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IMPACT ANALYSIS: THE CHALLENGES FOREIGN FIGHTERS PRESENT TO THE SECURITY OF STATES IN NORTH AFRICA & THE SAHEL

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Executive Summary

The Tunisian government should strengthen its border security and expand its legal system to include immigration reform, citizenship legislation, and preventative measures targeting terrorism to break the cycle of foreign fighters and stop future attacks. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, a foreign fighter gets describes as “an individual who leaves his or her country of origin or habitual residence to willingly join a non-State armed group in a non-paid, armed conflict abroad and who is primarily motivated by ideology, religion, and/or kinship.” Tunisia, despite its recent democratic transition, has contributed over 3,000 foreign fighters to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Returned foreign fighters pose a wide range of security threats to their country of origin, such as indoctrinating others, spreading the ideology and capitalizing on their knowledge of a country to conduct more lethal attacks. The Tunisian government inadequately responded to this threat, unable to procure the necessary measures to identify, capture, and process returned foreign fighters, which deters the country’s national security.

Under Tunisia’s legal system, many ramifications must be made to better address returned foreign fighters and the radicalization of citizens. Currently, the definition of terrorist is often confused with that of a protestor, which allows for the newly democratic state to prosecute citizens for protesting. Furthermore, the process for fairly prosecuting suspected foreign fighters fails to meet the democratic standards due to the overwhelming amount of cases. While Tunisia attempted to take actionable steps to reduce the travel for potential foreign fighters by introducing a s-17 Travel Ban, the release of specification guidelines inhibited the state’s ability to see results with the bill and inhibit non-threat citizens from being affected. To mitigate such legal stress, the Tunsiaisn government should re-evaluate faulty legislation, such as the terrorist definition and the s-17 Travel Ban, and invest into the standards for how a foreign fighter is handled judicially and examined for threat level.

Tunisia’s current immigration laws and border security fail to contain the foreign fighter problem, lacking proper legislation and security controls to adequately monitor their population’s movement. Tunisia’s shared border with Libya, along with Libya’s ongoing instability, creates the ideal breeding ground for terrorism and hotspot for unrestricted movement. Soon after the 2015 Sousse attacks in a Tunsiaian border town, the government started building a 200 km border along the Libyan stretch, comprised of water trenches and sandbanks meant to keep out vehicles. To better safeguard the area, Tunisian authorities should increase military personnel patrolling for illegal border crossers, and install better checkpoints that require proper identification to tightly monitor the identity of those crossing.

Turkey also plays a major role in the foreign fighter problem, as its inaction and negligence, its adjacency to Syria’s conflict zone, and its laxness on terrorist traffic, all indirectly contributed to the recent increase of fighters in Iraq and Syria. And while Turkey’s sovereignty impedes other countries from taking charge in its fight against foreign fighters, international cooperation, like sharing intelligence with countries like Tunisia, could help address this issue.

Foreign fighters attempting to return home confront a nationality challenge as states fear homegrown terrorism will deteriorate public safety. The Tunisian government in the past decided that it’s

unconstitutional to strip citizenship, but with increased concern of returning foreign fighters, policy may change in the future. There are many challenges that stripping of nationality may affect the state and returning foreign fighters. The number of stateless individuals would increase and surveillance of foreign fighters would decrease due to enacting these amendments to constitutions. These changes could weaken Tunisia's young democracy as it would contradict democratic ideals and return the state to authoritarian ideas.

Programs helping foreign fighters reintegrate into society prevent re-radicalization, breaking the foreign fighter cycle. The Tunisian government should provide programs to integrate returning foreign fighters into society, focusing on social, financial, and ideological stability to prevent re-radicalization. Consider youth programs that focus on similar factors, which will possibly lead to a decrease in initial radicalization. Social stability should include a feeling of community, possibly through government funded support groups, as feelings of belonging decreases chances of re-radicalization. Financial stability includes improvement of education, training, and skill building, achieved through community workshops. Ideological stability should include a safe space to discuss and practice religion; religion courses provided by the community programs, addressing extreme interpretations of religious text. Preventing returned foreign fighters from re-radicalization will decrease domestic terrorism and recruitment of other Tunisian citizens.

In conclusion, the obstacle with foreign fighters inhibits Tunisia's ability to thrive as a newly democratic state by creating ongoing instability and serious security risks should the situation worsen. Post-democracy leniency likely played a key role in the rise of radical jihadism in Tunisia, contributing to a high number of foreign fighters comparatively to other states. However, actionable solutions by Tunisia may help reduce some of the ongoing problems and prevent re-radicalization or returned foreign fighters. To prevent future terrorist attacks and alleviate the cycle of foreign fighters, Tunisia must respond to the crisis by improving their border security infrastructure, reforming immigration policy, expanding citizenship legislation, and instituting preventative mechanisms.

