

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

Abstract

This article examines Katibat Uqba Bin Nafi, al-Qaeda/al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib's official branch in Tunisia. It sheds light on an unexplored case study on jihadi groups in recent times by investigating its history and forthcoming prospects. Moreover, it plans to use this article as an avenue to weigh in on the debate within jihadi studies on the future of al-Qaeda and if it can take advantage of the Islamic State's misfortunes in Iraq and Syria as well as Libya. The latter of which has more direct impact on IS's network in Tunisia. The article interrogates a number of Arabic primary sources that have yet to be surveyed from KUBN and AQIM that will help clarify these inquiries. It will identify shortcomings in KUBN's capacities and highlight reasons why IS will likely remain a more attractive avenue for jihadi mobilization in Tunisia going forward. This is relevant since much of the debate on AQ's status analyzes the topic from more of a macro level than looking at specific groups within its broader global network. This research will illustrate that while the consensus might be that AQ is primed to benefit from IS's setbacks, in the case of Tunisia, unless conditions change locally, KUBN is unlikely to follow the same trend as other AQ branches or when evaluating AQ as a whole.

Keywords: Tunisia, Katibat 'Uqbah Bin Nafi, al-Qaeda, The Islamic State, Networks, Messaging, Local Population, Terrorism

As 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.[1] 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.[2] 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).

The article plans to first explore literature that relates to debates on the state of al-Qaeda and how this research hopes to complement these ideas. Then it will provide background history on and the evolution of KUBN. The article will conclude by providing a deep analysis and reasons for why KUBN is unlikely to take greater advantage of IS's loss of territory in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, and not become more of the standard bearer of jihadism in Tunisia.

The State of al-Qaeda

Over the years, there have been a number of debates within the jihadi studies field on the health of al-Qaeda as an organization and its ability to remain relevant and operate. In the early years following the September 11th attacks, much of this was in the context of whether AQ was a centralized organization that had command-and-control over external operations in the West.[3] It morphed after the Arab uprisings into a discussion on if the uprisings hurt or helped AQ's broader agenda in the region.[4] More recently, with the tide going against IS militarily, there has been a vigorous exploration by specialists in the field on if AQ is primed to take advantage

of IS's losses and reclaim the mantle as the preeminent global jihadi network.

It is important to note, which Daniel Byman and Anne Stenersen have articulated, that sometimes this debate can get confusing or individuals are talking past one another since there have been different metrics used to identify strength.[5] And depending on which one is utilized one may gain a different view. For instance, as Stenersen highlights, "Should al-Qaida's strength be measured by the number and size of affiliates or the popularity and reach of its message? Or should the ability to stage international terrorist attacks be taken as yardstick? And when it comes to the threat – are we talking about the immediate threat from al-Qaida's 'external operations' capability, or the long-term threat from the development of al-Qaida-friendly sanctuaries abroad?"[6] Therefore, Stenersen suggests that "al-Qaida's support to Islamist insurgencies, and al-Qaida's international terrorist planning, should be seen as two different problem sets which require different countermeasures." [7] This particular article will focus on the former since there has been no evidence that KUBN has attempted or has the capacity to conduct external operations.

In terms of thoughts on the current overall health of AQ as an organization, some of the leading researchers in the field believe AQ is in a positive position and trajectory going forward. According to Bruce Hoffman, "While the self-proclaimed Islamic State has dominated the headlines and preoccupied national security officials for the past four years, al-Qaeda has been quietly rebuilding." [8] Relatedly, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross notes that "al-Qaeda remains a coherent and centralized organization, albeit one that is not perfectly centralized. Second, al-Qaeda's leadership continues to be essential in determining both the trajectory of the organization as well as its strategic direction." [9] Julia McQuaid, et al., have taken a less sharp view highlighting the changes over time, but still believes that: "Al-Qaeda is a very different organization in a very different world. It has suffered setbacks and periods of weakening, but it has also made gains and expanded in the face of international efforts against it." [10] I have also argued that "the [AQ] network is not on the run and is very active in numerous locales, most specifically Syria, Yemen, Mali, Somalia, Libya, as well as AfPak." That said, I did caution that "Al-Qaeda's emphasis on localized jihad missions, however, is not free of possible downsides." Noting complications and troubles in places like Syria and Libya with more locally focused actors. [11]

In contrast to the above conventional wisdom, Daniel Byman argues that "AQ's operational activity, strength, and the resulting threat that it posed all appeared in decline." [12] Likewise, Barak Mendelsohn has asserted that jihadi groups, including AQ, have a fundamental "aggregation problem," [13] which leads to failure. This suggests from Mendelsohn's perspective that AQ is not on the upward trajectory.

However, there is a thought-provoking dilemma. When reading the above take by the field, most view AQ as having a positive future outlook. Yet, this goes against my original contention that KUBN is not in position to take advantage of IS's recent failures. Therefore, it is important to make an addendum to this author's analysis on the state of AQ by noting that it is important to not only explore AQ as a broader system, but to also look on a case-by-case basis at specific branches and affiliates since the picture might differ from the overall diagnosis, which is the case here.

Background History on KUBN

Going back to mid-1995, AQIM and its predecessor groups (GIA and GSPC) have attempted to establish a larger network in Tunisia. [14] After the GSPC pledged bay'a to Usama Bin Ladin in September 2006 and later changed its name to AQIM in January 2007, [15] it restructured its allocation of resources, which had previously been divided across nine zones only in Algeria. The group decided to break its operations into four areas: Central (Algeria), East (Tunisia), South (Sahel), and West (Mauritania). The new division illustrated the importance that Tunisia and Tunisian members would play. [16] These changes could explain why a multi-week low-level insurgency broke out from December 2006 to mid-January 2007 in the mountains of eastern Tunisia with the AQIM front group Jund Asad Bin al-Furat (JABF). [17] In some ways, this was a test run for AQIM's post-Tunisian uprising creation of KUBN.

KUBN: A Fig Leaf of AQIM

KUBN came to be as a consequence of France's Operation Serval in Mali. Although the operation did not begin until mid-January 2013, the Malian government requested assistance to combat the AQIM-led jihadi insurgency in the northern part of the country in September 2012. This gap between Mali's request and the French intervention allowed AQIM time to plan its resources and personnel relocation. This spurred the movement of AQIM assets, Tunisian foreign fighters in Mali and AQIM fighters in Algeria to Western Tunisia in Jabal Chambi, along the border with Algeria. This was later corroborated by Tunisia's Interior Minister at the time Lotfi Ben Jeddou.[18] It is at this juncture that Tunisia fell victim to more sophisticated insurgent-type attacks against its military and security forces. Prior to the first KUBN attack, which targeted a National Guardsmen in Bou Chebka, along the Algerian-Tunisian border, on December 10, 2012,[19] most AQIM-related incidents following the Tunisian revolution had to do with weapons smuggling enterprises being broken up. The six incidents before the Bou Chebka attack occurred in remote and rural areas of Tunisia, such as Tataouine, Nekrif, Bir Znigra, Rouhia, Bir Ali Ben Khalifa, and El-Stah Hsan.[20]

Following the Bou Chebka attack, the al-Nahdah-led government at the time announced a series of arrests ten days later in Jabal Chambi and Ain Drahem, in northwest Tunisia, and provided more details on KUBN. [21] Ali Larayedh, Minister of Interior at the time, noted that some Tunisians arrested in the sweep had also previously been involved with AST dawa activities, though he was "unable to confirm the existence of formal links" between the KUBN cells and AST. The Tunisian government would formally designate AST as a terrorist organization in late August 2013.[22] The designation was a consequence of some of AST's members joining up with KUBN, but more importantly is due to AST's secret military wing, which helped prepare the two assassinations of secular leftist politicians Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi in February and July 2013, respectively as well as the failed October 2013 terrorist plot against Sousse and Monastir.[23] It should be noted, however, that this network was more connected to the AST-ASL nexus in Libya, with training camps used in Sabratha, Libya to help train individuals involved in these assassinations and plots than the KUBN network on the Algerian-Tunisian border in Jabal Chambi. The latter network is more connected to historical AQIM networks than the former newer ones that were established from scratch following the 2011 revolution.

