baghdad (13), and Salah al-Din (11) and smaller numbers in Baghdad (5), al-Janoub (3), Falluja (2), al-Jazirah (2), and Dijlah (1).

IS did note that one Tunisian, Abu Yassin al-Tunisi, who was killed August 9, 2016, in Nineveh province, was a member of its media apparatus.[35] Beyond IS itself, some media organizations did report on a few of these individuals. Perhaps most notable is the case of Abu Ayub al-Nurwiji, a Tunisian who had previously lived in Oslo, Norway, and whose real name was Jamel Mahmoud. After being killed July 27, 2014, in Shamal Baghdad province, Abu Ayub was dubbed by the Norwegian press as "Norway's first suicide bomber."[36] Another case is that of Imad bin Abdul-Razzaq bin Salah (aka Abu Abdullah al-Tunisi, Abu Umar al-Tunisi, Abu Umar al-Faransi), who was killed in Mosul on March 14, 2017.[37] Born in 1971 and originally from Sfax, bin Salah worked as a mechanical engineer at a car company in France before returning to Tunisia after the 2011 revolution. Little detail is available on how he got involved in the jihadist movement, but on March 21, 2013, he was arrested in Nasr City in Cairo for possessing fake passports and helping facilitate the travel of individuals to fight in Syria.[38] This was for the same network mentioned earlier, when a group of Libyans and Tunisians was arrested in January 2011 attempting to join ISI in Iraq. Bin Salah would be deported back to Tunisia a week later and be questioned by Tunisia's border police but released for alleged lack of evidence.[39] He would eventually make his way to IS territory in July 2014.[40]

Information on Tunisians who died in Syria is far

more abundant, especially before the IS ascendance and the group's embargo on specific information about deaths. Of the 343 martyrdom notices in Syria, 243 (71%) noted the individual's location of death, 199 (58%) stated the group to which the individual belonged (see Table 3), and 134 (39%) provided the individual's city of origin. Therefore, the data has varied strength as to whether it can be generalized.

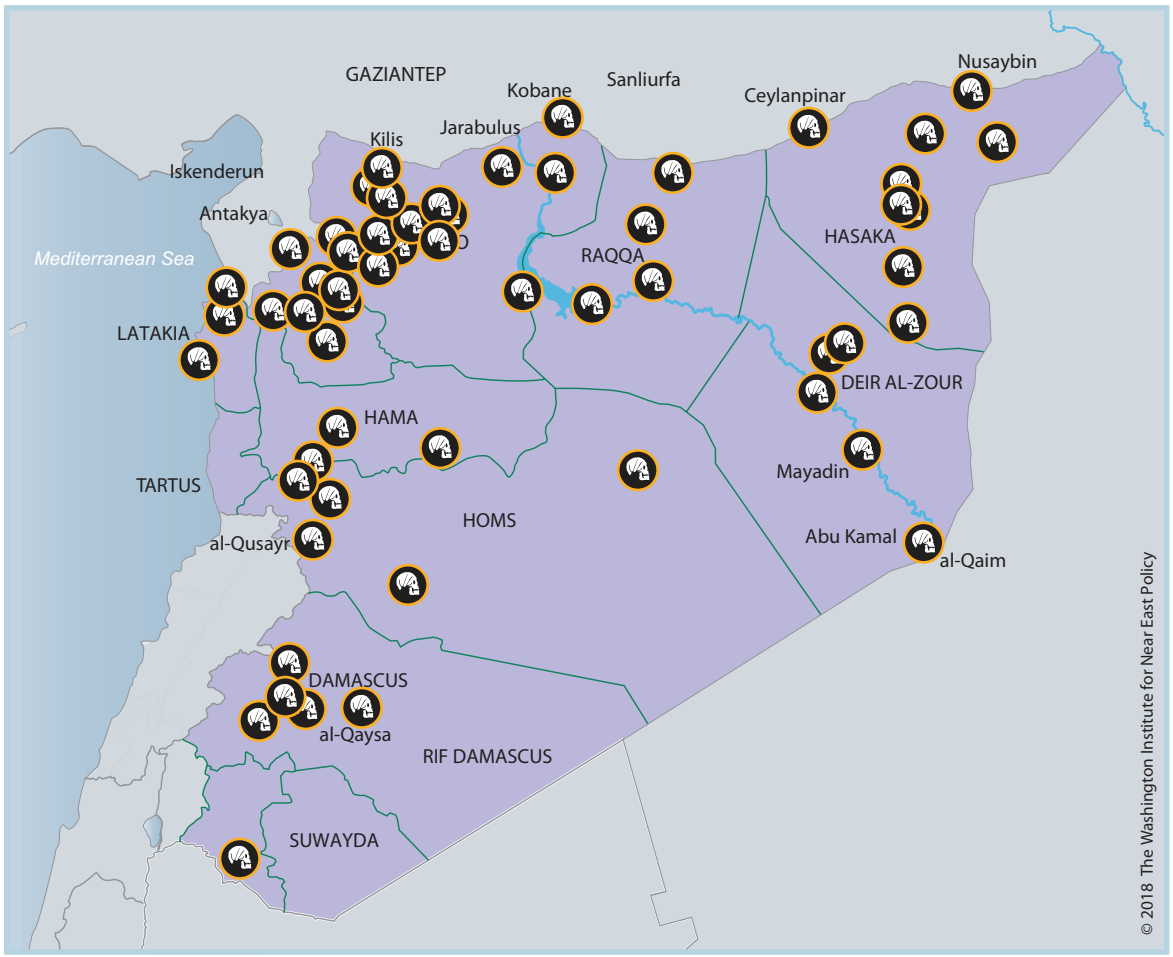
Unsurprisingly, most Tunisian fighters in Syria died in Aleppo governorate, where some of the fiercest fighting against the Assad regime has occurred. In particular, many Tunisians died in the battle for Kobane, when IS endured its first defeat after the global coalition began assisting the Kurds in northern Syria. Furthermore, areas where IS has been strong (Deir al-Zour, Raqqa, Homs, and Hasaka governorates) are all represented relatively well (see Map 3). But the numbers further illustrate that many Tunisians, by the time the battles in those provinces had accelerated, likely had moved on to Libya or returned home, since those casualties pale in comparison to Aleppo ones. Although Latakia has seen less fighting than most governorates during the war, a military campaign called "Cleansing the Coast"—aimed particularly at ethnically cleansing Alawite villages around Latakia—led to many Tunisian deaths among both IS and JN ranks. The deaths in Idlib governorate highlight more of an association with JN, its successor groups, and its allies since they have controlled this territory since spring 2015.

Tunisians, however, have died fighting with IS (and associated groups) far more than with any other bloc, including JN. As noted earlier, many Tunisian fighters defected to the former when it announced its presence in Syria in April 2013. This also helps explain the absence of substantial Tunisian deaths in JN's successor groups Jabhat Fatah al-Sham and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. Many deaths with the al-Qaeda affiliate predated the ISIS announcement.

As displayed in Map 4, deceased fighters in Syria represent nineteen of Tunisia's twenty-four governorates. The five for which deaths have not been recorded are Beja, Gafsa, Siliana, Tozeur, and Zaghouan, among the eight least populous in the country, none with a significant history of jihadist or foreign fighter participation. Still, overall only 39 percent of the Tunisians reportedly killed mentioned their location of origin. And IS border control documents indicate Tunisians joined IS from all five of those governorates, except Tozeur, which itself appears to have been touched by jihadist activism. For instance, on February 23–25, 2013, AST conducted an instructional session on *al-ruqyah al-sharia* (Islamic exorcism, or ridding oneself of jinni [spirits]) led by Khalifa Qarawi at the al-Rahmah mosque in Nefta, an oasis town.[41] Moreover, in mid-April 2016, the Tunisian government arrested a returned Tunisian foreign fighter from Tozeur who had fought in both Syria and Libya.[42] More recently still, in late May 2018, Tunisian security officials arrested a women in Tozeur for communicating via social media with terrorist elements abroad and possessing jihadist videos on her computer.[43] These examples illustrate the importance of triangulating with numerous sources, rather than focusing on just one, to try to achieve a complete picture of the phenomenon.

TABLE 3 *Tunisian FF deaths, by group.*

ISLAMIC STATE	**140**
Islamic State (name after June 2014)	82
Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham	52
Katibat al-Battar al-Libiya	6
HAYAT TAHRIR AL-SHAM	**42**
Jabhat al-Nusra	34
Jabhat Fatah al-Sham	7
Hayat Tahrir al-Sham	1
OTHER GROUPS	**17**
Jaish Muhammad in Bilad al-Sham	3
Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyah	2
Jamaat Ansar al-Islam	2
Katibat Suqur al-Izz	2
Katibat al-Muhajirin	2
Al-Fatihun	1
Jaish al-Muhajirin wal-Ansar	1
Katibat al-Hamzah bin Abdul Mutalib	1
Katibat al-Khadra	1
Liwa al-Muhajirin wal-Ansar	1
Liwa al-Mutah	1



MAP 3 *Location of Tunisian foreign fighter deaths in Syria.*
CLICK ON MAP TO ZOOM IN.

