

# Country Reports on Terrorism 2018

## October 2019

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## TUNISIA

**Overview:** The government continues to prioritize counterterrorism, and Tunisia cooperated with the United States and other international partners to professionalize its security apparatus. U.S. security assistance to Tunisia grew in 2018 and Tunisia made tangible progress on several of its counterterrorism goals, including enhanced border security, new proposed legislation, asset freezing of terrorist financiers, and implementation of CVE programming. Tunisia also made positive strides in developing its military and civilian security capacity to conduct counterterrorism efforts. Tunisia is currently working on a strategy for the return, trial, and incarceration of captured Tunisian FTFs from battlefields in Iraq, Libya, and Syria. Tunisia is a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and is active in the Coalition's FTF and Counter-ISIS Finance working groups.

The risk of terrorist activity in Tunisia remained high in 2018, including the potential for terrorist attacks and the infiltration of arms and terrorists from neighboring countries. In 2018, aspiring ISIS affiliate Jund Al Khilafa-Tunisia (JAK-T), al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)-aligned Uqba bin Nafi' Battalion, and others conducted primarily small-scale attacks against Tunisian security personnel, including one in July against the Tunisian National Guard that killed six officers. Nonetheless, Tunisian security forces continued to improve their ability to preempt terrorist activities by identifying and dismantling numerous terrorist cells.

**2018 Terrorist Incidents:** Terrorist organizations remained active in Tunisia, primarily targeting Tunisian security elements. The list below highlights the most significant terrorist incidents of 2018:

- On July 8, armed terrorists ambushed a group of Tunisian National Guard officers in Jendouba near the Tunisia-Algeria border, killing six officers. Two days later, Algerian military forces conducted operations along the border, killing three terrorists and arresting three others suspected of involvement in the July 8 ambush.
- On October 29, a 30-year-old woman affiliated with ISIS detonated a suicide IED near several police officers on Habib Bourguiba Avenue in central Tunis. The explosion killed the terrorist and injured 20 police officers and six civilians.
- On December 15, 12 terrorists affiliated with JAK-T stole approximately US \$110,000 from a local bank in Kasserine before killing a Tunisian civilian in his home. The group targeted the individual for being a relative of a Tunisian soldier whom terrorists killed in 2016.

**Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security:** Tunisia pursued several counterterrorism legislative initiatives toward the end of 2018. On November 23, the Ministerial Council announced the need to conduct further review of the draft state of emergency law's provisions on civil liberty guarantees and judicial controls. Under consideration since 2014, the draft law remains controversial because of the power it would provide the Ministry of Interior to administer house arrests and curfews, limit public meetings, monitor media, and inspect businesses without prior judicial permission. Following the October suicide bombing in Tunis, a parliamentary committee reexamined a draft law on the protection of security forces in an effort to expedite its completion. The draft law has been stalled for more than two years because of its controversial language, which critics say lacks explicit civil liberty protections. Parliament requested that the government revise the language in the current draft before it considers the bill for ratification.

The 2015 Countering Terrorism and Money Laundering Law is currently under review by a parliamentary plenary session for possible amendments. These amendments include lifting immunity on anyone involved in investigations related to terrorism or money laundering crimes; establishing legal and procedural frameworks to implement UNSCRs related to prohibiting the proliferation and financing of WMD; adding a juvenile court to the CT Judicial Pole; and increasing penalties for money laundering crimes and broadening the crime's definition. Two of the proposed amendments, Articles 107 and 108, have prompted criticism by lawyers who argue that attorney-client confidentiality would be threatened by regulations requiring lawyers to report clients suspected of terrorist activities.

The Government of Tunisia's counterterrorism efforts demonstrated sustained momentum in 2018, with successful weapons seizures, arrests, and operations against armed groups throughout the country. Significant law enforcement actions and arrests included the following:

- On January 24, a National Guard unit conducted a security operation in Kasserine, killing one terrorist and wounding several others. The operation is credited with dismantling a cell providing logistical support to aspiring ISIS affiliate JAK-T.
- On June 4, the Counterterrorism Investigative Brigade of the Aouina National Guard arrested five people ages 17 to 21 who, after interrogation, confessed their intention to join JAK-T.
- On November 13, the National Terrorist Crimes Investigation Unit (UNECT) conducted counterterrorism raids in Raoued and Tunis, dismantling 40 active terrorist cells. In Raoued, UNECT seized a laboratory equipped to produce explosive materials and toxic gases.
- On December 5, a counterterrorism special unit raided a house and arrested a suspected terrorist in Sidi Bouzid. The unit seized many weapons and dismantled a terrorist cell that had been planning attacks against security personnel.