In the beginning, KUBN, unlike many other jihadi groups, did not have a presence online to push its propaganda or announce operations it conducted. Therefore, there was a gap in information on the organization in the first year-and-a-half of its existence. It is likely that this was the case because AQIM did not want to publicize this project. It should be recalled that it was the Tunisian government that uncovered this front group. Therefore, it is plausible that reports that KUBN, beyond conducting low-level insurgent attacks, was also being used to attract more Tunisians to AQIM, and therefore providing initial training before sending these fighters to more advanced AQIM camps in Algeria or Libya.[24]

It only began to establish a presence online on July 11, 2014 when it created a Facebook page and Twitter account called Fajr al-Qayrawan.[25] This was ahead of an attack on the Tunisian military five days later, which killed 14 Tunisian soldiers and left 20 wounded.[26] The attack has been considered the most deadly attack against the Tunisian military since the country's independence in 1956. Moreover, KUBN only admitted officially that it was an AQIM front group in January 2015 when a martyrdom notice it released wrote AQIM under KUBN to note, which group the individual died fighting with. Both the creation of the presence online as well as the announcement of overt affiliation as an AQIM cut out was due to the Islamic State's advances in Iraq and Syria, but also within Tunisia.

The Islamic State Infiltration of KUBN

In the lead up to and following the announcement of IS's Caliphate in late June 2014, the proto-state promoted various pledges of allegiance and support to IS's leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as well as the broader project of resurrecting the historical form of Islamic government. For instance, in late March 2014, AQIM's central region came out in support of IS.[27] This grouping formed the basis of what eventually would become a 'province'

of IS called Wilayat al-Jaza'ir following Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's mid-November 2014 speech expanding IS's provincial system outside its core in Iraq and Syria.[28] This same dynamic occurred in mid-September 2014, when an alleged KUBN statement was released by Ifriqiya Media and stated "the mujahidin brothers in KUBN from the land of al-Qayrawan show support, help, and aid for the Islamic Caliphate State...give victory to the Islamic State, raise its banner and unite the ranks of the mujahideen in every place." [29]

This statement, however, did not represent KUBN as an organization. With hindsight, it is clear that it was a group of KUBN members that were pro-IS attempting to agitate for the organization to defect as well as buttress IS's claims over the homegrown Tunisian jihadi movement. Another important angle to point out is that the majority of insurgent attacks from IS in Tunisia once they officially began conducting them in 2015 have been carried out in Jabal al-Maghilah and Jabal Salloum.[30] This is where KUBN cell's that defected to IS had previously been located. It also helps explain the pattern of operations in Kasserine governorate, where IS maintains a base in those two locales, while those that remained loyal to KUBN continue to operate cells and conduct attacks in Jabal Chambi and Jabal Samamma.

The dynamics in Tunisia between KUBN and IS cells in Kasserine governorate, where both groups mainly operated was different and less hostile militarily than how the situation played out in Syria and elsewhere. Ifriqiya Media explained the nuanced nature of the local relationship between KUBN and IS: "we work in silence without any disagreements between us, we cooperate together, and the goals in different stages differ between every one of them." [31] Therefore, the groups had their own agendas and each focused on them, but sometimes they would cooperate since both were operating in the same non-conducive environment due to the Tunisian government's efforts.

That said, Ifriqiya Media, a Tunisian jihadi online media outlet that was founded in mid-June 2014 and was posting content that supported both IS and AQ-affiliated groups, had a clear agenda and information operation campaign. Ifriqiya Media was pro-IS and was only posting KUBN content since it was holding out hope that members of KUBN would pledge bay'a to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Therefore, by posting both IS and KUBN content, Ifriqiya Media was hoping to expose and convince their fellow pro-AQ jihadis to IS content and for them to commit to the correct side in the competition between IS and AQ.[32] Therefore, Ifriqiya Media was hoping to undermine AQIM's project in Tunisia: "We were the first to support and spread the news about jihadi operations in Tunisia during a time when the official jihadi media platforms were being passive due to some orders given." [33] This appears to be a slight against AQIM, since as discussed above, KUBN did not have an overt presence online in the first year-and-a-half of its existence. It is only a month after the creation of Ifriqiya Media that KUBN's official outlet at the time, Fajr al-Qayrawan, was established. That said, Fajr al-Qayrawan went dormant in mid-October 2014 following the arrest of its administrator.[34]

This arrest though provided greater space to the pro-IS elements in KUBN, since for whatever reason, possibly a lack of qualified individuals with the necessary skill set to run a media outlet, KUBN did not create a new media apparatus or replace someone to run the Fajr al-Qayrawan online accounts. As a result, over time, more and more of the Ifriqiya Media content was pro-IS and less and less highlighted pro-AQ/KUBN-related content. It is only after the death of KUBN's leader, Khalid Sha'ib,[35] and the organizations reaffirmation that it was still a part of AQIM,[36] both in late March 2015, did Ifriqiya Media begin fully posting 100% pro-IS and IS in Tunisia propaganda. It is no wonder then, that within two weeks of these developments, KUBN established its own Facebook page under the group's name for the first time to reclaim its autonomy and legitimacy.[37]

As a consequence of Ifriqiya Media's information operations, it is also likely the main reason why the Tunisian government originally claimed that KUBN was responsible for the Bardo Museum attack in March 2015.[38] The Tunisian government may not have yet fully comprehended at that point the split within KUBN itself. Therefore, IS's infiltration of KUBN hurt KUBN's capacity as well as membership base due to the defections between late summer 2014 and early 2015 when IS began to overtly promote through its official propaganda organs that it was indeed them as an organization involved in attacks, with the most notable being the March 2015 and June 2015 Bardo Museum and Sousse Beach attacks. As part of Tunisia's military response to those two IS attacks, it also picked up its military operations against KUBN, due to the original confusion, but also

to show that it was doing something against the militant threat. By July 2015, according to Tunisia's Interior Minister at the time, Najem Gharselli, 90% of KUBN's membership had been killed.[39]

Rebuilding KUBN, But Losing Momentum

As a consequence of the degradation of KUBN, the organization put out a statement in late August 2015, with a new official logo to help rebrand and boost its efforts. In many ways, it was also a reintroduction of the group to the Tunisian public. In the statement it had a message for a few audiences:

- The Tunisian government (which it called taghut [tyrants]) and its soldiers: "their repressive measures against the Katibah and against all Muslims will only strengthen their resolve to continue their jihad.
- Their 'mujahidin' brothers and especially those in the prisons of the tyrants: "offering them support and encouragement".
- The people of Tunisia: "the freedom promised by their revolution is being stolen. The Katibah will not shed innocent Muslim blood, and they are only targeting the tyrants." [40]

This last line is the most consequential aspect of the message. It would come back to hurt the organization since it has been unable to fully live up to its claim that it does not shed 'innocent Muslim blood'. Before getting to this in greater detail below, which helps explain why KUBN has been unable to take advantage of IS's misfortunes since 970 Tunisians have returned home from Iraq and Syria, it is worthwhile to explore the pace of operations that KUBN has conducted since 2015. This will illustrate its weaknesses and hardship in re-recruiting back IS in Tunisia members and foreign fighter returnees.