Introduction

Terrorist groups fueled by extreme Islamist views, like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), expanded their regimes to include foreigners willing to join their cause- also known as foreign fighters. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime¹, a foreign fighter gets described as “an individual who leaves his or her country of origin or habitual residence to willingly join a non-State armed group in a non-paid, armed conflict abroad and who is primarily motivated by ideology, religion, and/or kinship.” While this phenomenon existed previously, as seen in Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Ukraine, it became increasingly popular in recent years due to dissatisfaction with domestic situations, especially in developing countries.² According to the Institute for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (CSR)³, 11,000 out of 20,730 fighters in Iraq and Syria in January 2015 came from the Maghreb (Northern Africa) and the Middle East, while the rest came from Asia, Europe, and some Western countries.⁴

Tunisia, a small, newly democratic, North African republic, generates a per capita number of 280 fighters per million people, making it the biggest contributor of foreign fighters in the world.⁵ In recent years, over 3,000 Tunisians left to join ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and about 1,000 returned after its decline.⁶ Returned foreign fighters pose a wide range of security threats to their country of origin, such as indoctrinating others, spreading the ideology and capitalizing on their knowledge of a country to conduct more lethal attacks. The Tunisian government inadequately responded to this threat, unable to procure the necessary measures to identify, capture, and process returned foreign fighters. Lack of legal action by Tunisia’s government in criminalizing and monitoring former foreign fighters could cause further terror attacks and increase in radicalization, which would exacerbate the problem. This was the case in Egypt when radicalization within prisons grew as Egypt failed to take any fair legal action regarding Jihadists or returned foreign fighters.⁷ This case study correlates to Tunisia because Tunisia’s prisons are overcrowded and lack of definitive action has already shown detrimental effects, as discussed later in the research. The Tunisian government should strengthen its border security and expand its legal system to include immigration reform, citizenship legislation, and preventative measures targeting terrorism to break the cycle of foreign fighters and stop future attacks.

Briefing on Tunisia - current situation

The Arab Spring, which originated in Tunisia with the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in 2011, caused widespread protests across the Middle East and North Africa calling for fairer job opportunity and an end to dictatorial rule. These uprisings intensified the existing political and economic instability, which led to the side of radical jihadism, especially in Tunisia. A Vanderbilt report linked the high number of foreign fighters to the “lack of economic opportunities, political marginalization of youth and Salafi-jihadists, bordering unstable regional actors, and existence of jihadist recruitment networks in Tunisia pre- revolution,⁸” showing no sole cause for the high numbers of radicalized individuals in Tunisia.

Post-democracy leniency on jihadism increased jihadism mobilization, which eventually manifested itself in the high numbers of foreign fighters. A Washington Institute article emphasized that “The

Tunisian government sought dialogue over suppression for two years after the 2011 revolution, thus allowing jihadists to openly operate without much harassment.⁹ This leniency would eventually go as far as releasing of hundreds of Salafi-jihadists from prison in February 2011, one of which would later go on to create Ansar al-Sharia, the most prominent terrorist organization in Yemen.¹⁰ The release of the Jihadists plays a large role in the continued radicalization of Tunisians because of its spread of ideology to everyday citizens and its relinquish of judicial oversight in the activities of former prisoner, who likely may have been Jihadists.

Despite Tunisia’s new democratic status, ongoing instability in the new government created challenges with domestic terrorism. The increased presence of insurgent groups decreased tourism, negatively impacting Tunisia's economy. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS), and Ansar Al-Sharia all created branches of each organization within Tunisia.¹¹ Attempts to decrease extremist activity only made slight dents in the terrorist organization which correlates to the inability to track the crimes each foreign fighter commits, preventing Tunisia’s law enforcement from properly prosecuting.¹² In 2016, Tunisia released a statement laying out a counter-terrorism plan consisting of ‘prevention, protection, judicial proceeding, and retaliation’, however, the detailed plan was never published, creating a gap of information.¹³ Tunisia’s efforts in counter-terrorism led to restrictive legislation arguably infringing on human rights, seen notably in the 2015 travel ban legislation called S17.

The culmination of all these events eventually lead to Tunisia yielding the highest number of foreign fighters per million people. As of 2019, an estimated 27,000 Tunisians were found to be attempting to mobilize, demonstrating a high commitment of Tunisian citizens to join the Jihadist mission. However, while the number of those attempting to mobilize signified a cultural shift, only around 3,000 were successfully able to do so. Of the roughly 3,000 Tunisians that became foreign fighters, an estimated 1,000 have returned back to Tunisia according to the Edgmont research group.¹⁴

Tunisians Who Attempted to Mobilize	Estimated 27,000 people
Tunisian Foreign Fighters	Estimated 2,900- 6,000 people
Returned Foreign Fighters	Estimated 600-1,000 people