Tunisia maintained its focus on border security in 2018, coordinating with international donors through the G7+7 Border Security sub-committee to request and implement training and equipment for its border forces. Tunisia continued to receive support from Germany and the United States to complete installation of electronic surveillance equipment along its border with Libya. It also received maritime border training from Italy and is implementing a comprehensive border police program funded by the EU and organized by the International Center for Migration Policy Development. Tunisia continued to prioritize the safeguarding of tourist zones in 2018. As a result of sustained collaboration and cooperation among security forces, international partners, and the tourism industry to enact preventative measures throughout the country, the last attack against tourists in Tunisia was in June 2015.

Tunisian security personnel continued to participate in the Department of State's expanded Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program and additional training funded through the State Department's Counterterrorism Partnership Fund. This year's ATA programming included interoperability and sustainment training for members of the National Police, the National Guard, Intervention Units, the Presidential Guard, and Civil Protection. The ATA program expanded outside of Tunisia in 2018 to include courses in Kairouan, Medenine, Nabeul, and Sousse governorates.

In close collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, the Department of State is implementing a new police academy modernization project, which includes curriculum development. U.S. government programs also provided the Ministries of Interior and Justice with armored and non-armored vehicles, surveillance cameras, and other equipment to enhance internal and border security. The Tunisian armed forces consider counterterrorism and border security their principal mission, and have successfully employed U.S.-funded patrol craft, vehicles, weapons, and training in border security and counterterrorism operations.

**Countering the Financing of Terrorism:** Tunisia is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF) and the country's FIU, the Tunisian Financial Analysis Committee, is a member of the Egmont Group. In 2017, FATF categorized Tunisia as having strategic AML/CFT deficiencies. Tunisia developed an action plan to correct these deficiencies. In line with the new action plan, the National Counter-Terrorism Committee (CNLCT) published its first *National List of Individuals, Organizations and Entities Related to Terrorist Crimes* in November. This list included the names of 23 supporters of terrorism whose assets the Government of Tunisia froze. Some of those listed have been sentenced by the courts

in absentia, while others were imprisoned. Most of the accused belong to terrorist organizations such as Ansar Sharia, ISIS, JAK-T, and Katibat Uqba bin Nafi'. CNLCT President Mokhtar Ben Nasr announced that a second list would be published in the *Official Gazette of the Republic of Tunisia* by the end of 2018, with subsequent lists to be published periodically.

**Countering Violent Extremism:** In October, CNLCT published the Tunisian National Counterterrorism Strategy. The strategy contains four main pillars (prevention, protection, prosecution, and response) and collectively contains 59 targeted measures, 18 of which are dedicated solely to CVE. CNLCT approaches CVE comprehensively, working with the Ministries of Education, Culture, Communication, and Religion, as well as with Tunisian civil society organizations and international partners to implement both broad counter-messaging campaigns and targeted CVE programming for at-risk populations such as youth and prison inmates. Tunisia is a founding member of the Strong Cities Network. Tunisia also made a concerted effort to improve socioeconomic conditions in the country through economic development and education programs to address conditions that terrorists have exploited for recruitment.

**International and Regional Cooperation:** Tunisia participates in multinational and regional efforts to counter terrorism, such as those at the UN, the Arab League, the GCTF, and the AU. Tunisia hosted a GCTF meeting on returning families of FTFs in February 2018. Tunisia is a major non-NATO ally and a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. It is a founding member of the GCTF-inspired International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (IIJ), and it participated in numerous IIJ trainings and workshops focused on improving criminal justice actors' capacity to prevent and address terrorism-related crimes.

Tunisia is an active member of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), a U.S. multi-year interagency regional program aimed at building the capacity of governments in the Maghreb and Sahel to confront terrorist threats. Tunisia is also part of the Security Governance Initiative. Tunisian authorities continued their coordination on border security with Algerian counterparts.