

Tunisia is widely credited with initiating the wave of revolutions that swept the Arab world in 2011. Following the ouster of former President Ben Ali, the country navigated an extremely difficult political transition that culminated in the formation of a democratically elected government under a new constitution in December 2014.

While many of the issues that fueled mass protests during the revolution remain, including an anemic economy and endemic corruption, Tunisia faces several security concerns that threaten its nascent democracy. These concerns include the growing presence and violence of extremist groups, smuggling of arms and continued security force abuses.

Recognizing the country could serve as a model for others in the region, the United States has marshalled a significant amount of resources to assist Tunisia. From FY 2011 to FY 2014, the United States provided an estimated \$167 million in security assistance and has requested at least \$142 million for FY 2015 and FY 2016 combined. Yet, the United States has several challenges in effectively assisting Tunisia.

## QUICK FACTS



**POPULATION:** 10,937,521  
**UNEMPLOYMENT RATE:** 17.2%  
**PER CAPITA GDP:** \$9,900  
**CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX RANKING:** 77 (out of 177)  
**MEDIAN AGE:** 31.4 YEARS  
**SIZE OF ARMED FORCES:** 67,000  
**DEFENSE EXPENDITURE:** \$550 million



## Main Security Concerns

**EXTREMIST VIOLENCE:** Since 2011, Islamic extremist groups have increasingly thrived along Tunisia's borders. The Tunisian military has discovered training camps belonging to Ansar al-Sharia (AS) and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and has arrested hundreds of suspected militants.<sup>1</sup> From 2011 through March 2015, extremist attacks resulted in an estimated 69 Tunisian security force members killed and more than 183 injured in addition to 24 civilians killed and 50 injured.<sup>2</sup> AS is also presumed to have been behind the assassination of two leftist politicians.<sup>3</sup> In addition, there is a growing concern about Islamic State, or ISIS, fighters carrying out attacks after the group claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack at the Bardo museum in Tunis, which killed 20 civilians.<sup>4</sup> U.S. personnel also came under threat when a large demonstration turned into an attack on the American Embassy and arson at the American Community School in Tunis in 2012.<sup>5</sup> Estimates suggest that between 2,500-3,000 Tunisians have traveled to fight in Syria, heightening the risk of fighters returning to engage in violent activities at home.<sup>6</sup>

**SMUGGLING OF ARMS AND EXTREMISTS:** Extremist violence has heightened concerns about the growing level of illicit movement of arms and extremists from Algeria and Libya into Tunisia. Before the revolution, cross-border smuggling networks consisted mostly of food and gasoline, aimed primarily at supporting border communities. Since the revolution, extremists have used the existing networks to expand smuggling operations for more nefarious contraband.<sup>7</sup> According to experts, the amount of trafficking in arms such as AK-47s, rocket launchers and anti-personnel mines from Libya to Tunisia has increased ten-fold in the past few years.<sup>8</sup> Porous borders with Algeria and Libya have also reportedly aided extremists in moving people in and out of the country illicitly to carry out attacks against Tunisian security forces.

**SECURITY FORCE ABUSE:** There continue to be reports of security forces, predominantly the police and National Guard, using excessive force, torture and arbitrary arrest as well as imposing media constraints, often in response to extremist concerns.<sup>9</sup> Sporadic crackdowns on journalists, nonviolent activists and conservative Islamists have persisted throughout the political transition, including the recent sentencing by a military court of a blogger for allegedly defaming military officials on Facebook.<sup>10</sup> In August 2014, police allegedly used excessive force on a road near the Algerian border, killing two women and wounding two others.<sup>11</sup> There are also concerns about Tunisia's outdated, authoritarian legal system, which allows security forces to employ abusive tactics to counter extremism. The lack of transparency and lengthy

prosecutions for security force abuses also undermines legal recourse for victims.<sup>12</sup>

