

# Deciphering the Jihadist Presence in Syria: An Analysis of Martyrdom Notices

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Aaron Y. Zelin is the Gloria and Ken Levy Senior 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.



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**W**hen the Syrian uprising began in March 2011, the presence of jihadists in the protests was minimal at best. As the rebellion escalated, however, jihadists began to take advantage of the new landscape; by fall 2012, militants associated with al-Qaeda's worldview had become one of the key fighting forces against the Assad regime. And similar to the Iraqi jihad at its zenith, users on al-Qaeda's official and unofficial web forums have been posting authentic martyrdom notices for Syrians and foreigners perceived to have fought on behalf of the jihadist cause.

This article analyzes these notices both quantitatively and qualitatively, using data and biographical information collected from jihadist web forums between the start of the uprising and January 31, 2013. Such information can help observers piece together the identity, origin, group affiliation, area of operation, and other important data regarding many of the jihadists who have fought in Syria over the past two years. ❖

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