As detailed in the appendix, deaths fit an expected pattern. For instance, Greater Tunis, which encompasses the Tunis, Ariana, Manouba, and Ben Arous governorates, was home to the largest grouping of individuals to die in Syria. These are followed by other areas of rich recruitment such as the Bizerte, Sidi Bouzid, Sousse, Medenine (Ben Gardane), and al-Qayrawan governorates. Similarly, less populous governorates like Kebili and Tataouine have a greater relative representation. As a comparative note, a former study by this author noted that "for the foreign fighter mobilization to Libya, the largest numbers have come from the traditional recruitment hotspots of Ben Gardane, Bizerte, and Tunis."[44] The paper also highlighted the town of Remada, in Tataouine governorate, for its outsize mobilization of residents to Libya.

As the next section shows, a qualitative approach complements the statistical one, casting interesting light on the Tunisian foreign fighter phenomenon.

Motivations for Mobilizing to Syria

The explanations behind the Tunisian mobilization to Syria are complex and multi-causal. Nor was successful recruitment restricted to one geographical location or clustered in rural or urban locales. Mohamed Iqbal Ben Rejeb, president of the Rescue Association of Tunisians Trapped Abroad, has noted, "The problem of recruitment for the Syrian war transcends social class."[45] It also entails overlap in some of the explanations. Finally, certain reasons for the mobilization are specific to the Tunisian context, while others are more universal. As the Tunisian Faisal (Abu Islam) explains, his multiple reasons for joining the jihad abroad included "the Salafi movements, the Internet, the friends [who had] gone, the situation in Syria, the personal problems, etc."[46]

The main drivers, then, are outlined here (and organized alphabetically): altruism, anti-colonial sentiment, bandwagon effect, disillusionment, economic opportu-

nity, establishment of the caliphate, impressionability, open conditions, personal tragedy, prison radicalization, recidivism, desire for redemption, religious void, and sectarianism.

ALTRUISM

Some Tunisians were animated to join the fight by the barbaric massacres conducted by Syria's Assad regime against peaceful protestors and later armed rebels. The Syrian war has likely been the most photographed and videoed conflict in history, owing to the profusion of cameras and phones over the past decade, along with the rise in social media sites that allow anyone access to posted content. This is the story of a twenty-five-year-old Tunisian, referred to here as Omar, who watched war scenes over Facebook, which in turn led him to a Syrian man who convinced him to help in the fight to stop regime atrocities.[47] Similarly, the Tunisian soccer player Nidhal Selmi, according to his father, Fethi, fought with IS in Syria, eventually dying in mid-October 2014, "after becoming angered at internet videos of the violence committed by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces."[48] Another father, Yassine, echoed Fethi, expressing his belief that his son Hichem joined the fight because "watching the slaughter of their Syrian brethren at the hands of President Bashar al-Assad's regime, they were moved to act."[49]

MAP 4 *Origin of Tunisian foreign fighters killed in Syria.*
CLICK ON MAP TO ZOOM IN

ANTI-COLONIAL SENTIMENT

Although colonialism seems remote within the West, many in the Arab world still seethe over its effects. The Sykes-Picot Agreement, the 1916 deal by which France and Britain carved up the Middle East between them, remains an emblem of outside interference and denial of local agency. Even though the lines themselves changed, the agreement still signals the callousness of British and French colonial rule in the Middle East and North Africa. Therefore, the Islamic State's "breaking of the border" between Iraq and Syria was seen as a symbolic reversal of this historical misdeed. A twenty-seven-year-old Tunisian, Bilal, argues that the "division of the countries is European...We want to make the region a proper Islamic state, and Syria is where it will start."[50]

BANDWAGON EFFECT

In this version of the phenomenon, enterprising early fighters tell their friends and family back home how worthy the endeavor is. The firsthand recommendation from a familiar and trusted voice carries extra weight, and can be perceived to reduce the sense of risk. Two Tunisians, Walid and Wissam, were susceptible in this way. "They live better than us [over there]!" Walid said, based on reports from his acquaintances in Syria. The latter considered following his friend, saying he was "leading a truly nice, comfortable life."[51]

DISILLUSIONMENT

Many Tunisians had great hopes following the fall of the government of President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in 2011. These were especially prevalent among highly educated youth, then experiencing unemployment at extremely high rates. Yet despite gradual political progress over the past seven years, the economic fruits that so many yearned for have yet to emerge. As a consequence, many young people have become steadily disillusioned with the political process, from which they felt only elites had benefited.[52] In turn, Tunisians sought alternative pathways to economic success or, at the very least, pursued significance outside a system that still marginalized

the young. One way was through migration to Europe and pursuing more-abundant opportunities there, while others sought relief within the jihadist movement, with its sense of mission, infusions of pride, and immediate social benefits. It did not hurt that groups like AST and later IS were just then rising, promoting a new form of governance that called for skilled youth to carry out their program, which sought ostensibly to improve society, just under a theocratic rather than a democratic rubric. Tunisia's first president after the revolution, Moncef Marzouki, summed up this dilemma well: "We had a dream—our dream was called the Arab Spring. And our dream is now turning into a nightmare. But the young people need a dream, and the only dream available to them now is the caliphate."[53] A young Tunisian filmmaker whose cousin was then fighting in Syria confirmed this sentiment when asked whether joining IS seemed normal to him: "If you lived in Tunisia and you're experiencing daily subjugation and injustice, and you have ideas, and you have principles, and you have objectives, and you have a vision for the future, and if you live in a state that doesn't embrace you, then it's the opposite. It's very normal."[54]

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Although economic deprivation is not a leading cause for joining with jihadist groups or fighting abroad,[55] some individuals are motivated by economic concerns. For instance, a Tunisian named Malik, who quit school at age fourteen to help support his family, ended up enlisting with the Islamic State three years later when members of the group "told him they would transfer $1,500 by Western Union to his family back in Tunisia."[56] There is also the case of an unnamed former Tunisian baker who joined IS in November 2013 and sent $500 back to his family every month. According to this individual's older brother, the ex-baker thought joining IS would give him "a good chance to make a living." This is because "he didn't go to college, and he tried to get a visa to move to Europe, but he didn't have any luck."[57] IS, therefore, was seen to provide an opportunity that benefited his entire family. Similarly, there is the case of Mohammed Bel Jayyed, who wanted to open a patisserie and marry a woman who lived next door. But his employer, a high-end pastry shop, paid him wages too low to allow either opening his own place or getting married and living independently with his fiancée.[58] As a result, he signed on with IS and ultimately died in October 2014.[59] Relatedly, the Tunisian Muhammad (only first name available), who defected from IS, noted that the group's recruiters would entice Tunisians in lower-middle-class neighborhoods by promising to wire $3,000 to their families if they completed three months of military training prior to joining the Syria fight.[60] And IS delivered on this specific financial promise. Because of this, according to Taylor Luck of the *Christian Science Monitor*, in neighborhoods like Ettadhamen, "several homes of alleged fighters...have newly erected second- and third- white concrete storys. Other impoverished neighborhoods in Tunis are witnessing a minor 'building boom.'"[61]

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CALIPHATE

When the Islamic State announced it had reestablished the Caliphate, the news was greeted with support by many in the jihadist movement, regardless of whether the announcement carried much legitimacy in the broader Muslim community. Some saw a new opportunity for justice wherein Muslims were once again on top instead of being bullied through colonialism or disregarded by their local Arab secular, military, or monarchical authoritarian systems. This is why a Tunisian named Ahmad supported IS: "The Islamic State is a true caliphate, a system that is fair and just, where you don't have to follow somebody's orders because he is rich or powerful...It is action, not theory, and it will topple the whole game."[62] Likewise, Ridha from Jendouba, who traveled to Syria in 2013, said he wanted to join IS because he was "attracted by their radical ideology [and was] convinced that he would be on the front lines of defending his faith and bringing sharia to the masses."[63] Ridha, however, would later escape after claiming members of the group had abused him sexually, returning to Tunisia in 2015.[64]

Umm Fatimah, a Tunisian, contested the idea that women joined IS for *jihad al-nikah* (a euphemism for providing sex to male militants; lit. "jihad of marriage"), a notion propagated by the Tunisian government.[65] Undoubtedly, IS engaged in sexual abuse (as discussed in the later section "Returnees"), but no credible evidence has emerged to suggest women joined IS specifically to "comfort" fighters, as indicated by Tunis.[66] For her part, the Tunisian Khadija Omry said she went to Syria with her husband in the "hope of leading the kind of religious lifestyle they had long dreamt of."[67] It was "for jihad, for sharia and the Islamic State...I really

believed that there was a state where we could live like the Prophet."[68] Similarly, Umm Bara al-Tunisi, a former IS member, said she "came to Syria as a woman wanting to be empowered by Islamic principles."[69] There is also Asma bin Salim, from Tunis, who requested that the Islamic State employ her as a teacher for girls, according to the border documents submitted by her husband when they entered IS territory with their son on October 5, 2013.