Based on official claims of responsibility from KUBN, in 2015 it conducted seven attacks; in 2016 it went down to three, with that total being reached subsequently in 2017 and 2018.[41] What is noteworthy beyond the fact that their attack pace has gone down, is that the level of sophistication in attack has been degraded greatly as well. In 2015, four of the attacks were ambushes and included clashes with Tunisian forces. This went down to one in 2016, none occurred in 2017, and only one occurred in 2018. The rest of KUBN's attacks have been against civilians as well as random mine explosions that it planted. Neither of which needs a lot of planning to execute. With the mines going off randomly once it is placed, it makes it far less risky on its members. This highlights risk aversion from KUBN due to low membership and broader organizational incapacity.

Part of this breakdown over the past few years is also due to American military aid, intelligence assistance, and forces on the ground has increasingly helped Tunisia deteriorate KUBN's (as well as IS's) ability to operate as openly and as forcefully.[42] Therefore, it is no surprise that the Tunisian military eventually killed Khalid Sha'ib's successor, his brother, Murad Sha'ib in August 2017.[43] Moreover, within quick succession, when AQIM began to send reinforcements from outside Tunisia to assist in re-organizing KUBN's capabilities, the Tunisian military was quickly able to kill KUBN's new leader Bilal Kobi in January 2018.[44] Further to this weakening, this could also explain why within the propaganda realm, KUBN's statements were now being released under the name of AQIM officially instead of released only under its group's name. Instead of the statement being signed as from KUBN solely and using its letterhead, even if it is known that KUBN is a part of AQIM, KUBN's statements are now signed off at the bottom with KUBN and AQIM, while also now using AQIM letterhead.

Within that framework and change, KUBN/AQIM released two statements in April and May 2018, likely to spur support and recruitment by focusing on classic jihadi ideological points. The first takes aim at France and Western governments for alleged continued imperialism in Tunisia and noting that "replacing persons and names, while keeping the essence of the regime and its structure, will only produce the same results. Previously, there were Bourguiba and Ben Ali. Today, there is Essebsi. Tomorrow, there will be Ghannouchi, and so on and so forth. It will be all the same!"[45] The statement ends with contradictory declarations by first claiming its continued relevance: "the mujahidin are still keeping their word. They have not replaced or changed, despite the successive trials and tribulations," while also then calling on individuals to act on its behalf: "We incite

every honest Muslim who is able to inflict harm on the Crusader wrong-doers and their interests by any means possible to spare no effort to do so, and to offer their persons and property in support of their faith and in defense of the oppressed children of their Muslim nation.”[46] This shows, that in fact, KUBN is not too strong and therefore needs others to conduct some type of low-scale operation.

The second statement was geared toward the forthcoming Tunisian municipal elections, which took place on May 6, 2018.[47] Jihadi-salafis, including KUBN/AQIM, consider democracy a religion, one in which humans contravene the sovereignty of God by attempting to make their own laws. In placing themselves on God’s level, politicians—including Islamists—violate the fundamental monotheistic principle of tawhid, which makes them polytheists. This ideology informs KUBN/AQIM’s statement, which attacks the legitimacy of democracy in Tunisia: “elections are drugs to sedate the Muslim people of Tunisia every two to three years and divert the attention from their key issues.”[48] That said, two months prior to the statement being put out by KUBN/AQIM, IS released an article in mid-March 2018,[49] in issue 123 of its weekly newsletter al-Naba, that takes aim at Tunisia’s electoral democracy and forthcoming election.[50] Therefore, KUBN/AQIM’s statement might not have had the same impact within the audience that might have been most receptive to it due to IS’s earlier article.

While the fate of KUBN recently has been of deterioration in overall capabilities, that does not mean the organization should be taken lightly since it still has lethal capacity, just far less often. For instance, their July 8, 2018 attack on Tunisian National Guardsmen in Ayn Sultan in Jendouba Governorate killed nine National Guardsmen.[51] That said, a larger question is if KUBN has the ability to take advantage of IS’s losses in Libya (December 2016), Iraq (July 2017), and Syria (October 2017) over the past couple of years. Based on the data above there are no signs that KUBN has been able to exploit this changed environment within the global jihadosphere. It is worthwhile mentioning that the capacity of IS in Tunisia has also gone down over the past few years having claimed responsibility for eleven attacks in 2015, four attacks in 2016, four attacks in 2017, and four attacks in 2018. No doubt, the role of American aid, assistance, and guidance has been helpful. The next section will help explain why beyond the purely counterterrorism measures KUBN is not poised to become the preeminent jihadi group in Tunisia.

Drawbacks on KUBN’s Ability to Overtake IS in Tunisia

The discussion about KUBN’s election statement following IS’s leads to a crucial point when exploring KUBN as an organization today and its ability to position itself vis-a-vis IS’s network in Tunisia: the group is not connected to the pulse of the Tunisian jihadi movement, is not innovative in the way it operates, and alienates the local population it is attempting to curry favor with. Some might argue that is the case for IS in Tunisia as well, but IS, unlike AQ, has never claimed that it is attempting to cultivate hearts and minds. Furthermore, when looking at the prisoner population of Tunisian jihadis most are pro-IS, which highlights the lack of broader support in country, even if both groups appear to have relatively similar operational pace the past few years. This is due to KUBN’s network disconnection, the changed experiences of Tunisian jihadis since the Arab uprisings, KUBN’s inability to align propaganda with action, and therefore losing hearts and minds of the local populace.

Network Disconnection

KUBN has had the disadvantage of positioning itself in areas that did not have much historic connection to jihadi activism. It is true that AQIM’s predecessor groups, the GSPC and the GIA, conducted attacks along the Algerian-Tunisia border three times between 1995-2001,[52] but most historical Tunisian jihadi networks were closer to the coastal region (Ariana, Bizerte, and Tunis) and Libyan border (Ben Gardane). This is in contrast to KUBN’s, which hugs the Algerian border in Kasserine and to a lesser extent in El Kef and Jendouba. Moreover, following the Tunisian revolution when AST was active and building local branches of its organization in various governorates, cities, and villages throughout Tunisia, the governorates where KUBN has operated were some of the least active within AST’s network. Based on research for this author’s forthcoming book, on a per

capita basis as it relates to events that AST organized by governorate (24 total governorates in Tunisia); El Kef, 19/24; Jendouba, 22/24; and Kasserine, 24/24, were at the bottom.[53] The main takeaway from this is that those locales were not deeply penetrated by jihadi networks and influence. Therefore, those three governorates, with Kasserine being the most relevant, since that is where KUBN has been the strongest since 2012, there was no fertile ground to easily recruit and penetrate the local milieu. Instead, KUBN has mostly been holed up in different mountainous areas in these regions, with Jabal Chambi and Jabal Samamma as the most relevant -- both of which are in Kasserine government. This is also relevant when discussing issues with the local population below.