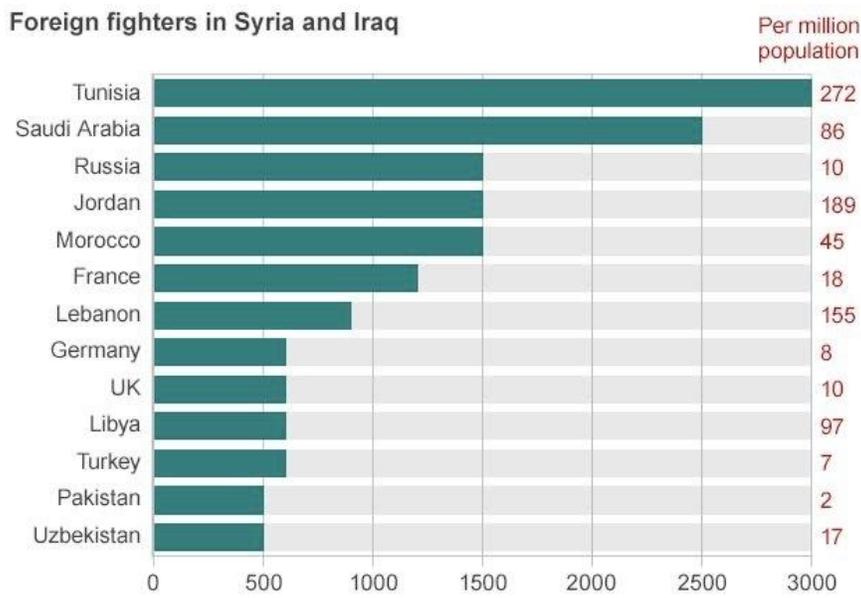
Washington Institute¹⁵ and Egmont¹⁶

The Effects of the Islamic State

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), an internationally designated terrorist organization and “formerly unrecognized proto-state”, receives the largest amount of foreign fighters from all over the world, but especially from Tunisia. They follow a fundamentalist, Salafi jihadist doctrine of Sunn Islam.¹⁷ Their beginning was embedded in Al-Qaeda, a different Salafi jihadist terrorist organization,

but splintered off on their own due to ideological differences and began their quest of fueling a Sunni-Shia civil war to establish a global Sunni caliphate.¹⁸ They originated in Iraq partly due to the U.S. invasion and overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s regime along with the power vacuum that followed.¹⁹

At its peak in 2014, the Islamic State held nearly 300,000 km of land, from Iraq spreading into Syria and declaring their caliphate in Raqqa.²⁰ They governed as a state, controlling oil and taxes, keeping bureaucratic measures, and installing strict Sharia Law, all while carrying out international attacks like the 2015 Paris bombings that killed 138.^{21,22} The individuals that join the Islamic State contribute to all areas of their operations, from running social media and recruiting, to religious education and fundraising outreach.²³ Some foreign fighters even contribute to logistical support for attacks on their own countries, given their thorough knowledge of the areas.²⁴ Tunisians made up the highest amount of foreign fighters participating in ISIS, as shown in the graph. This poses a major threat to the country’s national and internal security, seen firsthand in the 2015 mass shooting in Sousse, Tunisia carried out by a radicalized, returned Tunisian foreign fighter that killed 38 people.²⁵



Note: Upper estimates used. Countries with fewer than 500 fighters not included
 Source: ICSR, CIA World Factbook

Tunisia’s Legal System

Tunisian foreign fighters in Syria/Iraq present an imminent security threat upon their return home. After the Arab Spring Tunisia's Ennahda party witnessed the failure of the Muslim brotherhood to consolidate power in Egypt because citizens thought they would impose Islamic practices.²⁶ To ensure democracy the Ennahda party decided to step down, then in 2014 the new constitution was ratified combining sharia (religious interpretation coming from religious scholars that analyze text) and civil law.²⁷ For a new democracy the document is a good start but the state lacks overseeing enforcement over laws in compliance with constitutional parameters.²⁸ The Tunisian legal system ineffectively deals with returning foreign fighters because it lacks access to adequate resources, a weak chain of command for intel, and prevents daily citizen’s activities. In Tunisia the government agency

overseeing counter-terrorism is the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) because the government lacks a centralized intelligence agency. The National Guard Special Unit functions to respond to hostage crisis to rescue citizens²⁹, a responsive tactic not proactive.³⁰

Emphasizing important articles in the constitution that the Tunisian government contradicts implemented legislation. Article 37³¹ guarantees the “right to assembly and peaceful demonstrations” crucial to a nascent democracy’s civil society preventing an authoritarian relapse. Under Article 108³² of the 2014 Tunisian constitution it protects citizens rights “every individual is entitled to a fair trial within a reasonable period. Litigants are equal before the law” contradictory to the counterterrorism law. Article 30³³ claims that “the state shall seek the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners back into society” indicating that it applies to foreign fighters which Tunisia has an undeveloped plan. Article 23³⁴ “protects a citizens right to human dignity and physical integrity prohibiting torture as a means of punishment” contradictory to the treatment faced by police amongst returning foreign fighters. The judicial system needs a clear definition distinguishing what constitutes a prisoner versus foreign fighter/terrorist and a protestor from a terrorist to persecute terrorists and not ordinary citizens.

Counter-Terrorism Law

In 2015, Tunisia passed counterterrorism legislation amending the shortcomings, loopholes, and vague language found in the 2003 authoritarian backed law.³⁵ Tunisia sought to balance democratic principles/liberties while dealing with domestic terrorism and returning foreign fighters creating the 2015 law. However, this counter terrorism law caused Tunisia to commit human rights violations, because it reintroduced the death penalty, and created motivation for terrorist affiliation exposing the country to a potential anti-democratic relapse. Per the 2015 bill Tunisia defines a terrorist act(s) as any act(s) that:

First: kills a person or several people, or inflicts considerable physical damage; Second: causes damages at facilities of diplomatic and consular missions, and international organizations; Third: does substantial damage to the environment, putting residents’ lives and health at risk; Fourth: Harms public or private property, vital resources and infrastructures, transportation means, communication networks, information and computer systems or public facilities; or aims by its nature and context to terrorize the population or to force a state or an international organization to carry out or refrain from carrying out an action.³⁶