Such attitudes are not surprising given the IS state-building message focused on enjoining followers to help create a utopian society. This prospect drew in more women, whereas previous recruitment calls for foreign travel to jihadist groups were based solely on the imperative to fight, an endeavor generally seen among jihadists as taboo for women. Therefore, being part of the administrative and services cadre of the caliphate project broadened opportunities and interest among women, but also for some men who wanted to help by using skills other than fighting.

IMPRESSIONABILITY

Some analysts, like Tareq Moumni, a sociologist who monitors Tunisian returnees after their release from prison, have proffered the idea that Tunisian as well as other recruits to the Syria fight were brainwashed.[70] This thinking is problematic for a number of reasons, however, since it denies personal agency, as well as the human desire to be part of a larger project and build a community. Therefore, while the sister of Slim Gasmi, who died in Syria in April 2014, believed him to be impressionable,[71] he likely resembled other young enlistees who wanted to fit in and be liked among their peers. On this front, some have pointed to jihadist materials online as drivers for mobilization, especially after the Tunisian crackdown on jihadist-run mosques in late 2013, but online forums also provided a space for young people to interact on their own terms outside the Tunisian system, leading in many cases to Tunisians eventually deciding to join up with jihadist groups in Syria.

OPEN CONDITIONS

As alluded to earlier in this paper, Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia helped enable individuals seeking to fight in Syria. The opening up of Tunisian society after the revolution also allowed jihadist groups like AST to publicly proselytize and recruit without much consequence until August 2013, when the Tunisian government designated it as a terrorist organization. But those two and half years of uninhibited exposure to the group's ideological worldview and social milieu offered an important basis for large-scale potential mobilization in the Syria fight. This was how an individual like Mohamed Amrouni from Kalaa Kebira, a town outside Sousse and a hotbed of AST recruitment,[72] decided to join the Islamic State.[73] According to Mohamed's childhood friend Oussama Ben Amer, "[AST] would come preach to us in school, in the streets...it became a normal thing. And boys going to Syria became a normal thing, too."[74] These open conditions issued from the light-touch policy toward jihadists espoused by Ennahda, the Islamist party then in control of the government. Ennahda leaders believed that through dialogue they could coopt jihadists into the democratic process, even though individuals in AST explicitly said from the beginning that they rejected the system and wanted to institute an Islamic theocracy. From this, a Tunisian IS fighter who was imprisoned by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Raqqa as of mid-July 2017 told Jenan Moussa of *Akhbar al-An* that he traveled to Syria with the belief that he would face no consequences when he returned.[75]

PERSONAL TRAGEDY

In psychological studies of individuals who join extremist movements, one explanation involves the emergence of a cognitive opening. Usually in cases of recruits, some type of personal tragedy can be identified, whether the death of a family member or friend, a divorce, job loss, or another cause. The person experiencing the loss, while not necessarily attracted to jihadist ideology otherwise, develops an amplified interest to fill the personal void. This was evidently the case for Yusuf Akkari, who began attending a radical mosque after one of his friends drowned. The personal tragedy created an opening wherein jihadist-related ideas became more palatable to Akkari, leading him to eventually join IS; he later would die in the battle for Kobane.[76]

PRISON RADICALIZATION

For experts, a common refrain explicating involvement in jihadism is exposure to the ideology through proselytizing inmates in prison. In Tunisia, the case of Marwan al-Dwiri is instructive. Formerly known by his rapper name Emino, he was imprisoned in 2012 for alleged marijuana possession, although he claimed the real cause was his rap lyrics criticizing the police. While

in prison, he became sympathetic to jihadism through interaction with other jihadist prisoners, and joined IS in Syria after his release. On his Facebook page, he wrote that he "sold [his] soul and [his] body for ISIS, and will come back to liberate [his] country of the garbage that is polluting it."[77]

RECIDIVISM

The case of Rafiq bin Bashir bin Jalud al-Hami highlights the risk of individuals returning to the battlefield after not being engaged for some time as well as the connection between the older generation of jihadists and the newer battlefields. Hami first got involved with the jihadist movement after he moved to Germany to work as a carpenter in 1995.[78] There, he was recruited by a Libyan named Lutfi to train in the Khalden camp in Afghanistan.[79] Following the 9/11 attacks, he was arrested in Iran while attempting to escape, as did a number of other foreign fighters in Afghanistan. He would be transferred through a deal with the United States to Guantanamo Bay, where he would remain until being released nine years later, in January 2010, for resettlement in Slovakia.[80] A year later, following the revolution, he returned to Tunisia, but was primed to return to the jihadist movement. Some might say it was because of his treatment at Guantanamo. Based on his brother Mourad's account, it is clear he still subscribed to the jihadist cause. Mourad believed that Rafiq was "mentally ready to go back even on the religious level" and noted that his brother had told him before he left for Syria that "the show must go on."[81] Rafiq would eventually die in Syria with Jabhat al-Nusra in fall 2015.[82]

DESIRE FOR REDEMPTION

Another reason Tunisians and others mobilize to fight in Syria is to atone for perceived past sins. To be sure, a number of individuals with criminal pasts have joined groups like IS to redeem themselves, echoing a pitch made by recruiters. According to Ahmad, the Tunisian former IS adherent mentioned earlier, after his brother Rashid went to Syria, he saw online that this was a means of recruitment. He explained: "The jihadi recipe begins simmering in the minds of young men when they confess past sins to their clerics, sins that mainly revolve around dating a girl, drinking alcohol, or frequenting bars. The cleric then begins to exaggerate the seriousness of those sins, transforming them into unpardonable offenses that the young man must atone for through certain deeds, the culmination of which is to fight the jihad in Syria."[83]

RELIGIOUS VOID

Prior to the Tunisian revolution in 2011, religion was cast aside publicly within the framework of Tunisia's laïcité system created by founding president Habib Bourguiba. In this regard, Bourguiba was infamous for drinking orange juice on television during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan and pulling a hijab off a woman in the street. Within this environment, and given the state's policy across several decades to restrict even elementary religious education, many young people within Tunisian society were either religiously illiterate or had a nonscholastic understanding of nuances within Islamic intellectual debates and history. Dejla Abdelhamid, a French teacher in a Tunisian high school, lamented the death of one of her students, Henda Saidi, in Syria: "We have to teach them to defend themselves in a solid way."[84] This helps explain the impressionable nature of some, since individuals may not have been adequately equipped to identify mainstream versus more extremist interpretations of Islamic principles. One analogy is the experience of older generations worldwide who, lacking Internet savvy, get caught up in phishing schemes. As a result, Mahfoudh Balti, whose son joined the jihad, expressed his suspicion that this "religious void among young people" helps explain the mobilization in Syria.[85] This, Abu Muadh al-Tunisi affirms, is what got him interested in joining IS: "Would I be lying to you if I said I used to pray in Tunisia? We did not pray. In Tunisia, we were religiously cut off. There was corruption. After the revolution, preaching tents erected by Salafi-jihadists spread throughout the country. So I went to some of the tents of AST. They came out of prison bearded. This was something I had never witnessed before, something new. I started attending these tents, where they gave out leaflets on how to pray and perform ablutions, and urged us to wage jihad."[86]

SECTARIANISM

Tunisia is 99 percent Sunni Muslim and does not have an obvious history of internal sectarian tensions, but some Tunisians still felt obligated to defend their Sunni brothers and sisters in Syria due to the atrocities committed by the Assad regime, seeing their activity within a sectarian lens. For example, Abu Zaid al-Tunisi, a freelance sniper and *munashid* (one who chants Islamically

sanctioned a capella music) who fought in the Libyan revolution against the Qadhafi regime before joining the Syria fight in 2012, explained that "Bashar al-Assad and his people are Shia and it is my duty to help in restoring true Islam, Sunni Islam."[87]

These examples and descriptions demonstrate many potential factors behind Tunisians' decision to travel to Syria. But, as already noted, these reasons can also be interlinked, illustrating the complexity of the process and the trickiness of fingering a single explanation. Indeed, any commentator who boils jihadist mobilization down to one particular cause should not be taken seriously.

With the potential motivations surveyed, the next section will explore what Tunisians actually did with groups in Syria as well as Iraq, highlighting key actions or events illustrating Tunisians' importance within the broader ecosystem of organizations, especially the Islamic State.