Beyond the limited nature of AST's activism within those three governorates, the areas that were more richly organized and mobilized were later co-opted for recruitment to fight in Libya and Syria with IS. The main conduit for this was through a group and online media outlet called Shabab al-Tawhid (ST), a network of pro-IS Tunisians that had previously been with AST before it was designated as a terrorist organization. At the time, this author surmised that ST was a successor network to AST and was attempting to remobilize locally after the designation.[54] But with hindsight, it appears more as a mobilizing structure for foreign fighter recruitment and to turn AST members away from AQ to IS. ST was also where the first former senior AST leader, Shaykh Kamal Zuruq, pledged baya (allegiance) to the leader of IS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.[55] As a consequence, much of the Tunisian foreign fighter contingent abroad was pro-IS and drifted away from AQ's branches in Syria (Jabhat al-Nusra) and Libya (ASL). These networks, especially those connected to the Tunisian jihadi training camps in Sabratha, Libya, which were associated with IS, helped populate IS's branch in Tunisia as well as train the individuals responsible for the Bardo Museum, Sousse Beach, and Tunis National Guard Bus attacks as well as the attempted takeover of Ben Gardane in 2015-2016. As a result, this network co-optation by IS of many facets of AST's infrastructure, made it far more difficult for KUBN to also connect with and recruit Tunisians to join it in its mountain bases in other parts of the country.

As noted above, many of the key figures in the leadership of KUBN had previously come from AQIM's network in Algeria and Mali. The latter of which were mainly Tunisians that had been foreign fighters in Mali. The former, including the group's leaders (Khalid Sha'ib, Murad Sha'ib, and Bilal Kobi), were Algerian. Therefore, they were not necessarily as plugged into the new scene that emerged in Tunisia with AST after the revolution and were more used to the methodology of AQIM's network in Algeria. Therefore, if one compares the modus operandi of KUBN with AQIM's activities in Algeria over the past decade, they appear to be very similar: small groups of cells that primarily lay ambushes and are deeply clandestine in rural and mountainous areas. While this might bode well for survival, it does not necessarily help with winning hearts and minds of the local population. Nor does this approach augur well for KUBN's propaganda products garnering an audience, especially if the frame alignment is off due to differences between what is said and what its actions show.

From Terrorism and Insurgency to Social Movement and Service Provision

It is necessary to first highlight some key structural changes that happened to the jihadi movement, which is relevant to Tunisian jihadism, and helps explain some of these failures that KUBN has encountered.

Historically, within the Arab world, most jihadi groups either were involved in terrorist incidents or some level of insurgent military activity. Much of this is due to the conditions on the ground in these countries, whether within the framework of an authoritarian system or within the context of civil war. As a consequence, there was a limit to the tools that jihadis could use to attempt to advance its message and try over time to implement its vision for society. It in many ways was self-defeating since these groups mainly operated clandestinely and covertly. Therefore, they were not close with the local population, which made it difficult to advance beyond a purely violent stage of action. This dynamic changed dramatically with the onset of the Arab uprisings, which allowed for jihadi groups to expand their repertoire of actions due to the opening of public squares or safe havens that jihadi organizations controlled. This led to the growth in dawa (proselytization/outreach) activities as well as the provision of social services and in some cases governance. This was a paradigm shift and moved the jihadi movement forward due to the greater opportunities to appeal directly to the local populace in a face-

to-face manner versus only through online videos. These new conditions brought in a larger pool of individuals to a number of jihadi organizations that may have not joined had it been a purely violent and underground movement. Therefore, the expectations within the broader movement altered to presume a certain type of organizational operation. It also shows that jihadi groups could not only talk about implementing some type of theocratic vision some time in the future, but actually carrying it out in the real world to varying degrees.

In the context of Tunisia, AST built up a vast network of outreach and service from 2011-2013. My forthcoming book on the history of Tunisian jihadism gets into this in great detail, but is beyond the scope of this particular article. What is important to note in this piece though is that the building of an Islamic state was a key motivating frame used by AST to encourage people to join its group. It was so important to the group that when it published its first advertisement for its second annual conference in May 2012, it framed the event as “a building block in the project to establish the Caliphate State.”[56] Furthermore, the title of the third annual conference a year later was “Supporters of Islamic Law ... The Islamic State We Are Building,” suggesting that it was no longer an objective for the future, but rather a process that AST had already begun. After the third conference, AST began using the slogan, “We Are Building the Islamic State” to further signify the ongoing process and push individuals to join the historic project.[57]

This messaging frame is a tool in fostering an individual’s sense of significance. It asserted that one could be part of a project larger than oneself: the re-establishment of an Islamic state in Tunisia. Therefore, those same youth who have education, skills, and desire to give back to their community can now feel empowered. AST sought to contrast that feeling of empowerment with the feelings sparked by a corrupt central government that does not want to empower youth. Recognizing these grievances, AST always repeated the slogan “Your Sons Are At Your Service.” This highlighted the importance of not only giving back to one’s neighborhood, but also honoring those involved in such work. It also helped that AST provided evidence (by posting all of its activities on its official Facebook page) that it was indeed building this shadow structure of works and services in various communities throughout Tunisia. Consequently, the more charitable and outreach activities AST orchestrated, the more individuals joined up, which in turn allowed AST to organize and conduct more activities, more often, in more locales.

This helps provide one explanation for why recruitment to IS was so seamless. Many Tunisian jihadis viewed it as a continuation of what they had already been doing in Tunisia, as told to this author by a member of AST: “The dawa is going on and then after it, it is global work, not just in Tunisia.”[58] Moreover, instead of only doing these types of functions as a movement, now they were doing it, from their perspectives, as part of a historical project through the reintroduction of the Caliphate. As a consequence, Tunisian jihadis became accustomed to a certain type of jihadism, one that included population outreach and service, beyond just violence. This historical process, especially with the experience of the Tunisian jihadi movement since the Tunisian revolution in particular, is key to also understanding why KUBN has not been able to succeed as much with the local population as one might think. It does not help either that their ideological messaging to the population does not completely align with what has happened on the ground.

Losing Hearts and Minds

With this in mind, this section will highlight a number of points. First it will show that the type of messages that KUBN and AQIM have been pushing to the Tunisian population seems distant and from an era prior to the Arab uprisings. Second, it will illustrate the inability of KUBN to ingratiate itself with the local population. Rather, and finally, it will demonstrate how any possible goodwill has been hurt due to KUBN’s penchant for stealing provisions from locals homes, raiding local businesses for supplies, and setting up mines that although are likely supposed to target Tunisian security forces have in many cases killed local civilians in the areas they operate. In the end, KUBN/AQIM are proffering a message against the current Tunisian government and those that believe in the process of democratization, but not offering anything in return beyond terrorizing and alienating the local community, one that they are not even close to because they are hiding in the mountains.