According to the third and fourth definition, protestors equates a terrorist by inflicting damage on public property causing accidental harm to residents drawing a thin line between terrorist and civilian. At the introduction of this bill, parliament attacked human rights organizations that criticized it by running a smear campaign against politicians in opposition.³⁷ Former President of Tunisia, Beji Caid Essebsi,³⁸ wanted to pardon returning foreign fighters but Tunisian citizens and parliament rejected the idea. The law issues a six to twelve-year prison sentence along with a fine for those who recruited, were recruited, or falsified documents for the purpose of committing acts of terror, or financed terrorist.³⁹ The Arab Spring was driven by the high unemployment rates amongst the youth an issue not yet solved, for the youth there exists two options: selling drugs or fighting for a terrorist

organization. Democracy is effective when citizens are able to participate and see changes in their daily lives, if not then it becomes just as ineffective as other forms of government. Citizens resort to violence to deliver political messages across such as inequality and injustice making it important for Tunisia to portray an efficient system on contentious topics such as foreign fighters.⁴⁰ The law introduces capital punishment for individuals convicted of terrorist acts resulting in dead casualties, and life in prison committing related acts. Before passing this law terrorist suspects were held for six days without outside communication with a lawyer or family, the 2015 law changes that to fifteen days with prosecutor consent.⁴¹ Legal psychology proves that under intense surveillance with interrogations can lead a suspect to confess guilty despite innocence. Wrongfully convicting potentially innocent individuals sending them to overcrowded prisons where they can be recruited or radicalized providing them with motive that the system is unjust witnessed firsthand.⁴² The law establishes a national commission on fighting terrorism consisting of members from various departments recommending legislation and combatting terrorism. Under article 38⁴³ of the law, creation of judges specialized in terrorism will oversee the related cases, they are appointed by the executive branch providing the potential acquisition of power to push a harsh or lenient agenda on terrorism. Since the adoption of the law include a safety measure for state agents with a prison sentence of one year persecute terrorist groups without prior judicial approval.⁴⁴ Article 68⁴⁵ allows closed hearings to protect the rights of the individual's safety left up to the discretion of the judge meaning no jury just one person deciding the punishment.

Regional Cooperation – MENA, GCC, United States Department of State

Tunisian officials took a pragmatic approach at terrorism seeing it as homegrown while neglecting the regional bodies tasked with countering/containing regional terrorism; financial sector imposing targeted economic sanctions.⁴⁶ Foreign fighters will return to Tunisia in the following ways: direct flight from Turkey (embassy in Ankara, Turkey and Istanbul, Turkey), connecting flight Turkey then Morocco (embassy in Rabat, Morocco), or by sneaking through the Libyan border.⁴⁷ Foreign fighters burn their passports on the journey home to get new, untraceable document copies for returning to Tunisia to curb potential imprisonment upon return. Frameworks for regional cooperation and shared communication regarding terrorists does not exist in Tunisia, making it difficult to keep track of them across borders. Resolutions are passed at the UN, but MENA countries prioritized fighting domestic terrorism over preventing regional terrorism further propagating the terrorism problem from country to country. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 sets provisions to prosecute individuals who finance foreign fighters and assist with their activities, but lacks an overarching enforcement mechanism for legal recommendations targeting only one sector of a complex problem.⁴⁸

Travel bans and restrictions: S17

In 2015, Tunisian authorities abused their power in the creation of a discriminatory and arbitrary travel ban that targeted specific cohorts of the population called S17.⁴⁹ The ban limited travel to Turkey, Algeria, Libya and Morocco to curb migration toward other conflict prone areas such as Iraq, and Syria.⁵⁰ According to Amnesty International, the government implemented these travel restrictions “to prevent Tunisians from engaging in criminal activity” but ended up causing more damage than expected, as they violated human rights.⁵¹ The bill classifies as an executive order by the Ministry of

the Interior, relinquishing its need for parliamentary approval and allowing it to withhold important information, such as the criteria for detainment.⁵²

In turn, the measures put in place to weed out extremists focused on discriminatory physical traits, as law enforcement targeted people between the ages of 18 and 35, and focused on men with long beards and women wearing the niqab.⁵³ Officers performed inspections in buses, taxis, or public transit and unlawfully disallowed hundreds of citizens from traveling abroad or domestically by preventing them from boarding planes or crossing into neighboring countries. Government officials even detained some 'suspects', harassing and interrogating them, requiring their father's legal authorization and forcing DNA tests without explanation.⁵⁴

The S17 travel ban responded to the heightened terrorist activity in Tunisia, but while their intentions focused on security, their approach did not follow. Instead of curbing terrorism and preventing foreign fighter movement, the ban affected people's lives, disabling them from travelling to work and earning an income.⁵⁵ This might have increased disillusionment in the government and pushed some people to radicalize. So, while the travel ban attempted to resolve ongoing security issues in the country, it backfired instead and escalated the situation.