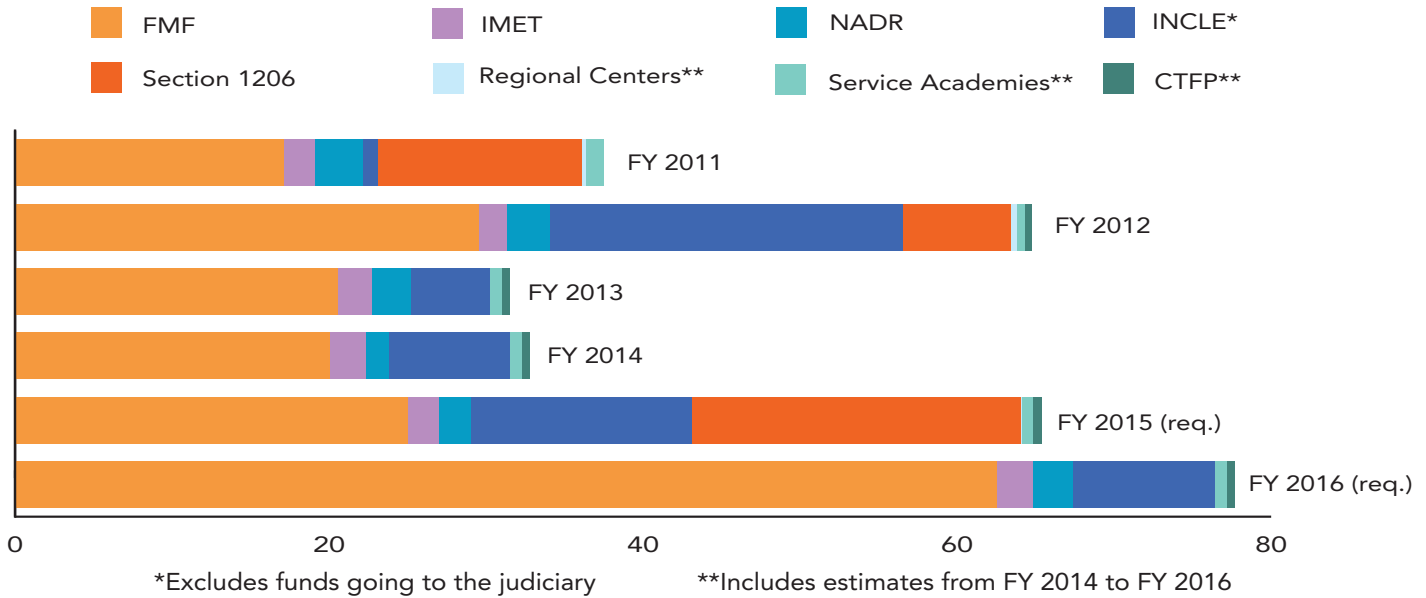
## U.S. Security Assistance

U.S. security assistance to Tunisia has three primary goals: 1) improving counterterrorism capabilities; 2) enhancing border security; and 3) supporting police and prison reform.<sup>13</sup> From FY 2011 to FY 2014, the United States allocated an estimated \$167 million in security assistance through numerous State and Defense Department programs to support these goals (see chart).<sup>14</sup> Although the Defense Department does not make much of its military aid requests public, available data makes it clear the administration intends to significantly increase security assistance to Tunisia for FY 2015 and FY 2016. Combining the FY 2015 and FY 2016 requests, the administration plans to appropriate at least \$142 million in security assistance, more than double the total amount allocated for the previous two years.<sup>15</sup> Tunisia is also slated to receive additional military aid as part of the Defense Department's Counterterrorism Partnership Fund request for FY 2015 and FY 2016, which will likely be over \$20 million.<sup>16</sup>

From FY 2011 to FY 2014, the United States allocated about \$121 million (73 percent) of the total \$167 million in security assistance to Tunisia's military to support counterterrorism and border security operations.<sup>17</sup> The vast majority of this assistance, \$106 million, went to the provision of military equipment through the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and Section 1206 programs. Under Section 1206, for instance, the United States supplied vehicles to improve ground troop mobility and boats and equipment to enhance maritime security.<sup>18</sup> In FY 2014, FMF funding sought to provide parts and components for previously U.S.-supplied airborne and ground radars and unmanned aerial vehicles to help the military detect and identify extremists.<sup>19</sup> The FY 2016 FMF request seeks to allocate \$42.5 million more than FY 2014. This new FMF funding will also help pay for Tunisia's purchase of 12 armed Black Hawk helicopters.<sup>20</sup>

