



PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

**TUNISIA: ATTACK ON EL GHRIBA SYNAGOGUE KILLS SIX ON
THE ISLAND OF DJERBA**

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ACSRT/PRE-
REP/03/2023

13 MAY 2023

A. INTRODUCTION

1. On Tuesday, 09 May 2023, the Tunisian Ministry of Interior announced an attack in Aghir Djerba against a security officer and a synagogue that resulted in many victims, which included the killing of 2 stationed security officers and injuring of 06 security agents with varying severity, as well as the death of 02 visitors, and the injury of 04 other people with injuries of varying severity, who were taken to hospital for treatment.
2. The Synagogue has since been surrounded, and all the people inside and outside the Synagogue were secured and protected. Tunisian Authorities have indicated investigation was underway to ascertain the motive behind the treacherous and cowardly attack.

B. THE INCIDENT

3. On the night of Tuesday 09 May 2023, a Tunisian National Naval Guard Officer attacked El Ghriba Synagogue, killing three (1 security officer and 2 civilians worshippers) and injured 10 others. The attacker who was stationed at the National Guard Naval Centre in the port town of Aghir on Djerba, first killed his colleague and took his ammunition. He then headed to the El Ghriba Synagogue, where he fired indiscriminately at security units near the synagogue. Security forces then shot the attacker dead. Another officer later died on Wednesday from his injuries.



Map Showing the Location of El-Ghriba Synagogue in Djerba, Tunisia



The Two Cousins: Aviel and Benjamin

The Civilian victims were among hundreds of worshippers' part of Jews annual pilgrimage held at the Synagogue. The two Identified Civilian victims killed during the attack are:

1. **Aviel Hadad**- a 30-year-old dual citizen of Tunisia and Israel living in Netivot, Israel.
2. **Benjamin Haddad**- a 42-year-old dual citizen French-Jewish Businessman living in France.

4. On 12 May 2023, Tunisian Minister of Interior, Kamel Fekih, revealed the identity of the Gunman as **Wissam KHAZRI**, a member of the Tunisian National Guard affiliated with the naval centre in the island port town of Aghir. The minister indicated the attack was premeditated, but motive was not revealed.

5. The attack coincided with the annual Jewish pilgrimage that draws faithful to the El Ghriba Synagogue from around the world every May 9. According to organizers, more than 5,000 Jewish faithful, mostly from overseas, participated in this year's pilgrimage to Ghriba. The event resumed in 2022 after two years of pandemic-related suspension.

6. Djerba, a holiday destination off the coast of southern Tunisia, 500km (300 miles) from Tunis is home to Africa's oldest synagogue, El- Ghriba. Security has always been tight during the period to ward of any attack since al-Qaeda attacked the religious site in 2002 with a truck bomb that killed 21 Western tourists.

C. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

7. The El Ghriba Synagogue is considered the oldest and one of the most significant synagogues in the world. The synagogue is believed to have been built by Jews who fled Jerusalem after the destruction of the First Temple. The Djerba synagogue is an important symbol of Tunisia's rich cultural heritage and its long history of religious tolerance and coexistence. Despite the decline of Tunisia's Jewish population



The El Ghriba Synagogue, Djerba, Tunisia

in recent decades, the synagogue remains an important spiritual center for the country's and overseas Jewish communities and a popular destination for tourists from around the world. The synagogue is the site of an annual pilgrimage, known as the Ghriba Pilgrimage, which takes place on the Jewish holiday of Lag BaOmer. The pilgrimage attracts thousands of visitors each year, both Jews and non-Jews, who come to pray, make offerings, and participate in traditional celebrations.

Timelines

Significant Terrorist Attacks in Tunisia 1995-2023.

1995

On 11 February 1995, an Algeria Armed group attacked National Guard Border crossing, killing all 7 guards

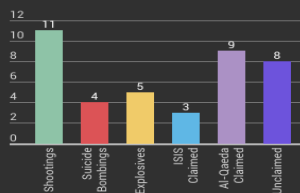


2002

On 11 April 2002, Al-Qaeda branch in Tunisia attacked the El Ghriba Synagogue using trucks filled with explosive. 21 people were killed including 16 German and French Tourists. 30 other were injured

2013

On 6 June 2013, Two tunisian Soldiers were killed when their vehicle was attacked by IED near Jebel Ech Chambi



2015

On 18 March 2015, AQIM branch in Tunisia attacked Bardo National Museum in Tunis, killing 22 and injured 50. On 15 June 2015, 38 people most British Tourists were killed tourist resort at Port El Kantaoui, near Sousse; and on 24 November 2015, A suicide bomber attacked a bus carrying members of the Tunisian presidential guard, killing 12, on a principal road in Tunis. ISIL claimed responsibility for the attack.

