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# Not Gonna Be Able To Do It: al-Qaeda in Tunisia's Inability to Take Advantage of the Islamic State's Setbacks

by [Aaron Y. Zelin](#)

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[Arabic](#)

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



### [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.



Articles & Testimony

**While the consensus might be that al-Qaeda is primed to benefit from Islamic State setbacks, unless conditions change locally, the so-called caliphate will likely remain a more attractive avenue for jihadi mobilization in Tunisia.**

**A**s the Islamic State (IS) began to lose territory in Iraq and Syria in the spring of 2015, two of the larger concerns for those that analyze the broader global jihadi movement was the potential for foreign fighter returnee violence and for al-Qaeda (AQ) to take advantage of IS's misfortunes. This article seeks to address the latter concern, in the context of Tunisia. This is because there is a puzzle worth unpacking: if the majority consensus in the jihadi studies field views AQ as ascendant, why is AQ in Tunisia's branch Katibat 'Uqbah Bin Nafi (KUBN) not able to overcome IS's network in Tunisia and become the standard-bearer of the movement in Tunisia? Relatedly, it will also explain why KUBN was unable to take advantage of AQ's prior branch in Tunisia, Ansar al-Sharia's successes (AST). Beyond answering this puzzle, there has been very little written about KUBN, beyond small mentions in articles on AQ or as a side note when discussing IS in Tunisia. Therefore, this article will help fill an important qualitative gap in the literature on jihadi groups. It seeks to interrogate KUBN in a more holistic manner by exploring its creation and evolution over time based on a number of under or unexplored primary sources from KUBN and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib (AQIM)...

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