The Role of Tunisians in Iraq and Syria

Over the past seven years, Tunisians have held a number of roles and taken part in infamous events as members of various jihadist organizations in Iraq and Syria (see appendix). For instance, two Tunisians were involved in the torture and execution of the captured Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh. Abu Bilal al-Tunisi was at the scene of Kasasbeh's capture and was pictured with his arm around the lieutenant's neck.[88] Following the capture, Umm Rayan al-Tunisi (discussed later) participated in Kasasbeh's torture. According to a female IS member who later defected, "It was the most brutal torturing [*sic*] I have ever seen."[89] Afterward, Abu Bilal allegedly helped come up with the idea to burn Kasasbeh alive in a cage.[90] In an event of comparable brutality, at least three Tunisians were involved with the massacre of seven hundred members of the al-Shaitat tribe in Deir al-Zour, an atrocity that took place over a two-week period.[91]

IS TUNISIAN JIHADISTS

Besides these bloody episodes, many Tunisians were engaged in outreach and religious education as part of the IS state-building project. One individual so engaged early on was Abu Waqas al-Tunisi, who became the face of what was then ISIS's *dawa* program, appearing in six of its videos by the end of 2013.[92] These activities—which include giving lectures, distributing gifts to children, and reciting the Quran in competitions, among others—allowed the jihadist group to ingratiate itself with locals and dispel the negative reputation it had gained as a result of its conduct during the Iraq jihad—even though it would eventually revert to such objectionable practices, especially after January 2014, when the Syrian rebel opposition and JN turned against it. The activities were also a way to attract foreigners, including Tunisians. Regarding the Tunisians, it showed that their previous efforts with AST could continue under ISIS. This idea would resonate with many AST recruits who felt that their mission in Tunisia had only just begun and that they would eventually spread their *dawa* globally, according to an AST member interviewed in 2013: "The *dawa* is going on, and then after it, it is global work, not just in Tunisia."[93]

Relatedly, in terms of media work and logistics, IS was first setting itself up in Wilayat Dimashq (Damascus province) when, on May 18, 2015, the office of the province's *wali* (leader) asked al-Fida al-Tunisi "to secure a dwelling for the brothers in the media office to be a base for media in Wilayat Dimashq. That is on account of the necessity of work while we have no place to work. If possible, we ask this request to be fulfilled as soon as possible."[94] Such media messaging is, as amply documented, central to IS communications to the outside world to illustrate its strength. The May 2015 date of this directive is additionally relevant, because the previous month, it had taken over its first territory in the region, the Yarmuk refugee camp, which was evidently not considered a safe location.[95] Therefore, this Tunisian had been given an important task, which appears to have been fulfilled since the group began releasing even more video messages afterward.[96]

Elsewhere in the IS administrative machine, Abu Anas al-Tunisi was the deputy head of *hisba* (moral policing and consumer protection) in the village of Tayana, in Deir al-Zour governorate.[97] Abu Anas arrested individuals for smoking, wearing their clothing or hair inappropriately, having unacceptable songs or pictures on their phone, or leaving shops open during prayer time.[98] Another Tunisian named Luqman was in charge of receiving *jizya* payments (yearly tax on non-Muslim "people of the book") from Syrian Christians, a practice that had been eliminated from modern Muslim states between the mid-eighteenth and twentieth centuries but was reinstated by IS.[99]

At a more senior level, Fathi bin Awn al-Murad al-Tunisi (Abu Sayyaf al-Tunisi) was head of the Islamic State's Diwan al-Rikaz (Administration of Precious Things from the Ground [e.g., oil, gas, antiquities]) in Wilayat al-Khayr (Deir al-Zour governorate) and Wilayat al-Barakah (Hasaka governorate) until he was killed in May 2016 during a U.S. Army Delta Force operation.[100] Abu Sayyaf originally joined IS when Abu Musab al-Zarqawi established JTWJ/AQI/MSM in the aftermath of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq.[101] This once again highlights the continuity between the older generation of foreign fighters and the more recent flow, similar to the case mentioned earlier of Abu Umar al-Tunisi.

In the IS military apparatus, a number of Tunisians served as trainers or commanders in Iraq and Syria (see appendix). One of the group's military training camps for children was actually named after Shadad al-Tunisi,[102] an IS commander who was killed in al-Bab, Syria, in January 2014 as fighting between IS and other Sunni insurgent factions began to take form.[103] Another component of IS's military division was its research and development shop. In it, one Tunisian was involved in developing the IS drone program,[104] which provided a key asymmetric weapon in the organization's arsenal, especially when fighting comparatively local adversaries that might lack a monopoly over airspace, especially at lower altitudes. During a reporting trip in northern Syria, Jenan Moussa obtained internal IS documents, including one on the Islamic State's drone plans by one of its developers, Fadhil Minsi (Abu Yusri al-Tunisi).[105] Interestingly, until his assassination in December 2016 by Israel, another Tunisian, Muhammad al-Zawari, was a main engineer for Hamas's drone program.[106] As Moussa noted, though, there is no information on whether these two men knew each other.

Another job filled by Tunisians was as intermediaries between the mother ship in Iraq/Syria and its external provinces and affiliates. In winter 2013, a Tunisian named Ali acted as a courier on behalf of IS between Syria and Tunisia. According to Ali, he would relay important news back to IS elements in Tunisia, bring money to cells in Tunisia, and provide propaganda videos so that local Tunisian IS cells could recruit individuals.[107] Although Ali eventually quit the organization, others likely preceded and followed him in the role. More important, the case illustrates that as early as 2013, even before the announcement of the caliphate, IS was planning for its campaign to recruit Tunisians. Similarly, in August 2014, IS emir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi allegedly dispatched Abu Hatim al-Tunisi to northern Mali to scout prospects for jihadist insurgent factions there joining his group. In particular, Abu Hatim hoped to meet Hamadu Ould Khayr, the leader of Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad fi Gharb Ifriqiya (JTJGI; the Movement for Monotheism and Jihad in West Africa), and Iyad Ag Ghali, the head of Ansar al-Din in Mali.[108] It is difficult to know whether this was successful since Ansar al-Din eventually merged with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), although some JTJGI factions that supported Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi later swore allegiance (*baya*) to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in May 2015.[109] Whether Abu Hatim had any role in this remains unknown.

Paralleling these events, Tunisians served as senior leaders in the Islamic State's internal and external intelligence operations, most commonly referred to as Amn al-Kharji. At one point, Abu Abdul-Rahman al-Tunisi led this entity, helping plan the infiltration and activation of sleeper cells within Syrian rebel groups to undermine them from within.[110] This in turn allowed IS to build up its capacities and take over locales more quickly in 2013–14. The group also enacted a public intimidation component to this takeover. For instance, Abu Usama al-Tunisi was responsible for posting names of wanted FSA members on the doors of mosques in al-Dana and Darat Izza, Syria, and ordering all FSA members in his area of control to swear *baya* to Baghdadi and to hand over their weapons,[111] illustrating both a public and private approach to instilling fear in the local populace.

Outside Syria, in the realms of intelligence and planning, Boubaker al-Hakim, the French-Tunisian previously mentioned, was a senior leader in Amn al-Kharji directly involved in the planning of key IS external operations in Europe and North Africa.[112] French officials believe he had a role in both the January 2015 Hyper Cacher attack and the November 2015 multipronged attack as well as influencing other plots that were broken up in France, Morocco, and Algeria.[113] Within Tunisia, Hakim assisted indirectly in the March 2015 Bardo National Museum and June 2015 Sousse beach attacks, having helped establish the training camps in Sabratha, Libya, where the perpetrators trained beforehand.[114] These activities show Hakim's reach to be far with regard to larger IS external operations.

For their part, Tunisian women helped shape the vision of Islamic State society. The founder of the group's

infamous al-Khansa Brigade, which began operating on February 2, 2014, was a Tunisian women named Umm Rayan.[115] She would also help establish the al-Khansa Brigade in Libya after IS took control of Sirte, moving there from Syria in September 2015.[116] Among the initial thirty-five members of the group in Syria, seven were Tunisian. Umm Rayan's vision, instituted immediately, included stationing women at checkpoints to make sure those under the *niqab* were not men disguised for an ambush; securing marriages for foreigners who joined IS; standardizing displays for women's clothes and mannequins in stores; replacing all-male OB-GYN doctors with women; and helping develop school curricula for girls.[117] In turn, women within the brigade were led to recruit others already in Syria or abroad to help build al-Khansa's capacities. Among those to join were Umm Hajjar al-Tunisi, who was responsible for sharia classes and helped recruit women for the group's Diwan al-Taalim (Administration of Education) and Diwan al-Siha (Administration of Health) for an estimated monthly salary of $100–$200.[118] There is also the case of Umm Abdul-Rahman al-Tunisi, who helped facilitate arranged marriages in Mayadin, Syria.[119]

Alongside the positions just elaborated, the notes within Islamic State border documents remark on specific skills of interest offered by Tunisians and others. For instance, Qaaqaa al-Tunisi was trained in street fighting and kung fu, Abu Musa al-Tunisi had experience in transferring money and importing goods, Abu Saad al-Tunisi worked as a smuggler in Libya and Algeria, Abu Yusuf al-Tunisi knew the Montage Video program and software piracy programs, and Abu Mujahid al-Tunisi was an expert in hacking encrypted sites. This shows how border documents were used not only to identify individuals entering IS territory but also to spot and channel talent for various elements of the state-building enterprise.