Returning to KUBN/AQIM's statement ahead of the Tunisian municipal elections in May 2018, it notes that "in every election to date all political parties market the next elections as a turning point as if it's a 'magic cane,' which will change the circumstances of the country, and allow the country to escape its economic and political crises." [59] It is true that many Tunisians still are waiting for economic benefits from the revolution, but this particular election is part of providing such gains in the longer-term. By decentralizing power to the local level, instead of a centralized apparatus that is distant to the population, this election provides more local agency over budgets and other types of services and advantages that only someone from that particular area might be able to render since they do care about the area they came from. This is in contrast to some outsider from the capital that has no connection to the rural and interior parts of Tunisia. Therefore, KUBN/AQIM are criticizing a measure that in the medium-to-long-term will be beneficial to the local populations. This is especially the case in areas KUBN operates like Kasserine, since those locally will have more control over and say in their own lives and future, which the hope is to alleviate more of the economic burden. As a result, the same playbook AQ-aligned groups might use to delegitimize faux elections in authoritarian systems in the Arab world prior to the uprisings, falls short, as well as impedes the wishes of the locals the group is attempting to sway.

More importantly, KUBN/AQIM do not provide much alternative to what it is criticizing beyond rhetorical flourishes about the need for Islamic law and for individuals to fight jihad. These positions are attached to another key element of its messaging related to the fact that it claims it does not attack civilians. In at least four statements, KUBN/AQIM tries to convince Tunisians that it does not spill the blood of innocent individuals (which is part of a broader campaign that AQ has promoted since Ayman al-Zawahiri's September 2013 "General Guidelines for the Work of a Jihadi" [60]).

- "We tell our people in Tunisia that we do not target the Tunisian people... We only target those who attack us... we are not responsible for attacks on our Muslim Tunisian Families... We ask our mujahidin to do their best and be up to the task and warn them about infallible blood." [61]
- "[KUBN] will not shed innocent Muslim blood, and they are only targeting the tyrants." [62]
- "It reiterates to the people of Tunisia that KUBN's fight is with the tyrants and their soldiers, not with ordinary Muslims. And it warns the local population to be cautious about moving around KUBN areas with weapons in case the group mistakes them for enemy soldiers. It also informs local inhabitants that they can expect to be searched and to undergo identity checks so that KUBN can determine that they are not members of the army or on their list of supporters of the tyrants. KUBN also assert their right to defend themselves if they are attacked, even if the attacker is Muslim." [63]
- "We promise our people in Tunisia that we do not target any innocent Muslim who is not fighting us. And we confirm that our war is against those who oppressed and assaulted us like the army and other security bodies." [64]

Also, AQIM's 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jaza'iri in December 2016, released an advice booklet to leaders and fighters in KUBN on how to operate in the mountainous areas they are based in. It notes the following key directions:

Getting to know many people as much as you can and gain their affection, if you gain their affection they will aid you in many things... They will not snitch on you and will hide you, and mislead your enemies. You will gain influence in the area and will be able to mobilize as you wish. Gain information about the enemy anytime. And best you will gain and benefit from is the issue of recruiting. You will guarantee logistical support in all kinds (such as: provisions, clothes, and everything you need from military supplies)... And reminding everyone of the bombs, because it might be danger to them, this is part of maintaining the safety of Muslims. [65]

This counsel about being close to the local population, along with KUBN/AQIM's own propaganda about not targeting innocent civilians has not been heeded. Instead, KUBN is not, as noted above, close to the local residents, but rather hiding in the mountains. More importantly, it has killed a number of residents either

on purpose or by accident and has also ransacked individuals homes and businesses to survive, which runs counter to the second point above in al-Jaza'iri's guidance manual.

As a consequence of KUBN's direct murder of local residents, including Salih al-Firjani, Haddah Rihimi, and Lamjed Gribi, it has released statements attempting to justify the group's actions and whitewash what occurred as part of a public relations gambit since these deaths were seen locally as inexcusable.[66] Based on a database created by this author, since May 2016, there have been 14 cases where landmines laid by KUBN have been set off by civilians, which has led to at least four deaths, two amputations, and other various injuries. Less lethal, but no less worrisome to local residents, since October 2015, based on a database created by this author, KUBN has been involved in 20 cases of breaking into people's homes and local businesses to steal provisions, supplies, and forcefully eaten home-cooked meals as well as attacking or assaulting locals for information on the Tunisian military (see Table 1).

Table 1. Incidents and Assaults Related to Break-Ins and Gaining Intelligence

Date	Incident	Location
10/18/2015	Terrorists refuel food and force two young men to transport them	Ain Zayen
1/2/2016	Four armed individuals burst into family home and seize food	Mazreg Chames
3/25/2016	Three terrorists assault and rob a citizen	Sidi Harath
5/29/2016	Terrorist group penetrates a shop and a house	El Aayoun/Jebel Twaysha
6/28/2016	Nine terrorists including a woman broke into a home, stealing food and medicine	Mazreg Chames
8/4/2016	Terrorist group attacks a house and seizes supplies	Douar Msabhia
8/11/2016	Assaulting a resident of Kasserine who refused to give them the addresses of security forces	Agroub Mimoun
8/16/2016	Terrorists entered a house	Sarkouna
11/19/2016	Terrorist group attacks a house and seizes foodstuffs	Ghar Dimaou
1/17/2017	Group of terrorists storm a house and seizes provisions of its inhabitants	Douar Jfaffleya/Ain Zayen
3/5/2017	Terrorists attack a grocery store	Hammam Mallag
3/22/2017	Aggression by terrorists against a shepherd	Jebel Samamma
6/5/2017	Three terrorists assault a 22-year-old	Ain Zayen
8/9/2017	Terrorist group raided a house	Jebel Ouergha
10/21/2017	Terrorist elements rob a house	Ain Zayen
12/25/2017	Terrorists open fire on shepherds	Ain Jenan
6/1/2018	Terrorist group shoots a shepherd	Jebel Chambi
6/23/2018	Terrorist group tortures a shepherd	Krayriya
8/22/2018	Terrorists attack a house	Fej Ettine
10/1/2018	Two terrorists break into a house	Mejmaja

It is no surprise then that many local residents do not look too fondly upon KUBN and its fight against the Tunisian government and security forces. Not only is KUBN not close to the local residents nor attempting to gain favor with them via service provision, instead many civilians have been killed, injured, or harassed by KUBN. Therefore, KUBN has undermined its own potential base. This helps provide a greater explanation for why KUBN is unlikely to overtake IS as the most popular jihadi group in Tunisia. Plus, the broader Tunisian jihadi network is pro-IS, whether breaking it down by those that are based abroad (Syria, Libya, Europe) or internal (prison system). The reality is, IS's message still has greater appeal, due to the fact that it can rely on a nostalgia narrative of what it did in Iraq, Libya, and Syria, unlike KUBN, which just discusses what could be. All IS has to do is point to the exploits it was able to accomplish in Libya, Iraq, and Syria in terms of

administration, governance, and services to show that it could be a possibility in Tunisia if given the proper conditions in contrast to a negative lived experience with KUBN.