The administration allocated an estimated \$14 million (11 percent) of the total \$121 million to Tunisia's military for training.<sup>21</sup> According to the State Department's Foreign Military Training reports covering FY 2011 to FY 2013, the U.S. trained 614 Tunisians, mostly from the Air Force, Navy, Army and Coast Guard.<sup>22</sup> During this time, at least 329 students received training on courses directly supporting counterterrorism or border security through U.S. programs such as International Military Education and Training (IMET) and the Combatting Terrorism Fellowship Program (CTFP). The bulk of this type of training focused on improving skills such as small boat patrol operations, equipment repair and intelligence gathering.

U.S. Security Assistance to Tunisia by Program, FY 2011 to FY 2016 \$ (IN MILLIONS)



While most U.S. security assistance has gone to the military, an estimated \$46 million (27 percent) of the total \$167 million went to the Ministry of Interior (MOI), including the police, National Guard and prison system, for counterterrorism, border security and police and prison reform. Under the Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR), the United States allocated about \$10 million (22 percent) of the total \$46 million to assist Tunisia’s law enforcement in leadership, border security and investigative capabilities as well as to enhance the country’s ability to combat illicit arms trafficking.<sup>23</sup> The United States also funded the creation of a “Fusion Center” in Tunisia to improve the security forces’ coordination in targeting extremism.<sup>24</sup>

From FY 2011 to FY 2014, an estimated \$36 million (78 percent) of the \$46 million the United States allocated to Tunisia’s MOI went to “reform, train, and equip” the ministry, police forces and the prison system through the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) program. Although much of this funding provided the police and National Guard with bulletproof vests, helmets and shields, it also provided training aimed at reducing MOI forces abuse and increasing government oversight of these forces.<sup>25</sup> In FY 2014, for instance, the United States trained police and National Guard personnel on crowd management and in media and community relations.<sup>26</sup> The administration requested to double the amount of INCLE funds from FY 2014 to FY 2015. In August 2014, the White House also announced that Tunisia would be one of six African states to be part of the new Security Governance Initiative (SGI), a unique initiative that seeks to improve security force systems, processes and institutions.<sup>27</sup> It is unclear how much money Tunisia would receive of the \$64 million requested for SGI for FY 2016.<sup>28</sup>

**Key Challenges to U.S. Security Assistance**

**SECURITY SECTOR REFORM:** With U.S. support, the Tunisian government has taken some steps toward building a more responsible police and National Guard, including the creation of the new National Commission on Torture and streamlining command and control relationships.<sup>29</sup> Despite U.S. efforts to assist the MOI in management and oversight of police, the ministry has been unwilling to provide the United States with details on its budget and number of police personnel, limiting the ability to provide assistance.<sup>30</sup> Accustomed to using violent tactics to ensure public order, some police officers are also resisting reform, claiming switching to nonviolent tactics will hinder their ability to address extremist and criminal violence.<sup>31</sup> In one potentially telling incident, 12,000 police officers went on strike following the attempted dismissal of a senior MOI official accused of firing on demonstrators during the revolution.<sup>32</sup> Some police unions have also requested officers be able to use live fire against protestors should other means be exhausted.<sup>33</sup>

**BORDER SECURITY:** In addition to the importance of reforming Tunisia’s security forces, a strategy engaging the military, National Guard, customs, border communities and the governments of Algeria and Libya is critical to effectively stem the illicit movement of arms and extremists into the country.<sup>34</sup> To date, the majority of U.S. assistance for border security has been devoted to the military, which has been reluctant to share equipment and intelligence with other Tunisian security forces.<sup>35</sup> Lack of communication between security forces has also hampered Fusion Center operations and impeded

coordinating efforts to stem extremist movement and violence.<sup>36</sup> Even within the military, there is concern that the armed forces cannot use all U.S.-provided equipment effectively because of limited personnel and expertise.<sup>37</sup> There is also still relatively little collaboration between Tunisian security forces and border communities and among Tunisia, Libya and Algeria, all of which are essential to stopping arms smuggling and extremists.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