Policy Recommendation

Tunisia should align its constitution with the laws that it passes, rewrite its 2015 counterterrorism law incorporating the aforementioned changes. Furthermore, they should establish a centralized intelligence agency disseminating information to defense/security personnel and cooperate with regional allies in order to combat domestic terrorism and reintegrate foreign fighters back into society.

Tunisia should depend on its regional allies for fighting terrorism preferable towards the internal resentment caused by heavy involvement from Western powers such as the USA and EU. In a RAND study analysing border management in Niger, researchers found that success in counter intelligence and border security relied on collaboration between regional allies.⁵⁶ This helped re-enforce rules and regulations and give regional allies a larger role in terrorist threats that directly impact their country.⁵⁷ This also spread the capacity for multiple states to be involved in operations.⁵⁸ Tunisia approach could especially benefit Tunisia, as many of its problems rely in Tunisia's capacity to collect information mainly due to lack of resources.

Due to Tunisia's recent shift to democracy, they should cease authoritarian actions like the unconstitutional travel ban and focus more on its citizens' human rights. We recommend the Tunisian government amend the S17 Travel Ban to incorporate a constitutional framework for arrests backed by reasonable suspicion under the law. Tunisian officials should revise the S17 documents, amending the basis for interrogations to come from probable cause instead of physical discrimination and implementing the detainee's right to know the reason behind detainment. This would greatly restore citizens' faith in their democracy, and actually attempt to curb the amounts foreign fighters.

Immigration and Border Security

Tunisia's current immigration laws and border security fail to contain the foreign fighter problem, lacking proper legislation and security controls to adequately monitor their population's movement. As stated in the United Nations' definition, the foreign fighter problem begins with the physical movement of people across country lines, which increases pressure on governments to secure their borders to stop further attacks.⁵⁹ This section observes migration and border security, focusing on the Tunisian-Libyan and the Turkish-Syrian borders, to determine possible ways of improving existing measures of combating the foreign fighter problem.

The Tunisian-Libyan Border

Tunisia's shared border with Libya, along with Libya's ongoing instability, creates the ideal breeding ground for terrorism and hotspot for unrestricted movement. Following 2013 and the regime change that underwent in Tunisia, many border regions saw an increase in jihadist-led drugs and arms smuggling in border regions.⁶⁰ Informal activities make up a significant amount of both countries' economies, and while Tunisia's recent switch to democracy increases incentives to crack down on such activities, Libya's lack of political unity limits its possibilities for action.⁶¹

Uncontrolled borders pose copious amounts of danger to the countries and people that surround them, seen firsthand in 2015 when a Tunisian national opened fire at a tourist resort on the border town of Sousse and killed 38 people for ISIS.⁶² The gunman, trained in Libya, had crossed the border multiple times in the planning of the attack.⁶³ Soon after, the government started building a 200 km border along the Tunisian-Libyan stretch, comprised of water trenches and sandbanks meant to keep out vehicles.⁶⁴ Additionally, the United States and Germany contributed by "spending nearly \$20 million on advanced, high-tech sensors and cameras" placed along the border wall, to further securitize the region.⁶⁵

Turkey's Role

Turkey's inaction and negligence, its adjacency to Syria's conflict zone, and its laxness on terrorist traffic, all indirectly contributed to the recent increase of foreign terrorist fighters in Iraq and Syria.⁶⁶ Generally, most people who join ISIS cross the Turkish-Syrian border at some point in their journey, as 30,000 foreign fighters did in 2013, establishing the so-called "jihadist highway".⁶⁷

Regardless of other routes, most travelers favor Turkey due to its visa-free policy, its long and porous border with Syria, and its large tourist population that allows for easy assimilation.⁶⁸ ISIS facilitators often receive foreign fighters at airports, later providing them with lodging and transportation across the border.⁶⁹ The graph below shows the main Turkish border towns used as entryways into Syria.

Istanbul is a point of entry for many foreign fighters

- ↓
- Foreign fighters travel to Sanliurfa or Gaziantep near the border
- ↓
- They then travel to Turkish border towns...
- ↓
- ...before finally crossing into Syria

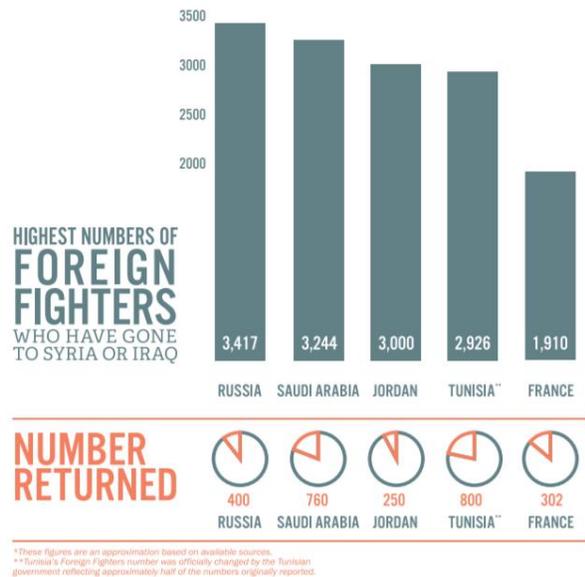
 Atlantic Council



Recently, Turkey implemented stricter border security to thwart the smuggling of cargo and people, but corruption and coercive measures stagnated progress.⁷⁰ Smugglers from nearby villages who move pistachios, sugar, cigarettes, and fuel often got threatened by ISIS commanders to escort recruits across the border or lose their lives.⁷¹ In some cases, border agents looked the other way when this smuggling happened, as they benefited more from payoffs than arrests.⁷²