Conclusion

For all these reasons mentioned in the previous few sections—network disconnection, the changed experiences of Tunisian jihadis since the Arab uprisings, and KUBN's inability to align propaganda about not shedding innocent Muslim blood with its actions—the group is losing hearts and minds of the local populace. Even if there may be some type of appeal with some themes in KUBN's message, whether it relates to economic inequality or imperialism that could attract those on the secular left or messages that have social conservative talking points related to issues including equal inheritance amongst the sexes that might entice Islamists, all of this becomes irrelevant when one alienates the same population that one is attempting to gain support from.

This is especially the case for AQ-aligned groups, which have been attempting, through al-Zawahiri's guidelines mentioned above, to distinguish itself from past jihadi excesses by showing a more welcoming jihadi enterprise. In the case of KUBN, however, it is not living up to such ideals and when one adds to it the structural factors, counterterrorism campaign, and IS's remaining appeal within the Tunisian jihadosphere, it is unlikely that KUBN will be to take advantage of IS's recent downturn. Therefore, contra to overall arguments about AQ's viability in the aftermath of IS losses in Iraq, Libya, and Syria over the past two years, this particular case study has shown that KUBN's status falls more in line with Byman and Mendelsohn's diagnosis for AQ's current state.

About the Author: Aaron Y. Zelin is the Richard Borow Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy and a Visiting Research Scholar at Brandeis University. He is also the founder of Jihadology.

Notes

[1] This author has already discussed this in two other papers on the Tunisian foreign fighter and returnee phenomenon: Aaron Y. Zelin, "Tunisian Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policy Notes* Number 55, November 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/tunisian-foreign-fighters-in-iraq-and-syria>; Aaron Y. Zelin, "The Others: Foreign Fighters in Libya," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policy Notes* Number 45, January 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-others-foreign-fighters-in-libya-and-the-islamic-state>.

[2] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Bay'ah to Baghdadi: Foreign Support for Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State (Part 2)," *Syria Comment*, September 27, 2014, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/15416/bayah-to-baghdadi-foreign-support-for-abu-bakr-al>; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "The Islamic State's African Long Con," *Foreign Policy*, March 16, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/16/islamic-state-boko-haram-nigeria>; Isabelle Werenfels, "Going 'Glocal': Jihadism in Algeria and Tunisia," in ed. Guido Steinberg and Annette Weber, "Jihadism in Africa: Local Causes, Regional Expansion, International Alliances," Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Research Paper 5, June 2015, https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2015_RP05_sbg_web.pdf; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, "The Islamic State Varying Fortunes in North Africa," *War on the Rocks*, June 24, 2015, <https://warontherocks.com/2015/06/the-islamic-states-varying-fortunes-in-north-africa>; "Jihadist Violence in Tunisia: The Urgent Need for a National Strategy," International Crisis Group, Briefing Number 50, June 22, 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/jihadist-violence-tunisia-urgent-need-national-strategy>; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Jacob Zenn, and Nathaniel Barr, "Islamic State 2021: Possible Futures in North and West Africa," Foundation for Defense of Democracies, February 2017, http://www.defenddemocracy.org/content/uploads/documents/022017_DGR_ISIL_Report.pdf.

[3] Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008; Bruce Hoffman, "The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism: Why Osama bin Laden Still Matters," *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 87 Number 3, May/June 2008; Bruce Hoffman, "The Leaderless Jihad's Leader: Why Osama Bin Laden Mattered," *Foreign Affairs*, May 13, 2011; Nelly Lahoud, Stuart Caudill, Liam Collins, Gabriel Koehler-Derrick, Don Rassler, and Muhammad al-'Ubaydi, "Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Ladin Sidelined?," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Harmony Program, May 3, 2012; Eliane Tschaen Barbieri and Jytte Klausen, "Al Qaeda's London Branch: Patterns of Domestic and Transnational Network Integration," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Number 35 Issue 6, June 2012; Mitchell Silber, *The Al Qaeda Factor: Plots Against the West*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012; Peter Neumann, Ryan Evans, and Raffaello Pantucci, "Locating Al Qaeda's Center of Gravity: The Role of Middle Managers," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Volume 34 Issue 11, November 2011; Aaron Y. Zelin, *Your Sons Are At Your Service: Tunisia's Missionaries of Jihad*, New York City: Columbia University Press, 2019.

[4] William F. McCants, "Al Qaeda's Challenge The Jihadists' War With Islamist Democrats," *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 90 Number 5, September/October 2011; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "Al-Qaeda Is Winning," *The Atlantic*, September 8, 2011; Alex S. Wilner, "Opportunity Costs or Costly Opportunities? The Arab Spring, Osama Bin Laden, and Al-Qaeda's African Affiliates," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 5, Number 3-4, 2011; Shiraz Maher and Peter R Neumann, "Al-Qaeda at the Crossroads: How the terror group is responding to the loss of its leaders & the Arab Spring," International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, August 2012; Clinton Watts, "What If There Is No Al-Qaeda? Preparing for Future Terrorism," Foreign Policy Research Institute, *E-Notes*, July 2012; Leah Farrall, "Some quick thoughts on reports Abu Yahya al-Libi has been killed," All Things Counterterrorism, June 6, 2012.

[5] Daniel Byman, "Review Essay: Explaining Al Qaeda's Decline," *The Journal of Politics*, Volume 79, Number 3, July 2017, 1106-1117, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/692166?journalCode=jop>; Anne Stenersen, "Thirty Years after its Foundation – Where is al-Qaida Going?," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 11, Number 6, December 2017, <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2017/issue-6/0220176-thirty-years-after-its-foundation---where-is-al-qaida-going-by-anne-stenersen.pdf>.

[6] Stenersen, "Thirty Years after its Foundation – Where is al-Qaida Going?"

[7] Ibid.

[8] Bruce Hoffman, "Al-Qaeda's Resurrection," Council on Foreign Relations, March 6, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/al-qaedas-resurrection>.

[9] Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, "How Al-Qaeda Works: The Jihadist Group's Evolving Organizational Design," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Volume 23, June 2018, <https://www.hudson.org/research/14365-how-al-qaeda-works-the-jihadist-group-s-evolving-organizational-design>.

[10] Julia McQuaid, Jonathan Schroden, Pamela G. Faber, P. Kathleen Hammerberg, Alexander Powell, Zack Gold, David Knoll, and William Rosenau, "Independent Assessment of U.S. Government Efforts against Al Qaeda," Center for Naval Analysis, October 2017, https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/DRM-2017-U-015710-2Rev.pdf.

[11] Aaron Y. Zelin, "How al-Qaeda Survived Drones, Uprisings, and the Islamic State," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policy Focus* 153, June 2017, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus153-Zelin.pdf>.

[12] Byman, "Review Essay: Explaining Al Qaeda's Decline."

[13] Barak Mendelsohn, "Bound to Fail: Transnational Jihadism and the Aggregation Problem," *War on the Rocks*, August 28, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/08/bound-to-fail-transnational-jihadism-and-the-aggregation-problem/>.

