

# Your Sons Are at Your Service: Tunisia's Missionaries of Jihad

by [Aaron Y. Zelin \(/experts/aaron-y-zelin\)](/experts/aaron-y-zelin)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



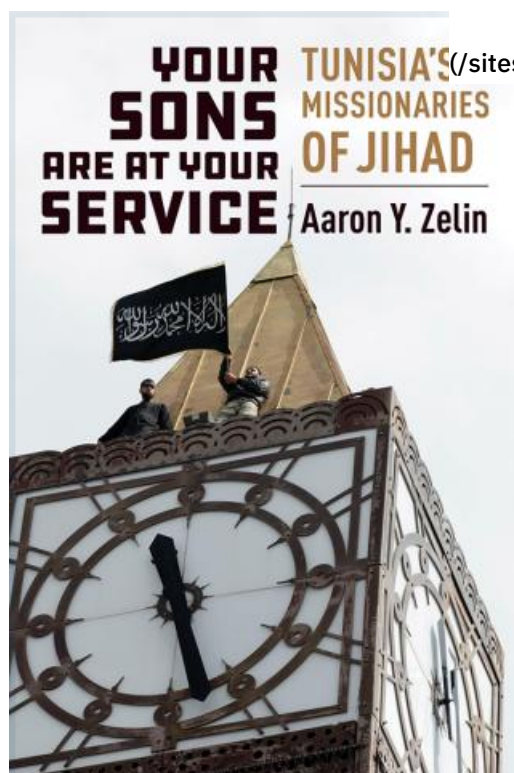
[Aaron Y. Zelin \(/experts/aaron-y-zelin\)](/experts/aaron-y-zelin)

Aaron Y. Zelin is the Richard Borow Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy where his research focuses on Sunni Arab jihadi groups in North Africa and Syria as well as the trend of foreign fighting and online jihadism.



In-Depth Reports

**How did Tunisia, a democratic bright spot of the Arab uprisings with very little history of terrorist violence within its borders before 2011, become one of the largest sources of foreign fighters for the Islamic State? This groundbreaking book presents the first history of the Tunisian jihadi movement and challenges simplified views of jihadism's appeal and success.**



Tunisia became one of the largest sources of foreign fighters for the Islamic State—even though the country stands out as a democratic bright spot of the

Arab uprisings and despite the fact that it had very little history of terrorist violence within its borders prior to 2011. In *Your Sons Are at Your Service*, Aaron Y. Zelin uncovers the longer history of Tunisian involvement in the jihadi movement and offers an in-depth examination of the reasons why so many Tunisians became drawn to jihadism following the 2011 revolution. Zelin highlights the longer-term causes that affected jihadi recruitment in Tunisia, including the prior history of Tunisians joining jihadi organizations and playing key roles in far-flung parts of the world over the past four decades. He contends that the jihadi group Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia was able to take advantage of the universal prisoner amnesty, increased openness, and the lack of governmental policy toward it after the revolution. In turn, this provided space for greater recruitment and subsequent mobilization to fight abroad once the Tunisian government cracked down on the group in 2013.

Zelin marshals cutting-edge empirical findings, extensive primary source

research, and on-the-ground fieldwork, including a variety of documents in Arabic going as far back as the 1980s and interviews with Ansar al-Sharia members and Tunisian fighters returning from Syria. The first book on the history of the Tunisian jihadi movement, *Your Sons Are at Your Service* is a meticulously researched account that challenges simplified views of jihadism's appeal and success.

## **Advance Praise for *Your Sons Are at Your Service***

“Backed by an astonishing body of research, *Your Sons Are at Your Service* is a sweeping, authoritative history of Tunisian jihadism, with new revelations on almost every page. Zelin is one of the most respected scholars studying terrorism at the top of his game in this debut book.”

—J. M. Berger, author of *Extremism*

“In this meticulously researched book packed with new discoveries, Zelin provides a comprehensive history of Tunisian jihadism, one of the least studied branches of the jihadi movement. But *Your Sons Are at Your Service* is much more than a country case study: it provides important insights on broader topics such as postrevolutionary politics, Salafi activism, foreign fighting, rebel recruitment, jihadi ideology, the Islamic State, and the war in Libya. This book should be on the shelf of any serious student of the modern Middle East.”

—Thomas Hegghammer, author of *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979*

“Zelin presents a striking and unique study of the Tunisian jihadi mobilization in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, its historical roots in the 1980s, and in the global jihadi movement. He has conducted extremely valuable and innovative research, collecting data and speaking with activists and leaders in the extremist circles on the ground in Tunisia. The book cements Zelin's reputation as an expert in his field, prized for his independent voice on this critical subject.”

—Jytte Klausen, Brandeis University

“To understand modern jihadism as an ideology and dogma, the Tunisian jihadi movement provides a unique case.... Zelin gives a glimpse into the past and future of jihadism through the Tunisian scope.”

—Wassim Nasr, France 24

## ***Your Sons Are at Your Service* in the Media**

POMEPS Middle East Politics Podcast

## About the Author

**Aaron Y. Zelin** is the Richard Borow Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and a visiting research scholar in the Department of Politics at Brandeis University. He is the founder of the website [Jihadology.net](http://Jihadology.net) (<http://Jihadology.net>), a primary source archive of global jihadi materials. ❖

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