Challenges of Citizenship

Foreign fighters attempting to return home confront a nationality challenge as states fear homegrown terrorism will deteriorate public safety. States stripping citizenship of both naturalized and born citizens foreign fighters, removing the individual's political and civil rights. Democratic European countries such as the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands have begun to enact new revocation measures based on possible increased risk of harm, while other states with considerable numbers of fighters have not established legislation that would strip nationality. Tunisia faces an obstacle on



whether to accept or remove these individuals. In 2014, a bill proposing the stripping of citizenship of individuals that fought in a foreign state was introduced in Tunisia, but failed as parliament argued that it violated Article 25⁷³ of the Tunisian Constitution which states “ [n]o citizen shall be deprived of their nationality, exiled, extradited or prevented from returning to their country.

Increasing Statelessness

States continuing to strip foreign fighters of their citizenship will drastically increase the population of stateless men, women, and children. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates there currently ten million stateless individuals⁷⁴, this number continues growing as states remove foreign fighters of their citizenship. The removal of nationality will also deem the children of foreign fighters stateless as many laws give children citizenship from their father. Turkey recently started deporting foreign fighters to their home country, many come from states revoking citizenship. Tunisia faces an increase of foreign fighters because of this situation and could result in a change of policy. Substantial number of those held children who have at least lost one or both parents.⁷⁵ States like the United Kingdom argue that the children will not be stripped of their citizenship, but do not attempt to bring the children back. States argue returning women and children risk a threat to citizens within the country. Recently Denmark enacted into law the stripping of the nationality of individuals who fought for the Islamic State without trial. About 158 people from Denmark traveled to Iraq and Syria, the law will increase the number of stateless individuals.⁷⁶ Denmark previously worked toward the creation of rehabilitation programs for foreign fighters, but changes its policy because of increasing numbers of fighters returning.⁷⁷ Tunisia has local community rehabilitation programs, but the change of democratic states could result in Tunisia passing these legislations.

States don't want to take responsibility for fighters, which causes more states passing denaturalization laws. These individuals will not have access to education, healthcare, or other necessities. The United Kingdom added a section to the British Nationality Act of 1981 which states, "the Secretary of State may not make [a Deprivation Order] if he is satisfied that the order would make a person stateless," but recently it stripped Shamima Begum's citizenship although she was born in the United Kingdom.⁷⁸ Since 2010 the UK has stripped 150 individuals of their citizenship, the number continues to grow. These actions lead to lack of intelligence of people who are foreign fighters, when states are not surveillancing former fighters.

The expansion of these laws in newly established democracies jeopardizes the rule of the people, especially with the transition of leadership in the state as new influences challenge set nationality laws. Tunisia's new democracy could experience harm from establishing such nationality law as many people left to fight for ISIS and Tunis do not have the intelligence or economic stability to distinguish each fighter. Also, the nationality laws manipulate those in office that do not agree with the current regime of the state. The Tunisian government should not amend their nationality laws as doing so will exacerbate the return of foreign fighters.