NON-IS TUNISIAN JIHADISTS

As contrasted with the data on individuals who joined IS, far less public information is available on those to join other jihadist groups in Syria, particular Jabhat al-Nusra and its successor groups Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (JFS) and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). Rather than coming from self-reporting by members or other on-the-ground observation, much of this information emerged during times of internal discord between JN/JFS/HTS and its enemies or competitors. Statements and testimonials from these disputes are usually signed by various actors, including Tunisians, and in some cases note the particular position the individuals hold in the organization (see appendix). Very little else is described about them, however. Based on these and some other primary sources, the roles Tunisians have played with JN/JFS/HTS and other non-IS jihadist factions can nonetheless be deduced.

In early 2014, during the initial period of overt discord between JN and IS, both groups released multiple testimonials offering their respective views on events as well as from defectors explaining the reality of the other group. In one of these "tell-alls," Abu Musab al-Tunisi, who defected from IS to JN in February 2014, discussed the former's illegitimacy, explaining how he and others were not sure what opponents they were fighting on the battlefield. Their senior commanders would claim it was the Assad regime or the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), even as he would ultimately learn the opponent to be JN.[120] Similarly, Abu Hafs al-Tunisi and his wife, Umm Hafs, released a testimonial illustrating the crudeness of IS during its takeover of Deir al-Zour from JN. Abu Hafs explained that because he was a JN soldier, IS doctrine regarded him as an apostate, deemed him undeserving of his wife, and attempted to divorce them and remarry her to an IS fighter.[121] They escaped—and their story helped JN frame the despicable character of its IS adversary.

In another testimonial from a senior JN leader, Sheikh Abu Firas al-Suri discussed in a video message private meetings with IS attempting to reconcile their differences, especially following the IS assassination of Abu Khalid al-Suri, Ayman al-Zawahiri's emissary in Syria and a senior leader in Ahrar al-Sham.[122] In the video, Abu Firas mentions an Abu Ubaydah al-Tunisi who was discussing reasons for the assassination with the IS senior leader Abu Ali al-Anbari.[123] Abu Ubaydah's involvement in these discussions likely illustrates his high-level leadership position within JN, while also showing the lack of public information on the specifics of the proverbial al-Qaeda leadership bench in Syria, since JN at the time was still overtly an al-Qaeda affiliate.

Despite its claims of IS abuses, JN did not have a clean record, either, and Tunisians were among those responsible. For instance, a Tunisian foreign fighter in JN allegedly beat a woman because she violated modesty laws by wearing a coat deemed too short, drawing local demonstrations in Salqin, Syria, against the

assailant.[124] Even more egregious was the case of Abu Abdul-Rahman al-Tunisi, the JN leader in the Druze area of Jabal al-Summaq, and specifically his actions in the town of Qalb Lawzah. First, in middle and late 2014, Abu Abdul-Rahman forced members of the Druze community to renounce their religion for Sunni Islam. Then, in early 2015, after perceiving this Druze commitment to be insincere—based on an alleged lack of devotion to "destroying shrines, teaching Islam with a particular focus on the youth, and adhering to sharia regulations on women's dress and gender-mixing"—he forced the community to restate its renunciation and rededicate itself to following these precepts.[125] Furthermore, also in Qalb Lawzah, amid an altercation during a JN campaign to seize property from Druze previously loyal to the Assad regime, Abu Abdul-Rahman recruited henchman who subsequently massacred at least twenty individuals for alleged blasphemy.[126]

Within the cohort of Tunisian senior leaders in JN/JFS/HTS, a few are known to have had historical ties to al-Qaeda. Among the most prominent examples are Muhammad Habib Bu Sadun al-Tunisi (Abu Ibrahim al-Tunisi), a JFS figure and an al-Qaeda facilitator and external operations leader, as well as Abdul-Jalil al-Muslimi (Abu Ali al-Tunisi), likewise a JFS operative and al-Qaeda facilitator and external operations leader, who had trained during the 1990s with the Taliban in Afghanistan.[127]

The identity of the most senior Tunisian within the al-Qaeda/JN orbit remains shrouded, although disparate sources could eventually help disclose it. In late 2012 and early 2013, reports indicated that Ayman al-Zawahiri had sent a high-level Tunisian emissary to Aleppo to garner support for JN and seek pledges of *baya* from local rebel leaders to Zawahiri.[128] Although unconfirmed, this individual may have been Sheikh Abu al-Hassan al-Tunisi, who died with JN during a military operation against the Shia village of al-Fua, Idlib governorate, in mid-September 2015.[129] According to jihadist sources, he previously served as an aide to Osama bin Laden himself, spent time with al-Qaeda in Sudan in the mid-1990s, survived the 2001 Battle of Tora Bora after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, and then became a military trainer and senior leader with JN in Syria.[130] Based on these details and the biography of the earlier-discussed Rafiq bin Bashir bin Jalud al-Hami, the two figures' paths appear to have lined up often. They could hypothetically be the same person, and correspondence with HTS through the expert Charles Lister suggests an inclination by the jihadist group toward nondisclosure rather than outright dismissal of the possibility. So even as researchers have much more information as compared to the Afghan war during the 1980s, this and other mysteries remain.

Lastly, as part of al-Qaeda's strategy to seed the Syrian jihad with experienced figures, Zawahiri dispatched multiple assets from the Afghanistan/Pakistan region to help build up the capacities of local jihadists. Among these individuals was a young Tunisian named Ibrahim Tariq (Abu Adl al-Tunisi), born in January 1996 in Sudan into the jihadist movement, his father having been an al-Qaeda member.[131] Soon after Tariq's birth, his father was forced to flee with him, along with bin Laden and his al-Qaeda contingent, back to Afghanistan. Following the September 11 attacks, Tariq and his family moved on to Balochistan, in Pakistan, but while attempting to return to Afghanistan to fight, his father was killed by the Pakistani military on October 28, 2005, prompting Tariq to flee to Waziristan.[132] Then, at just age seven, he was enrolled in the Osama bin Laden School and trained in the al-Farouq military training camp for "cubs," studying under the senior al-Qaeda figures Abu Yahya al-Libi, Mansour al-Shami, Abu Zaid al-Kuwaiti, and Abu Faraj al-Masri.[133] After completing these preparations, Tariq began more-advanced training on bomb making and electronics with Umar Khalil al-Sudani as well as preparing vehicles for car-bomb attacks with Muhammad Khan, the son of Mustafa Abu al-Yazid.[134] Once Tariq mastered these skills, he began fighting on the frontlines with the Taliban in Paktika province (in Barmal and Ghazni districts). After years of combat in Afghanistan, he went to Syria on November 2, 2014, a journey that required traversing five countries and took eight months, in part because he had been shot in the foot by the Afghan army. When Tariq arrived in Syria, he was appointed as a trainer for teenage recruits in a JN camp. He also fought in the battles for Sahel al-Ghab and Khan Tuman and acted as a field commander in the raids of Khalsa and Humayrah, in the Aleppo governorate countryside. Tariq would die in August 2016 during the storming of Umm al-Qura hill, when a shell fragment struck his heart.[135]

While many like Tariq remained enthusiastic jihadists abroad, a number of others returned home. For some, the decision was driven by disillusionment over what they saw in Syria and particularly over Islamic State actions on the ground, which many considered a betrayal of the ethos originally motivating their involvement.

Returnees

I feel like I was a terrorist
I was shocked by what I did...It's not Islam.
Don't give your life up for nothing.