[14] Alison Pargeter, "Radicalisation in Tunisia," ed. George Joffe, *Islamist Radicalisation in North Africa: Politics and Process*, Abingdon: Routledge Books, 2011, 77.

[15] Abu Mus'ab 'Abd al-Wadud, "Bayan wa bushra bi-indhimam wa mubay'ah al-jama'ah al-salafiyah li-l-shaykh usamah," al-Jama'ah al-Salafiyah Li-l-Da'wah wa-l-Qital bi-l-Jaza'ir, September 13, 2006; Abu Mus'ab 'Abd al-Wadud, "Isha'ar bi-taghayir al-tasmiyah," al-Jama'ah al-Salafiyah Li-l-Da'wah wa-l-Qital bi-l-Jaza'ir, January 24, 2007.

[16] Anneli Botha, "Terrorism in Maghreb: The Transnationalisation of Domestic Terrorism," Institute for Security Studies, ISS Monograph Series, Number 144, June 2008, 50.

[17] Alison Parageter, "The Suleiman affair - Radicalism and jihad in Tunisia," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Volume 23 Issue 1, 2011.

[18] "Jihadists hunted in Tunisia 'former Mali fighters,'" *AFP*, May 8, 2013, <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2013/05/90056/jihadists-hunted-in-tunisia-former-mali-fighters>; Noureldine al-Fridi, "Tunisian Jihadists May Be Training in Mali," May 18, 2013, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2013/05/tunisian-jihadists-training-mali.html>.

[19] Amira Masrour, "Circumstances of Death Arise After Algerian Border Attack," *Tunisia Live*, December 11, 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20121223020906/http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/12/11/circumstances-of-death-arise-after-algerian-border-attack>; Amira Masrour, "National Guard in Pursuit of Suspects in Algerian Border Attack," *Tunisia Live*, December 12, 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20121223100733/http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/12/12/national-guard-in-pursuit-of-suspects-in-algerian-border-attack>; "Tunisia arrests 11 after deadly border attack," *AFP*, December 12, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/60382/World/Region/Tunisia-arrests--after-deadly-border-attack.aspx>.

[20] "Two suspected Qaeda affiliates arrested in Tunisia," *AFP*, May 15, 2011; "Six killed in Tunisian clashes near Algeria: diplomat," *AFP*, September 23, 2011; Kouichi Shirayanagi, "Tunisian Authorities Break Up Alleged Al Qaeda Terror Cell," *Tunisia Live*, February 13, 2012; Pasha Magid, "Tunisian Ministry of Defense Confirms Destruction of Armed Camp," *Tunisia Live*, June 23, 2012.

[21] "16 Qaeda suspects arrested in Tunisia: minister," *AFP*, December 21, 2012.

- [22] Aaron Y. Zelin, "Tunis Designates Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia," *al-Wasat*, August 28, 2013, <https://thewasat.wordpress.com/2013/08/28/tunis-designates-ansar-al-sharia-in-tunisia>.
- [23] Aaron Y. Zelin, "The Others: Foreign Fighters in Libya," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policy Note* 45, January 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-others-foreign-fighters-in-libya-and-the-islamic-state>.
- [24] Benjamin Roger, "Tunisie: sur la trace des djihadistes de mont Chaambi," *Jeune Afrique*, May 7, 2013, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/170931/politique/tunisie-sur-la-trace-des-jihadistes-du-mont-chaambi>.
- [25] Fajr al-Qayrawan Facebook page, accessed July 11, 2014.
- [26] Jacob Jaffe, "14 Tunisian Soldiers Killed, 20 wounded in Chaambi Attack," *Tunisia Live*, July 17, 2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20171013133224/http://www.tunisia-live.net/2014/07/17/14-soldiers-killed-20-wounded-in-chaambi-attack>.
- [27] Central Region of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib, "Advocacy from the Islamic Maghrib for the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham," March 22, 2014, <https://jihadology.net/2014/03/22/new-statement-from-the-central-region-of-al-qaidah-in-the-islamic-maghrib-advocacy-from-the-islamic-maghrib-for-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-sham>.
- [28] Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, "Although The Disbelievers Dislike It," al-Furqan Media, November 13, 2014.
- [29] Katibat 'Uqbah Bin Nafi, "al-Qayrawan Support For the Islamic State," Ifriqiya Media, September 16, 2014, <https://shamukh.net/vb/showthread.php?t=226912>.
- [30] Aaron Y. Zelin, "Islamic State Attacks in Tunisia," *Tunisian Jihadism*, June 6, 2018, <https://tunisianjihadism.com/2018/06/06/islamic-state-attacks-in-tunisia>.
- [31] Ifriqiya Media, "A Brief Explanation of What Is Going On in the Tunisian Field," March 31, 2015.
- [32] Ifriqiya Media, "Information, Reminders, Coded Messages, Advice, and Warning," December 17, 2014.
- [33] Ibid.
- [34] Natasha Turak, "Medical Student Fatma Zouaghi, Alleged Ansar Al Sharia Member, Arrested," *Tunisia Live*, October 15, 2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170623133134/http://www.tunisia-live.net/2014/10/15/medical-student-fatma-zouaghi-alleged-ansar-al-sharia-member-arrested>; "Tunisia: Young Girl Led Propaganda Cell of Ansar Al-Sharia and Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade," *Tunis Afrique Presse*, October 14, 2014, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201410141646.html>.
- [35] Ifriqiya Media, "Good Night in This Life and Immortality in Paradise," March 29, 2015, <https://jihadology.net/2015/03/29/new-release-from-ifriqiyah-media-good-night-in-this-life-and-immortality-in-paradise>.
- [36] Ifriqiya Media, "A Brief Explanation of What Is Going On in the Tunisian Field."
- [37] Katibat 'Uqba Bin Nafi Facebook page, accessed April 16, 2015.
- [38] Patrick Markey, "Tunisia signals local al Qaeda links to Bardo museum attack," *Reuters*, March 26, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-security-idUSKBN0MM1L20150326>.
- [39] Tarek Amara, "Tunisia says almost wipes out al Qaeda group after attacks," *Reuters*, July 13, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-security/tunisia-says-almost-wipes-out-al-qaeda-group-after-attacks-idUSKCN0PN15S20150713>.
- [40] Katibat 'Uqbah Bin Nafi, "So Wait; Indeed We, Along With You, Are Waiting," August 21, 2015, <http://jihadology.net/2015/08/21/new-statement-from-katibat-uqbah-ibn-nafi-so-wait-indeed-we-along-with-you-are-waiting/>.
- [41] Aaron Y. Zelin, "Katibat 'Uqbah Bin Nafi/al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib Attacks in Tunisia," *Tunisian Jihadism*, October 8, 2018, <https://tunisianjihadism.com/2018/10/08/katibat-uqbah-bin-nafi-al-qaeda-in-the-islamic-maghrib-attacks-in-tunisia>.
- [42] Héni Nsaibia, "America Is Quietly Expanding Its War in Tunisia," *The National Interest*, September 18, 2018, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/america-quietly-expanding-its-war-tunisia-31492>.
- [43] "Tunisian security forces kill senior militant in ambush: sources," *Reuters*, August 9, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-security/tunisian-security-forces-kill-senior-militant-in-ambush-sources-idUSKBN1AP0RX>.
- [44] Tarek Amara, "Tunisia forces kill the new leader of local branch of al-Qaeda," *Reuters*, January 21, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-security/tunisia-forces-kill-the-new-leader-of-local-branch-of-al-qaeda-idUSKBN1FA0ZD>.
- [45] al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib, "Tunisia: Seven Lean Years After the Failure of the Revolution and Plundering of the Wealth," *al-Andalus Media*, April 7, 2018, <http://jihadology.net/2018/04/07/new-statement-from-al-qaidah-in-the-islamic-maghrib-tunisia-seven-lean-years-after-the-failure-of-the-revolution-and-plundering-of-the-wealth/>.