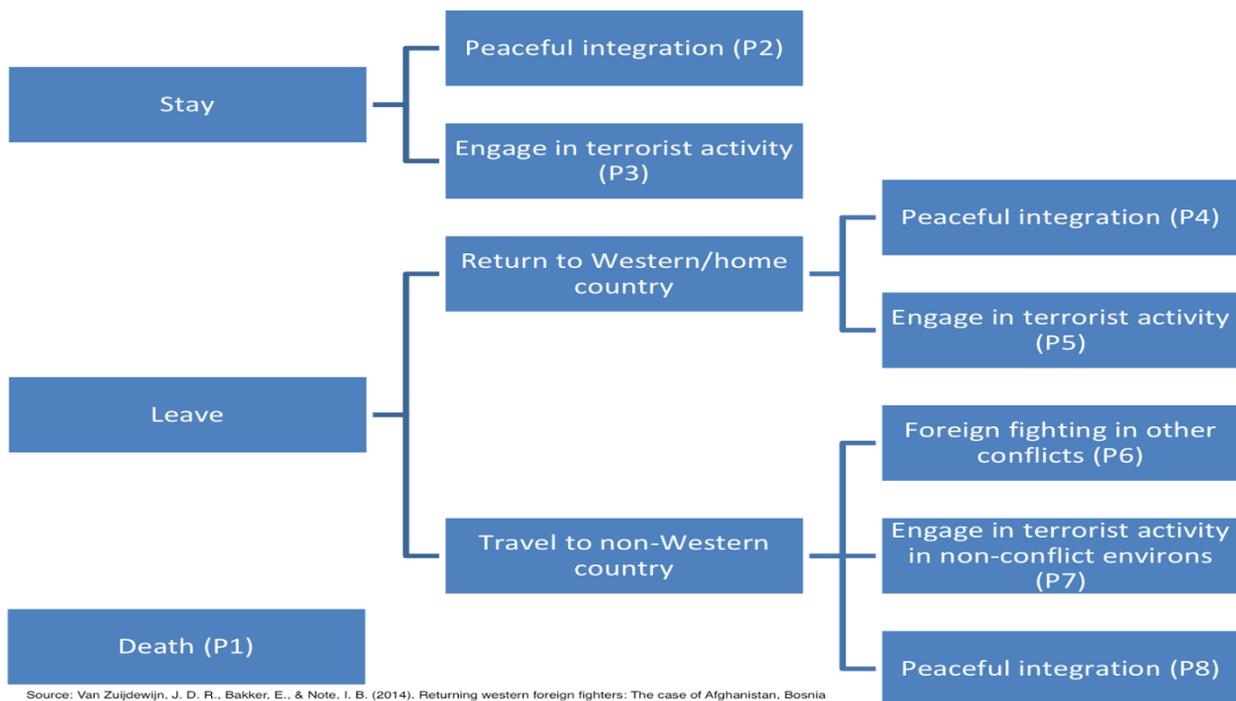
Policy Recommendations

Insufficient monitoring at the Tunisian-Libyan border and an inadequate response on the Libyan side did little to thwart the threat that returning foreign fighters pose. To better safeguard the area, Tunisian authorities should increase military personnel patrolling for illegal border crossers, and install better checkpoints that require proper identification to tightly monitor the identity of those crossing. The communication between governmental agencies and non-profit organizations that operate in the area

may also help provide Tunisia with needed intelligence and outreach near the border. One main argument associated with border security protection in Tunisia is the capacity for Tunisia to afford the technology needed to increase border security or increase the border personally, both costly. However, many states have already initiated border security management programs that have proven successful. Niger, with the assistance of the US, instilled a border protection plan called the Sahel-Sahara Development and Security Strategy (SDSS or SDS).⁷⁹ This plan detailed methods for migrant identification, outreach collaboration between security forces, and engagement of vulnerable border populations.⁸⁰ One key finding from this program was the need for border management to work in tandem with youth deradicalization programs.⁸¹ This would directly lead to helping decrease illegal activity, such as bribery that occurs, a similar problem facing Tunisia.

Turkey's sovereignty impedes other countries from taking charge in its fight against foreign fighters, however, furthering international cooperation with nations like Tunisia, who contribute heavily to the problem, could help stop the flow of terrorists. Sharing intelligence, such as potentially radicalized individuals, between Tunisia and Turkey could assist both countries in identifying perpetrators of attacks early.

Additionally, Turkey's vital role in the movement of foreign fighters needs increased cooperation from surrounding countries.⁸² Heavy contributors of terrorists, like Tunisia, need stronger security alliances with nations that border conflict zones, like Turkey. Furthermore, the Turkish government should better monitor and protect border areas with increased patrolling personnel and checkpoints, while also criminalizing bribery. A combination of these implementations would improve the fight against ISIS by significantly stopping the active flow of foreign fighters into enemy territory.



Source: Van Zuijdewijn, J. D. R., Bakker, E., & Note, I. B. (2014). Returning western foreign fighters: The case of Afghanistan, Bosnia and Somalia. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

Prevention of Re-radicalization

Programs helping foreign fighters reintegrate into society prevent re-radicalization, breaking the foreign fighter cycle. The foreign fighter cycle refers to the radicalization of others through recruitment of returned foreign fighters. Research conducted on the foreign fighter phenomenon evaluates possible factors that contribute to radicalization and the behavior presented after the fighting ceases. Understanding the initial radicalization and returning thought process of the foreign fighter phenomenon highlights components needed to provide an effective solution to re-radicalization. This section will assess the primary reasons for radicalization and the pathways of returning foreign fighters.

Radicalization

Narrowing down the reasons Tunisian citizens radicalize provides potential solutions to preventing re-radicalization of returning foreign fighters. Valentina Colombo, senior research fellow at the European Foundation for Democracy, credits the feeling of not belonging as a route to radicalization.⁸³ In an interview with a Tunisian citizen, the 21-year-old refers to the lack of education, employment, training, and leisure activities as gateways to radicalization.⁸⁴ Citizens associate the absence of these facets to the government pushing out the unwanted.⁸⁵ The lack of these resources creates an open vacuum for recruiters to radicalize a disillusioned group of people.⁸⁶ The recruiters present extremism as an inclusive community which highlights the exact feeling people search for.⁸⁷ Additionally, religious and political marginalization contribute to widespread feelings of exclusion.⁸⁸ Government acknowledgment of certain political and religious views over others strengthens feelings of exclusion, as most citizens yearn for recognition and representation. The conflicts that attract foreign fighters present the perfect illusion of inclusion; fighting for a cause together.⁸⁹ Colombo's argument does not only highlight Tunisia, but the United Kingdom and other western European countries, all providing examples of the effects of exclusion and its contribution to radicalization.⁹⁰ Further, Lisa Watanabe, head of the Swiss and Euro-Atlantic Security Team at the Center of Security Studies, argues that socio-economic marginalization allows for disillusionment in the government.⁹¹ Tunisian citizens believe that the government officials overlook them, excluding them from economic opportunities to only include people well connected to the government.⁹² Watanabe's argument corroborates with Colombo's argument, concluding that marginalization, leading to the feeling of not belonging, plays an important role in radicalization.