—ALI, A FORMER TUNISIAN JIHADIST RECRUIT[136]

According to Mohamed Iqbal Ben Rejeb, president and founder of RATTA, Tunisians decide to return home for three primary reasons: the earlier-noted experience of "becoming disenchanted by the war," or else "being cajoled by their distraught families, or in the hope to recruit their fellow countrymen."[137] The last of these comes with sparse specifics, due to the clandestine nature of recruitment by returnees. Yet public cases exist, such as one in April 2014 when two Syria returnees were arrested for attempting to build a bomb in Ain Charfi, seven miles northwest of Sfax.[138] Other reasons also come up, like in the alleged case of Abu Fatima al-Tunisi, a local leader in eastern Deir al-Zour who stole $25,000 in *zakat* funds, fled IS territory, and later mocked his former comrades on Twitter: "What state? What caliphate? You idiots."[139]

Most Tunisians attempting a return do so in one of three logistical ways: (1) a direct flight from Turkey; (2) a flight via Turkey then Morocco, where they burn their passports, get new ones at the embassy in Rabat, and then fly home, aiming to cover their past indiscretions; or (3) by sneaking over the Libyan border, in hopes of remaining undetected, unharassed, and free from a possible trial and jail time upon their return.[140] While many do make it back to Tunisia, others are either killed outright by IS when fleeing,[141] taken into custody by the SDF,[142] or arrested by Turkish authorities when attempting to traverse the Syria-Turkey border to catch a flight home in Ankara or Istanbul.[143]

As soon as they reach Syria, aspirants are at the mercy of jihadist groups. As Faisal explains, "Now that you're far from home, they know you cannot go back."[144] According to Umm Bara al-Tunisi, held in the SDF Ain Issa camp, where many captured IS members are placed, "The punishment for foreign families who tried to escape was severe. Many times Islamic State killed its own fighters suspected of disloyalty."[145] For example, one Tunisian was allegedly thrown into a well and left to rot after expressing an interest in leaving IS.[146] As noted by Khadija Omry, also in the Ain Issa camp, "You couldn't speak freely or criticize IS, you didn't know who was listening."[147] She also noted that seventy Tunisians were on an Islamic State hit list.[148]

Imen Triki, a lawyer representing returning Tunisian foreign fighters, affirmed an earlier-noted finding, commenting that "60 percent of those who come back profess disappointment."[149] A number of such returnees have spoken out on their disillusionment and desire for detachment from events in Syria. Two primary reasons, already explored, are JN-IS infighting and the latter's failure to live up to its own professed standards on governance. For example, Charfeddine Hasni, an IS supporter who remained in Tunisia but had multiple friends who traveled to Syria, noted from his interactions with them that "they thought it would be like joining the side of the Prophet Muhammad, but they found it was divided into these small groups with a lot of transgressions they did not expect, like forcing people to fight [between IS and JN]."[150] Furthermore, an aspiring combatant named Ghaith, who returned to Tunisia, said, "It was totally different from what they said jihad would be like...It's not a revolution or jihad, it's a slaughter."[151] Moreover, Faisal explains that "between the image they give themselves in their videos on the Internet—that of the companions of the Prophet—and what they really are, cold and calculating, there is a gap."[152]

Many women such as Omry also were disappointed regarding their yearning to live in a pristine Islamic state. "My husband and I made a huge mistake by coming there," she explained. "And I advise you not to believe those who say that IS is an Islamic state."[153] In addition, Omry complained that after her first husband was killed, she was placed in a dormitory, where a supervisor named Umm Adab mistreated her and her children, as well as others, by denying them diapers and medicine.[154] Omry concluded that such abuse could be a tactic to lead widows, seeking to protect themselves and their children, into remarriage with other IS fighters.[155] Umm Bara felt similarly, remarking, "I quickly became horrified by the executions and killings committed by ISIS, but by then it was too late to leave."[156]

Some expressions of disenchantment might not be wholly genuine, instead reflecting an acknowledgment of the Islamic State's loss of territory. For example, after IS began ceding ground, someone like Anouar Bayoudh evidently began to see IS members as "monsters," yet for whatever reason he and others did not express such sentiments when the group's situation appeared promising.[157] Similarly, Mohamed Amrouni, after IS began losing Raqqa, began to reach out to his family about returning home. His brother Ajmi said that "he begged for my forgiveness."[158] This is part of the dilemma with

returning foreign fighters writ large: determining whether their remorse is genuine. Expressed disillusionment with the IS experience, but paired with hesitancy to disavow the broader ideology and a focus on poor implementation, presents a special quandary. This is likely why someone like Umm Bara still says, "Given my choice I would stay here in Syria...rather than go home and go to prison there."[159] Those who do end up returning home, and have a similar mindset, can create security and human rights dilemmas for local governments and communities.

Once home, returnees also face the stigma of having joined a jihadist group, now wearing a proverbial scarlet letter. A former combatant named Rajab concurs that "even the ones that express regret are outcast and marginalized by society." Therefore, because these returnees have no alternative social network in Tunisia, they risk relapsing out of the desire for solidarity and purpose that fomented their mobilization in the first place. In some sense, this is why Ajmi Amrouni's expression in reference to his brother Mohamed, who is seeking to return home via extradition from an SDF camp—"Insh'Allah. He is not a threat"—encapsulates the approach taken by Tunisia and other countries to the broader dilemma of returning foreign fighters.[161] Tunis is essentially hoping that everything just works out, because at this juncture, it offers no governmental-level rehabilitation or reintegration initiatives for individuals who fought in Syria—with some returnees out in society and others detained in prison.

No doubt, Tunisia's police and military have gained excellent experience in law enforcement and counterterrorism and have done a remarkable job in keeping Tunisia safe over the past three-plus years following the Islamic State campaign against the country. That said, a purely kinetic response does not resolve broader underlying issues. Furthermore, at least in the realms of prosecution and detention, gaps remain to be filled; better capabilities and transparency could engender greater trust among Tunisians in the country's security and judicial institutions. In one particular instance, dissociating the Ministry of Interior from its persistent epithet "Ministry of Terrorism," owing to its long history of abuses, could build societal confidence. In cooperation with the Tunisian National Police and the Anti-Terrorism Brigade (BAT), the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation could do a great service by providing insights on building forensic cases for suspects involved in terrorism attacks, plots, attempts to travel abroad to join designated terrorist organizations, or for those suspected of recruiting, fundraising, or providing material support in whatever ways to groups like the Islamic State or al-Qaeda. This would helpfully change the status quo,[162] wherein BAT will arrest an individual, and the case will go to court, but the judiciary will claim insufficient evidence owing to ineffective presentation of forensic details, as contrasted with what one might see in the U.S. indictment of an individual attempting a terrorist attack or to fight abroad with a terrorist organization. Therefore, the Tunisian individual cannot be charged but still remains in jail because he (or she) is viewed as a threat. This, of course, undermines the rule of law and places added pressure on an overflowing prison system that lacks resources to maintain facilities or provide adequate services to inmates.[163] There are already reports that some prison blocks have been turned into mini-emirates by arrested jihadists.[164]

A legacy of colonialism, however, helps explain reservations among the Tunisian state and people toward deeper ties with outside Western powers like the United States—even if America never colonized North Africa like France did. On this count, note, for example, Tunisia's rejection of the NATO proposal to support establishment of an antiterrorism center.[165] If that discomfort becomes a major political issue—Tunisia, after all, is a democracy—officials can instead work through the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), thereby gaining some benefits of professionalization and best practices via a multilateral organization that includes other Arab and Muslim-majority states. Also through the GCTF, Tunisia would have access to entities like the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, which helps with community-based countering violent extremism efforts; Hedayah, an Emirati CVE project that assists on counter-messaging and local religion-education initiatives; and the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law, which provides support on good practices and training for judges/prosecutors in dealing with terrorism cases within a rule of law framework.[166]

These prescriptions are especially important given that the future of Tunisian jihadism is now brewing within the country's prison system. It is true that Tunisians affiliated with IS and HTS in Syria remain imprisoned in Europe, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey; other active fighters, under either the IS or AQIM umbrella, remain based in Libya, Mali, or the mountainous regions on the Tunisia-Algeria border. The vast majority, however, are now within Tunisia's prison system. One can only hope that

the Tunisian government does not demonstrate the disinterest in this population that the Ben Ali government showed in its latter years. During that era, from 2006 to 2011, Tunisia's imprisoned jihadists developed a plan that led to the formation of what became AST and all that followed. Only time will tell what will become of the many Tunisians currently imprisoned, whether abroad or at home, for jihadist-related actions.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to demystify and account methodically for the Tunisian foreign fighter phenomenon to Syria and Iraq from 2011 to 2018. Through a detailed exploration of jihadist internal and primary sources as well as local and Western reporting, it has identified how the Tunisian mobilization beginning in 2011–12 was connected to the flow to Iraq from the previous decade, and how AST helped incubate an atmosphere that allowed for high levels of recruitment in 2011–13, the years immediately preceding the IS caliphate announcement. It probed a variety of sources to better estimate how many Tunisians went to Iraq and Syria as well as where they came from in Tunisia originally and where those who died in Syria were killed. This research likewise uncovered various motivations that led Tunisians to join the fight in Syria, while underlining that these motives were both more complex and multi-causal than many have previously suggested. Furthermore, it highlighted the roles assumed by Tunisians, including in leadership, and their participation in events once they joined IS or JN and their successor groups. Finally, it looked at the current concern over returnees and what led many to return or attempt to return home, and how the United States and other actors might help the Tunisian government mitigate any future problems. The case of Tunisian foreign fighters is highly intricate. It is the author's hope that this paper has helped elucidate the reality of the Tunisian foreign fighter phenomenon, while at the same time casting off the rumors and outright disinformation that have proliferated about it over the past seven years.