[46] Ibid.

[47] al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib, “The Mirage of Elections in Tunisia,” al-Andalus Media, May 4, 2018, <https://jihadology.net/2018/05/04/new-statement-from-al-qaidah-in-the-islamic-maghrib-the-mirage-of-elections-in-tunisia>.

[48] Ibid.

[49] The Islamic State, “Istihbu al-hayah al-dunya ‘ala al-khurah,” Sahifat al-Naba’, Number 123, March 15, 2018, 3, <https://jihadology.net/2018/03/15/new-issue-of-the-islamic-states-newsletter-al-naba-123>.

[50] For more on IS’s anti-election campaign in Tunisia see: Aaron Y. Zelin, “The Islamic State Targets Tunisia Ahead of Elections,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policy Watch* 2965, April 30, 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-islamic-state-targets-tunisia-ahead-of-elections>.

[51] Katibat ‘Uqbah Bin Nafi, “Destroying Nine Soldiers of the Tunisian Guard, Including a 1st Lieutenant, in Targeting Their Patrol, and Capturing Light Weaponry and a 12.7 Western-made Machine Gun as War Spoils,” al-Andalus Media, July 8, 2018; Katibat ‘Uqbah Bin Nafi, “Photos of the Tunisian Guard Vehicles at the Moment and After Their Targeting By Mujahidin Fire in the ‘Support for Shari’ah’ Battle in Ayn Sultan,” *Ifriqiya al-Muslimah*, July 23, 2018.

[52] Aaron Y. Zelin, “Jihadi Attacks in Tunisia Prior to 2011,” *Tunisian Jihadism*, October 22, 2018, <https://tunisianjihadism.com/2018/10/22/jihadi-attacks-in-tunisia-prior-to-2011>.

[53] Zelin, *Your Sons Are At Your Service: Tunisia’s Missionaries of Jihad*.

[54] Aaron Y. Zelin, “Shabab al-Tawhid: The Rebranding of Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia?,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policy Watch* 2250, May 9, 2014, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/shabab-al-tawhid-the-rebranding-of-ansar-al-sharia-in-tunisia>; Aaron Y. Zelin, “Update on Shabab al-Tawhid and Creation of al-Midrār Media,” *Jihadology*, The Clairvoyant, May 12, 2014, <https://jihadology.net/2014/05/12/the-clairvoyant-update-on-shabab-al-tawhid-and-creation-of-al-midrār-media>.

[55] Shaykh Kamal Zuruq, “Appeal To Support the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham,” Shabab al-Tawhid Media, June 4, 2014, <https://jihadology.net/2014/06/04/shabab-al-tawhid-media-presents-a-new-video-message-from-an-sharia-in-tunisia-shaykh-kamal-zuruq-appeal-to-support-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-sham>.

[56] Ansar al-Shari’ah in Tunisia, “Announcing the Second Annual Conference,” al-Bayyariq Media Foundation, April 25, 2012.

[57] Ansar al-Shari’ah in Tunisia, “Helping Needy Families in Ariana,” al-Bayyariq Media Foundation, June 2, 2013.

[58] Interview with members of AST’s dawa program, Sousse, Tunisia, February 19, 2013.

[59] al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib, “The Mirage of Elections in Tunisia.”

[60] Ayman al-Zawahiri, “General Guidelines for the Work of a Jihadi,” al-Sahab Media, September 14, 2013, <https://jihadology.net/2013/09/14/as-sa%e1%b8%a5ab-media-presents-a-new-release-from-al-qaidahs-dr-ayman-al-%e1%ba%93awahiri-general-guidelines-for-the-work-of-a-jihadi>.

[61] al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib, “Revenge For the Free Tunisia: Targeting the Interior Minister ‘Lutfi Bin Jiddu,’” al-Andalus Media, June 13, 2014, <http://jihadology.net/2014/06/13/al-andalus-media-presents-a-new-statement-from-al-qaidah-in-the-islamic-maghrib-revenge-for-the-free-tunisia-targeting-the-interior-minister-lu%e1%b9%adfi-bin-jiddu>.

[62] Katibat ‘Uqbah Bin Nafi, “So Wait; Indeed We, Along With You, Are Waiting.”

[63] Katibat ‘Uqbah Ibn Nafi, “Clarification and Warning About the Killing of the Missionary ‘Ali al-Firjani,’” September 3, 2015, <http://jihadology.net/2015/09/03/new-statement-from-katibat-uqbah-ibn-nafi-clarification-and-warning-about-the-killing-of-the-missionary-%e1%b9%a3ali%e1%b8%a5-al-firjani>.

[64] Katibat ‘Uqbah Ibn Nafi, “Denial: Innocence of the Mujahidin From the Murder of ‘Haddah Rihimi,’” April 4, 2016, <http://jihadology.net/2016/04/04/new-statement-from-katibat-uqbah-ibn-nafi-denial-innocence-of-the-mujahidin-from-the-murder-of-%e1%b8%a5addah-ri%e1%b8%a5imi>.

[65] ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Jaza’iri, “Message to the Lions of al-Qayrawān,” *Ifriqiya al-Muslimah*, December 4, 2016, <http://jihadology.net/2016/12/04/new-release-from-abd-al-ra%e1%b8%a5man-al-jazairi-message-to-the-lions-of-al-qayrawan>.

[66] Katibat ‘Uqbah Ibn Nafi, “Clarification and Warning About the Killing of the Missionary Salih al-Firjani,” September 3, 2015, <http://jihadology.net/2015/09/03/new-statement-from-katibat-uqbah-ibn-nafi-clarification-and-warning-about-the-killing-of-the-missionary-%e1%b9%a3ali%e1%b8%a5-al-firjani>; Katibat ‘Uqbah Ibn Nafi, “Denial: Innocence of the Mujahidin From the Murder of ‘Haddah Rihimi,’” April 4, 2016, <http://jihadology.net/2016/04/04/new-statement-from-katibat-uqbah-ibn-nafi-denial-innocence-of-the-mujahidin-from-the-murder-of-%e1%b8%a5addah-ri%e1%b8%a5imi>; Katibat ‘Uqbah Ibn Nafi, “Explanation of

the Circumstances For the Loss of the Shepherd ‘Lamjad al-Qariri’ (Lamjed Giri),” June 26, 2018, <https://jihadology.net/2018/06/26/new-statement-from-katibat-qbah-ibn-nafi-explanation-of-the-circumstances-for-the-loss-of-the-shepherd-lamjad-al-qariri-lamjed-giri>.