2018

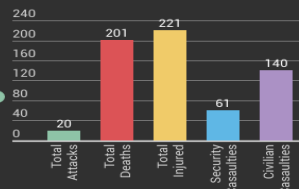
On 8 July 2018, Six members of the Tunisian security forces were killed and another three injured in an ambush in the area of Ain Soltane in the Tunisian governorate of Jendouba near the border with Algeria. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb claimed responsibility

2019

On 28 June 2019, Two suicide bombers killed one policemen and injured 9 others. The bombings happened near the French embassy in Tunis

2021

On 3 February 2021, A landmine blast killed four Tunisian soldiers during a counter-terrorism operation in Mount Mghila



2023

On 9 May 2023, During an annual Jewish pilgrimage to the island of Djerba, a guard from a naval center fatally shot a colleague before heading to the El Ghriba synagogue and opening fire. The attack resulted in the deaths of two civilians and a security guard, and left ten others injured. Security personnel responded quickly, shooting and killing the assailant

8. The May 9 attack is the second attack on the synagogue in the last two decades. On 11 April 2002, a suicide bomber drove a truck loaded with explosive into the synagogue's outer wall. 21 people were killed including 16 German and French tourists, and 30 were injured. The Tunisian branch of Al-Qaeda (Katiba Uqba ibn-Nafi - KUIN) claimed responsibility. Organized by the 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, it was al-Qaeda's first successful international attack following 9/11. Tunisia's last significant attack was a blast targeting police outside the US embassy in 2020 that killed one officer. In terms of the historical terrorist attacks, an estimated 20 attacks have been recorded that has led to over 201 deaths and 221 injuries (*See infographic opposite*).

D. ANALYSIS

9. Tunisia's main security threats are residual terrorism and social discontent. Generally, terrorism threats to Tunisia stem from returning Islamic State militants from Libya, Syria, and Iraq as well as Al-Qaeda's affiliate-Katibat Uqba Ibn-Nafi (KUIN) and ISIS branch in Tunisia. About 6,000 terrorists joined ISIL as Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) from Tunisia and the IS fighters are known to be active within the country.

10. While it has avoided any major violence, low-level assaults have been undertaken by extremists, mostly on security personnel. In addition, the mountainous areas of Kasserine and Kef are infested with small groups of extremists who conduct periodic attacks, especially on security personnel.

11. The incident therefore raises the issue of extremist infiltrators of security agencies, including Syria, Iraq, and Libya returnees using unapproved routes or the porous borders, who may not have been properly vetted by the authorities before their



Security Presence at the Synagogue after the Incident

condemned, and the current deleterious security situation prevailing there due to Israel security forces interventions, may have occasioned the attack as a revenge attack on Jews, Jewish interests and their supporters around the world. On 5 April 2023, Israeli police deployed at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the Old City of Jerusalem, raided the Mosque attacking worshippers. Both ISIS and Al-Qaeda propaganda have previously called for attacks against Jews, as a sign of demonstrating the religious significance of the Al-Aqsa Mosque as sacred to Muslims.

D. CONCLUSION

13. The incident may have a negative impact on the tourism industry in Tunisia, and its financial revenues, which could further exacerbate the prevailing economic difficulties and fuel local grievances that can be exploited by terrorist groups to ramp up their recruitment campaign. Given the historical trend of attacks against vulnerable targets and the importance of tourism in the country, the security forces must enhance their capacity in protecting vulnerable targets that include places of worship, touristic venues, hotels, special events, such occasions, open spaces, among many others as part of counter terrorism response generation efforts and operations.

14. Government-led de-radicalization programs and other initiatives such as enhanced monitoring of open spaces, intensified intelligence gathering and sharing, could considerably contribute to ameliorating the level of threat in the country. Indeed, the residual terrorism threat in Tunisia is driven by the diminishing control of ISIS and Al-Qaeda affiliated groups, and the failure to sustain cells due to robust counter terrorism operations by Tunisia Security Forces that have occasioned the dismantling of cells and arrests of suspected terrorists. That notwithstanding, counter-intelligence capabilities of the security must be reinforced to pre-empt and disrupt the occurrence of such premeditated incidents in the future.

recruitment in recent years. The attack further underscores the level of radicalization within the country, through the consumption of ISIS and Al-Qaeda propaganda information on social media. Also, the continuously deteriorating of the country' socio-economic situation, and the precarious political circumstances might also currently constitute important factors of Youths radicalization.

12. However, with the continuous attack on Muslims in Gaza territory by Israel security forces even during prayers and the Holy Month of Ramadan which have been largely

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