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Appendix

TABLE A *Origin by Tunisian governorate of foreign fighters according to IS border documents.*

Tunis	112
Tunis	55
Sidi Hassine/Sijoumi	12
La Marsa	10
Zahrouni	4
El Kabaria	3
El Menzah	3
Cité Ibn Khaldoun	2
El Ouardia	2
El Omrane	2
Cité El Khadra	2
Le Bardo	2
Mellasine	2
Ain Zaghouan	1
Bab El Khadra	1
Charguia	1
Cité Avicenne	1
Cité Errafaha	1
Cité Ettahrir	1
Cité Ibn Sina	1
Dibosville	1
Jbal Lahmar	1
Ezzouhour	1
Ksar Said	1
La Soukra	1
Megrine Chaker	1
Bizerte	**777**
Bizerte	37
Sajanan	12
Menzel Bourguiba	9
Mateur	4
Bir Masyougha	3
Zarzouna	3
El Alia	2
Menzel Jemil	2
Oum Heni	2
Beni Nafaa	1
Pêcherie	1
Tinja	1
Ariana	**44**
Ettadhamen	25
Ariana	13
Ennasr	3
Cité La Gazelle	2
Mnihla	1

Monastir	41
Monastir	10
Jemmal	8
Menzel Ennour	6
Moknine	6
Teboulba	3
Sayada	2
El Bassatine	1
Ksar Hellal	1
Menzel Hayet	1
Ouardanine	1
Qusaybat-al-Madyun	1
Sahline	1
Medenine	**41**
Ben Gardane	15
Zarzis	11
Medenine	8
Djerba	4
Dkhilet Toujane	1
Seguia	1
Ouled Amor	1
Sousse	**38**
Sousse	34
Kalaa Kebira	4
Sidi Bouzid	**32**
Sidi Bouzid	23
Sidi Ali Ben Aoun	7
Bir El Hafey	1
Meknassy	1
Kebili	**31**
Kebili	11
Souk Lahad	10
Douz	6
El Golaa (al-Qalah)	3
Nazla	1
Kasserine	**29**
Kasserine	17
Subaytilah	5
Sbiba	4
Feriana	2
El Ayoun	1

Nabeul	28
Nabeul	5
Taklisah	4
Sulayman	4
Kelibia	3
Beni Khalled/ Zaouiet Djedidi	2
Hammam El Ghezaz	2
Menzel Temime	2
Bou Argoub	1
Cité Hached	1
Hammamet	1
Korba	1
Mrezga	1
Sidi Daoud	1
Manouba	**28**
Manouba	14
Douar Hicher	7
Oued Ellil	4
Tebourba	2
Den Den	1
Ben Arous	**25**
Ben Arous	11
Mohammedia	5
Megrine	2
Ez Zahra	2
Fouchana	2
El Mourouj	1
El Yasminette	1
Rades	1
al-Qayrawan	**24**
al-Qayrawan	20
al-Ala	1
Ayn Jalulah	1
Chebika	1
Sidi Saad	1
Mahdia	**17**
Mahdia	12
Bou Merdes	1
Hbira	1
Ksour Essaf	1
Melloulèche	1
Sidi Alouane	1

Gafsa	17
Gafsa	14
Metlaoui	1
Moularès	1
Sened	1
Tatouine	**15**
Tataouine	8
Remada	5
Ghomrassen	1
Oued El Gameh	1
Siliana	**10**
El Krib	4
Rouhia	2
Siliana	2
Bargou	1
Bou Arada	1
Zaghouan	**7**
Nadhour	3
El Fahs	2
Hammam Zriba	1
Zaghouan	1
Béja	**5**
Nefza	2
Amdoun	1
Medjez el Bab	1
Testour	1
Gabes	**5**
El Hamma	5
Sfax	**4**
Sfax	3
Sakiet Eddaier	1
Jendouba	**3**
Jendouba	2
Ghardimaou	1
Kef	**3**
El Kef	3

TABLE B *Location by governorate of Tunisian FF Deaths in Syria*

Aleppo	**94**
Aleppo	63
Kobane	13
Minakh	3
Tal Rifaat	2
al-Bab	1
al-Mallah	1
Atarib	1
Uwaylin	1
Ain Dadat	1
Azaz	1
Doyrneah	1
Haritan	1
Khalsa	1
Maarat al-Artiq	1
Sarrin	1
Sheikh Najar	1
Wilayat Halab	1
Deir al-Zour	**29**
Deir al-Zour	18
Wilayat al-Khayr	4
Abu Kamal	3
al-Amr	1
al-Hamdan	1
al-Hawayqah	1
Mayadin	1
Raqqa	**26**
Raqqa	15
Wilayat al-Raqqa	9
al-Thawra	1
Suluk	1
Latakia	**22**
Latakia	20
Jabal al-Turkmen	1
Kasab	1
Idlib	**20**
Idlib	8
Salqin	4
Saraqeb	2
Adana	1
al-Fua	1
Binnish	1
Jisr al-Shughour	1
Maarrat al-Numan	1
Maataram	1
Homs	**16**
Homs	10
al-Qusayr	2
Sukhna	2
al-Qaryatayn	1
Humeira	1
Hasaka	**14**
Wilayat al-Barakah	5
Tal Hamis	2
Qamishli	1
al-Shadadi	1
Hasaka	1
al-Zuhour	1
Markadah	1
Ras al-Ain	1
Tal Khanzir	1
Damascus	**7**
Ghouta	5
Damascus	2
Hama	**6**
Hama	4
Uqayribat	1
Jidrin	1
Rif Damascus	**4**
Qalamoun	1
Daraya	1
Douma	1
Rif Damascus	1
Deraa	**3**
Deraa	3

TABLE C *Origin by governorate of Tunisian fighters killed in Syria*

Tunis	**26**
Tunis	12
Sidi Hassine/Sijoumi	6
Le Kram	4
El Ouardia	2
El Menzah	1
Lafayette	1
Bizerte	**15**
Bizerte	8
Menzel Bourguiba	3
Sajanan	2
Ras al-Jabal	1
Zarzouna	1
Sidi Bouzid	**12**
Sidi Bouzid	12
Ariana	**11**
Ariana	8
Ettadhamen	3
Medinine	**10**
Ben Gardane	7
Medenine	2
El May	1
Manouba	**10**
Douar Hicher	6
Manouba	4
al-Qayrawan	**9**
al-Qayrawan	7
Cherarda	1
Ousseltia	1
Sousse	**8**
Sousse	6
Hergla	1
Kalaa Kebira	1
Sfax	**7**
Sfax	6
Jebiniana	1
Tatouine	**4**
Tataouine	3
Remada	1
Kebili	**4**
al-Qalah	3
Kebili	1
Kef	**3**
El Kef	2
Kalaa Senan	1
Ben Arous	**3**
Ez Zahra	1
Ben Arous	1
Megrine	1
Jendouba	**2**
Jendouba	2
Kasserine	**2**
Sbiba	2
Mahdia	**2**
Mahdia	2
Nabeul	**2**
Nabeul	2
Monastir	**2**
Monastir	1
Jemmal	1
Gabes	**1**
Gabes	1

TABLE D *Known leadership positions of Tunisian fighters in Iraqi and Syrian jihadist groups*

Islamic State	
Abu Abdul-Rahman al-Tunisi	Military emir (leader) of Wilayat al-Raqqa
Abu Usama al-Tunisi	Emir of Idlib
Umm Rayan al-Tunisi	Founder of Katibat al-Khansa (al-Khansa Brigade)
Abu al-Dira al-Tunisi	Led military assault with Abu Hafs al-Misrati on Imam Kadhim University in Baghdad
Abu Jihad al-Tunisi	Executioner in Islamic State's police
Abu Hamza al-Radsi	Sharia official in Wilayat Homs
Abu Hatim al-Tunisi	IS envoy to unite jihadist factions in Mali
Abu Qudama al-Tunisi	Military trainer in Wilayat Halab
Abu Mujahid al-Tunisi	Military trainer in unspecified location
Abu Mariya al-Tunisi	Military trainer in Wilayat Halab
Ibrahim al-Tunisi	Military trainer at Muaskar al-Sadiq in Idlib, responsible for suicide bombers and *inghimasis* (infiltrators)
Abu Qutaybah al-Tunisi	Sharia official in Tal Rifaat
Abu Abdullah al-Tunisi	Sharia official in Idlib
Abu Haidar al-Tunisi	Cook for the Islamic State
Abu Muhammad al-Tunisi	Emir of eastern Ghouta in Wilayat Dimashq
Abu Sayyaf al-Tunisi	Emir of Diwan al-Rikaz (Administration of Precious Things from the Ground [e.g., oil, gas, antiquities]) in Wilayat al-Khayr and Wilayat al-Barakah
Abu Ahmad al-Tunisi	Official in Diwan al-Zara wal-Rei (Administration of Agriculture and Irrigation) in Wilayat al-Khayr (Deir al-Zour)
Abu Ibrahim al-Tunisi	Official in Diwan al-Dawa wal-Masajid (Administration of Preaching and Mosques) in Wilayat al-Furat in Abu Kamal
Abu Talhah al-Tunisi	Military Commander in Southwest Sector of Wilayat Karkuk
Abu Usama al-Tunisi	Military Leader in al-Bab, Wilayat Halab (Aleppo)
al-Nahlah al-Tunisi	Administrator of Affairs of the Fighters in Liwa al-Uqab (Black Flag Regiment)
Abu Anas al-Tunisi	Deputy emir of *hisba* (accountability) in Tiyana in Wilayat al-Khayr
Umm Hajjar al-Tunisi	Administrator of sharia classes in Diwan al-Taalim (Administration of Education)
Abu Dujanah al-Tunisi	Emir of Kubaysah in Wilayat al-Anbar
Abu Abdul Rahman al-Tunisi	Chief of al-Amn al-Kharji (External Security)
Abu Ibadah al-Tunisi	Emir of Bir Kasab Sector in Wilayat Dimashq
Abu Nihad al-Tunisi	Military commander in Fallujah in Wilayat al-Anbar
Abu al-Muhajir al-Tunisi	Emir of Albu Hayat in Wilayat al-Anbar
Abu Ayub al-Tunisi	Commander in Fallujah in Wilayat al-Anbar
Abu Jihad al-Tunisi	Media official in Wilayat al-Barakah (Hasaka province)
Abu Humam al-Tunisi	Commander of suicide bombers in Mukayshfah in Wilayat al-Anbar
Unknown name	Emir of the Euphrates dam
Abu al-Hija al-Tunisi	Military commander in Northeastern Sector of Wilayat Halab
Abu Dujanah al-Tunisi	Military official in Wilayat al-Furat
Unknown name	Emir of telecommunications in Wilayat al-Raqqa
Usama al-Tunisi	Emir of Manbij
Abu Ahmad al-Tunisi	Emir of *hisba* in al-Bab, Wilayat Halab