As the United States looks to expand its efforts to assist Tunisia in countering security threats, it will be critical to closely monitor and evaluate such assis-

tance. With large amounts of U.S. funding going to the Tunisian military, there needs to be a focus on measuring its adherence to human rights standards, its influence within the government, its institutional capability to employ and secure U.S. equipment and its capacity to thwart extremist attacks. U.S. efforts to assist Tunisia in reducing security force abuse and establishing government oversight of these forces will also be critical. Measuring police support for government oversight, a possible key indicator of success for U.S. assistance, could help identify a shift in law enforcement culture away from heavy-handed responses to civilians. Without these reforms security forces risk exacerbating extremism and undermining efforts to build a secure democracy.

<sup>1</sup> Associated Press, "Jihadists threaten Tunisia's Arab Spring transition," Al Arabiya, July 31, 2014, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/analysis/2013/07/31/Jihadists-threaten-Tunisia-s-Arab-Spring-transition>. Reuters, "Tunisia arrests about 100 militant suspects, signs of Islamic State influence," DefenceWeb, February 24, 2015, [http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=38143:tunisia-arrests-about-100-militant-suspects-signs-of-islamic-state-influence&catid=49:National%20Security&Itemid=115](http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=38143:tunisia-arrests-about-100-militant-suspects-signs-of-islamic-state-influence&catid=49:National%20Security&Itemid=115).

<sup>2</sup> Walid Mejri, "Terrorisme en Tunisie: Carte interactive des événements après le 14 janvier," accessed March 31, 2015, <https://inkyfada.com/maps/carte-du-terrorisme-en-tunisie-depuis-la-revolution/>.

<sup>3</sup> Alexis Arief and Carla E. Humud, "Political Transition in Tunisia," Congressional Research Service, February 10, 2015, <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS21666.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Reuters, "ISIS Claims Responsibility for Tunisia Museum Attack," Newsweek, March 19, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/isis-claims-tunisia-attack-315145>.

<sup>5</sup> Alexis Arief and Carla E. Humud, "Political Transition in Tunisia."

<sup>6</sup> Richard Barrett, "Foreign Fighters in Syria," The Soufan Group, June 2014, <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/TSG-Foreign-Fighters-in-Syria.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> "Tunisia's Borders: Jihadism and Contraband," International Crisis Group, November 28, 2013, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/North%20Africa/Tunisia/148-tunisia-borders-jihadism-and-contraband-english.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Tunisia Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2013, U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrprt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dclid=220378#wrapper>.

<sup>10</sup> Sebastian Fagan, "Tunisian Journalists' Union Condemns Police Attacks on Journalists," Tunisia Live, February 21, 2015, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2015/02/21/tunisian-journalists-union-condemns-police-attacks-on-journalists>. Safa Ben Said, "Blogger Yassine Ayari Sentenced to One Year in Prison by Military Court," Tunisia Live, January 20, 2015, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2015/01/20/blogger-yassine-ayari-sentenced-to-one-year-in-prison-by-military-court/>.

<sup>11</sup> "Tunisia: Investigate Fatal Police Shooting," Human Rights Watch, September 3, 2014, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/09/03/tunisia-investigate-fatal-police-shooting>.

<sup>12</sup> Yezid Sayigh, "Missed Opportunity: The Politics of Police Reform in Egypt and Tunisia," Carnegie Middle East Center, March 2015, [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/missed\\_opportunity.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/missed_opportunity.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> "Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations Appendix 3: Regional Perspectives," U.S. State Department, Fiscal Year 2015, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/224070.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Military Aid Database, Security Assistance Monitor, accessed March 31, 2015, [http://www.securityassistance.org/data/program/military/Tunisia/2011/2014/is\\_all/Global](http://www.securityassistance.org/data/program/military/Tunisia/2011/2014/is_all/Global). The State Department reported that Tunisia also received Peacekeeping and Section 1004 funding from FY 2013 and FY 2014, but the overall totals are not public.