Effects of joining the foreign fight

Understanding the thought process of returning foreign fighters will provide the Tunisian government targeted efforts to prevent re-radicalization. Foreign fighters react differently to the reality of the fight. According to the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), foreign fighters follow eight different paths after the current conflict resolves.⁹³ The first three paths include the death of the foreign fighter or staying in the country where they fought and either integrating peacefully or continuing in extremist activities.⁹⁴ Path four, five, and six include traveling to a different country that they do not affiliate with and either become peaceful or join other extremist organization.⁹⁵ Path seven and eight

include returning to the country of citizenship and either integrating peacefully or engaging in domestic terrorism activities.⁹⁶ Notably, the empirical data only represents recorded foreign fighter data, hindering a holistic picture of all foreign fighters.⁹⁷ Roughly 3,000-6,000 (numbers vary greatly) foreign fighters originate from Tunisia, as of December 2016, around 850 returned to Tunisia.⁹⁸ The 850 foreign fighters that returned to Tunisia chose path seven and eight, therefore, assuming that the other 5,750 chose paths one through six.⁹⁹ The United States Institute of Peace argues that foreign fighters will experience a few different feelings after returning to their original country from the conflict country: disillusionment or disappointment in the cause, physical or emotional trauma sustained from the conflict, or a need to join another cause to fulfil some kind of expectation.¹⁰⁰ Addressing the experiences and traumas of foreign fighters will allow for a more indepth rehabilitation process. Additionally, the Tunisian government addressing these issues will provide a connection with returned foreign fighter; the connection they lacked in the first place, possibly, causing the initial radicalization.

Policy Recommendation

The Tunisian government should provide programs to integrate returning foreign fighters into society, focusing on social, financial, and ideological stability to prevent re-radicalization. Consider youth programs that focus on similar factors, which will possibly lead to a decrease in initial radicalization.¹⁰¹ Social stability should include a feeling of community, possibly through government funded support groups, as feelings of belonging decreases chances of re-radicalization.¹⁰² Financial stability includes improvement of education, training, and skill building, achieved through community workshops.¹⁰³ The government funded community workshops should allow trusted volunteers to teach classes depending on the demand. For example, a vetted contracted volunteer to teach basic woodshop skills because of the high demand for technical skills. Ideological stability should include a safe space to discuss and practice religion; religion courses provided by the community programs, addressing extreme interpretations of religious text.¹⁰⁴ Preventing returned foreign fighters from re-radicalization will decrease domestic terrorism and recruitment of other Tunisian citizens.¹⁰⁵

While funding for certain rehabilitation programs may seem costly, they are cost effective in the long-run. Considering how Tunisia's already overcrowded prison system, further imprisonment of returned foreign fighters or even radicalized individuals will only strain the state and risk further indoctrination within the prison system. One civil society researcher in Tunisia stated "for every one [extremist] sent to prison, ten emerge; especially when they are held together with those in prison for crimes against the state,¹⁰⁶" further proving the misjudgement in sending all returnees or ISIS sympathisers to prison. Moreover, this approach to de-radicalization has already been proven successful in multiple models. The US instilled a rehabilitation program in Iraq 2008, claiming that the U.S.-run Iraqi deradicalization program contributed to the release of the 10,000 prisoners, further stating that only 33 committed further offenses.¹⁰⁷ While this particular model was not used solely for foreign fighters and utilized within prison systems, it proved successful for the de-radicalization of insurgency members and other detainees.¹⁰⁸ The success of this program was contingent upon the fact that there was a multitude of creative approaches taken. Vocational job training and language studies were offered, as well as

practical Islamic studies, to reduce the risk of other prisoners being influenced by radical Jihadism.¹⁰⁹ This program allowed detainees the ability to reintegrate quickly upon leaving prison. This approach maintained both a consequence to detainees, but more importantly plausible solutions upon release to prevent detainee from falling into the same cycle. This could be utilized in Tunisia, as it allows a public opinion approach or still maintaining consequences while also investing in rehabilitation programs to de-radicalize while serving time.

Conclusion

To prevent future terrorist attacks and alleviate the cycle of foreign fighters, Tunisia must respond to the crisis by improving their border security infrastructure, reforming immigration policy, expanding citizenship legislation, and instituting preventative mechanisms. While the root cause of this problem is complex, finding its origin in the Arab Spring and the rise of ISIS, solutions described outline both short-term and long-term goals for the state. The lack of action by the Tunisian government will likely exacerbate the problem, furthering security risks in the state and in greater North Africa. In responding to the situation, solutions must consider the ability to fund the material capacity and fill the enforcement gap as Tunisia transitions towards the development of democratic institutions. Tunisia, in order to halt the spread of terrorism, needs to review its interpretations of the concept of terrorism and heighten its capacity to review cases regarding returned foreign fighters. Furthermore, the state needs to reform its prison systems and move towards a rehabilitative process for convicts. Policy approaches such as expanding existing legal frameworks or streamlined cooperation with other states and international/regional organizations will help Tunisia diminish the crisis in a capacity they can afford. Regardless of the type of action, Tunisia has a responsibility to promote peace and security for its people. Learning from past mistakes and building on realistic policy action will ultimately help Tunisia in long-term increased security.

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