TABLE D *(continued)*

Islamic State (continued)	
Boubaker al-Hakim	External operations official
Sheikh Abu al-Bara al-Tunisi	Supervisor for the Ashbal al Khilafah (Cubs of the Caliphate) camp
Abu Ubaydah al-Tunisi	Member of of Islamic Police in Diwan al-Aqarat (Administration of Real Estate) in Wilayat al-Raqqa (Central/Western office)
Abu Hudayfah al-Tunisi	Judge of *Hudud* (Fixed Quranic) Punishments and Criminal Offenses in Diwan al-Qada wal-Madhalim (Administration of Judgment and Grievance), Wilayat al-Raqqa
Umm Abdul Rahman	Figure involved in arranging the marriages of women with the organization's fighters in Mayadin, Wilayat al-Khayr
Sabri Essid	Official in intelligence service
Abu Ubaydah al-Tunisi	Judge in al-Thawra
Abu Hudayfah al-Tunisi	Judge in al-Thawra
Jabhat al-Nusra/Jabhat Fatah al-Sham/Hayat Tahrir al-Sham	
Abu Qatada al-Gharib	Dawa official for Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) in Aleppo; opened religious institutes
Abu Sami al-Tunisi	JN judge in al-Tabni, Deir al-Zour province
Abu Usama al-Tunisi	JN emir, al-Dana
Abu Amina al-Tunisi	Sniper in the Katibat al-Dhaib (Wolf Brigade), JN
Abu Yahya al-Tunisi	Sniper in the Katibat al-Dhaib (Wolf Brigade), JN
Malik al-Tunisi	JN military trainer
Abu Haydarah al-Tunisi	JN emir, Rif al-Gharbi in Deir al-Zour Province
Sheikh Abu al-Hassan al-Tunisi	Senior JN official
Abu Hamza al-Tunisi	Official for Hama governorate correspondence for al-Manarah al-Bayda (The White Minaret) media outlet
Abu Dhar al-Tunisi	JN military emir for al-Thawra
Abu Ikrimah al-Tunisi	Sharia official for Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (JFS)
Abu Ali al-Tunisi	JFS external operations official
Abu Ibrahim al-Tunisi	JFS external operations official
Abu Yahya al-Tunisi	Religious official in Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)
Abu Yahya al-Tunisi	HTS sharia official
Sayyaf al-Tunisi	Official, JFS military office
Abu Ubaydah al-Tunisi	HTS military administrator
Abu Hajr al-Tunisi	HTS *muhajirin* (foreign fighter) official
Abu Muhammad al-Tunisi	HTS sharia official, Hama Sector
Abu Qutaybah al-Tunisi	HTS sharia official, Hama Sector
Haydarah al-Tunisi	HTS sharia official, Aleppo
Ansar al-Islam	
Abu Laith al-Tunisi	Senior military commander
Jaish Muhammad	
Abu Maryam al-Tunisi	General sharia official
Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyah	
Abu Musab al-Tunisi	Military leader

TABLE E *Tunisian foreign fighter signatories to AQ-linked statements during times of discord (some known only by one name)*

DATE	GROUP	STATEMENT	DESCRIPTION	SIGNATORIES
10/01/14	Mubadarah al-Hudna Bayn al-Fisail	Series of tweets	An initiative by pro–al-Qaeda ideologues proposing a JN-IS truce	Sheikh Abu al-Wafa al-Tunisi, Sheikh Abu Abdullah Amad bin Abdullah al-Tunisi
07/18/15	Muhajirin of al-Sham	"About the Baghdadi Group"	The group will continue to oppose IS after the latter attacked its members while attempting an offensive against the Assad regime	JN: Abu Hajr al-Tunisi (*muhajirin* official), Ansar al-Sharia: Abu Musab al Tunisi
06/20/16	Jaish Muhammad	"Decision"	About owning weapons	Abu Faris al-Tunisi
06/22/16	Jaish Muhammad	"And Hold Firmly: Pledge of Allegiance to Jabhat al-Nusra"	Giving *baya* to Abu Muhammad al-Julani	Abu Maryam al-Tunisi (top sharia official)
06/03/17	Muhajirin of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham	"About the Tweets of Hussam Atrash"	Against former HTS commander Hussam Atrash's tweets calling on rebel groups to dissolve and join an opposition interim government	Abu al-Walid al-Tunisi, Abu Yahya al-Tunisi
11/28/17	Muhajirin and Ansar of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham	"Important Statement"	Against HTS arrest of a number of prominent AQ leaders and clerics	Khaled al-Tunisi
11/29/17	Muhajirin and Ansar of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham	"About the Arrests of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham"	Against HTS arrest of a number of prominent AQ leaders and clerics	Abu al-Walid al-Tunisi, Abu Yahya al-Tunisi
11/29/17	Commanders and Cadres of the Western Sector (Border and Coast) of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham	"Because of the Arrests of the Muhajirin from the People of Knowledge, Precedence, and Jihad"	Against HTS arrest of a number of prominent AQ leaders and clerics	Sayyaf al-Tunisi (military office)
11/29/17	From the Muhajirin and Ansar of Western Aleppo Countryside of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham	"Leaving Their Work in Hayat Tahrir al-Sham"	Splitting from HTS due to the arrest of a number of prominent AQ leaders and clerics	Abu Ubaydah al-Tunisi (military administrator)
11/30/17	Mujahedin of the People of Tunisia in the Land of al-Sham	"Important Statement"	Against HTS arrest of Sami al-Uraydi, an AQ leader and former chief sharia official for JN	Sheikh Abu Umru al-Tunisi, Abu Yahya al-Tunisi, Abu al-Mundhir, Abu Amar al-Khattab, Birhan al-Din, Abu Abdullah, Abu Ishaq, Abu Hamza, Sayyaf, Abu Muhammad, Abu al-Bara Muhanad, Abu Khaled Khattab, Abu Muhammad, Abu Yahya, Haydarah, Faruq, Abu Anas, Abu al-Bayan
12/01/17	Talibat al-Ilm	"Statement"	Condemning the arrest of AQ leader and former chief sharia official Uraydi	Abu Umru al-Tunisi, Abu al-Mundhir al-Tunisi
12/04/17	Veteran Muhajirin of the Land of al-Sham	"Loyalty to the People of al-Sham: Testimony"	A reminder to HTS that the jihad in Syria is a jihad of the *umma*, not just one of Syria or of Idlib, Deraa, or Damascus	Abu Hajr al-Tunisi (*muhajirin* official in HTS), Abu Muhammad al-Tunisi (sharia official in Hama), Abu Qutaybah al-Tunisi (sharia official in Hama), Abu Malik al-Tunisi, Abu Jihad al-Tunisi, Abu Yahya al-Tunisi, Abu al-Zubayr al-Tunisi, Abu Ishaq al-Tunisi, Abu Said al-Tunisi

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A forthcoming book, *Your Sons Are At Your Service: Tunisia's Missionaries of Jihad,* based on his recent doctoral thesis, examines the history of the Tunisian jihadi movement. It is scheduled for publication in 2019 by Columbia University Press.

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