<sup>15</sup> Security Assistance Monitor, Military Aid Database, accessed on March 31, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Security Assistance Monitor interview with State Department official on March 12, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> The \$121 million is derived by adding together FMF, IMET, Section 1206, Regional Centers, Service Academies and CTFP from FY 2011 to FY 2014. State Department reports such as States Congressional Budget Justifications and the foreign military training reports show that these accounts are used to support counterterrorism and border security.

<sup>18</sup> Nina M. Serafino, "Security Assistance Reform: 'Section 1206' Background and Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service, April 19, 2013, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/209251.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> "Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations Annex: Regional Perspectives," U.S. State Department, Fiscal Year 2013, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/185015.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Defense Security Cooperation Agency News Release, July 23, 2014, <http://www.dsca.mil/major-arms-sales/tunisia-uh-60m-black-hawk-helicopters>. Security Assistance Monitor interview with State Department officials on March 12, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> The \$14 million number is derived by adding together the total amount of funding for IMET, Service Academies, CTFP and Regional Centers.

<sup>22</sup> "Foreign Military Training and DoD Engagement Activities of Interest," Security Assistance Monitor Reports Database, <http://securityassistance.org/content/foreign-military-training-and-dod-engagement-activities-interest>.

<sup>23</sup> "Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations Annex: Regional Perspectives," U.S. State Department, Fiscal Year 2014, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/208291.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> "Remarks by Ambassador Walles Ceremony for the Donation of Equipment to the Ministry of Interior," U.S. Embassy in Tunisia, August 14, 2014, <http://tunisia.usembassy.gov/am-speeches/remarks-by-ambassador-walles-at-ceremony-for-the-donation-of-equipment-to-the-ministry-of-interior-august-14-2014.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Security Assistance Monitor interview with State Department officials on March 12, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> White House, "Fact Sheet: Security Governance Initiative," Office of Press Secretary, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/08/06/fact-sheet-security-governance-initiative>.

<sup>28</sup> "Congressional Budget Justification, Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs," U.S. State Department, Fiscal Year 2016, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/236395.pdf>. Department of Defense, "Counterterrorism Partnership Fund," Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller), March 2015, [http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2016/FY2016\\_CTFPJ-Book.pdf](http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2016/FY2016_CTFPJ-Book.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Bassem Bouguerra, "Reforming Tunisia's Troubled Security Sector, Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center," October 2014, [http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/Reforming\\_Tunisia's\\_Troubled\\_Security\\_Sector.pdf](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/Reforming_Tunisia's_Troubled_Security_Sector.pdf). Robert M. Perito, "Security Sector Reform in North Africa: Why It's Not Happening," Centre for Security Governance, January 7, 2015, <http://www.ssrsourcecentre.org/2015/01/07/security-sector-reform-in-north-africa-why-its-not-happening/>.

<sup>30</sup> Security Assistance Monitor interview with State Department officials on January 9, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Bassem Bouguerra, "Reforming Tunisia's Troubled Security Sector."

<sup>32</sup> Querie Hanlon, "Security Sector Reform in Tunisia: A Year after the Jasmine Revolution," U.S. Institute of Peace, March 2012, <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR304.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> Yezid Sayigh, "Missed Opportunity: The Politics of Police Reform in Egypt and Tunisia."

<sup>34</sup> "Tunisia's Borders: Jihadism and Contraband," International Crisis Group.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Security Assistance Monitor interview with State Department officials on March 12, 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Security Assistance Monitor interview with State Department officials on January 9, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Security Assistance Monitor interview with State Department officials on March 12, 2015.

<sup>38</sup> "Tunisia's Borders: Jihadism and Contraband," International Crisis Group. Martin Armstrong, "Tunisia's smuggling trade poses security risk," Al-Jazeera English, January 8, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/12/tunisia-smuggling-trade-poses-security-risk-201412237244616426.html>.

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