

Reform and Security Strategy in Tunisia

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	i
Recommendations.....	iii
I. Introduction	1
II. The Deterioration of the Security Forces	3
A. Politics of Fear and Weakening of the ISF Under the Former Regime.....	3
B. The Security Apparatus Since the Revolution: Structural Break-down and Arbitrary Management	4
C. From the Autonomy of the ISF to their Fragmentation	8
D. Politicisation of the Security Apparatus and Failure of Reforms.....	11
III. The Isolation of the ISF	15
A. The ISF and Citizens: A Growing Divide	15
B. The Rise of Anti-central Government and Anti-police Discourse.....	17
1. Young people in the underprivileged urban peripheries	17
2. The dilemma of the border regions	17
C. The ISF and the Military: A Problematic Relationship?	19
IV. From Reform to Strategy.....	23
V. Conclusion	27
APPENDICES	
A. Map of Tunisia.....	28
B. Glossary of Abbreviations	29

Executive Summary

With a dysfunctional internal security apparatus, Tunisia's response to increasing, ever more devastating jihadi attacks has been ad hoc. The attacks in Tunis and Sousse, in March and June 2015, as well as frequent assaults against the police, the National Guard and the army over the past two years, especially in areas along the country's borders, are evidence of jihadi groups' significant advances. The authorities are struggling to confront this threat and develop a public policy on security. While their predicament is primarily linked to problems inside the internal security forces (ISF), the regional context does not help. To tackle jihadi violence, as well as better manage political and social conflicts, a thorough reform of the ISF will be necessary.

Instead of promoting standards of professionalism and strengthening its efficiency and integrity, the internal security sector – which includes National Security, police, National Guard, civil defence and correctional services – is both fragmenting and asserting its authority vis-à-vis the executive and legislative branches of government. Its members, many lacking motivation, carry out their profession in an institution whose statutes date from the time of dictatorship and that has been uprooted and politicised by the 2010-2011 uprising. During the subsequent transition, political parties took advantage of the discretionary power held by successive interior ministers in matters of recruitment, promotions and dismissals; police unions supposed to defend the institution have, for the most part, only worsened its internal divisions.

Many officers and staff now look at reform as destabilising, much as they see the revolution and those who speak in its name. A recently submitted ISF-championed draft law granting impunity to the security forces (the ISF, the national army and the customs police) indicates that they are on the defensive. They respond to political rhetoric accusing them of representing the counter-revolution, dictatorship and human rights abuse with a narrative of their own that pits security against democracy as part of a “war on terrorism”.

Many elements inside the ISF are worried about the state of their institution, even if it has the capacity to reform without the intervention of external actors. Priorities should be improving management capabilities, curbing bad practices (police brutality, the spread of petty corruption) and pushing back the rise of clientelism that is hollowing it out.

Yet, the presidency, the government and members of the Assembly of the People's Representatives (APR, the parliament) have a role to play in improving the security sector (through, for example, parliamentary oversight). Rather than impose their vision on the ISF, they should channel the ISF's desire for independence: encourage it to reinforce its internal oversight mechanisms, review the way it is structured and operates, and provide the support necessary for its professionalisation.

The last four years of transition have shown that a head-on fight between the ISF and the political class is a dead end. Neither revolution nor counter-revolution has achieved its goals. This confrontation – in part exaggerated by ordinary citizens – has produced a false antithesis between order and liberty that must be overcome.

The government and APR should agree on a new ISF code of conduct, to be drafted jointly following wide consultation inside and outside the security sector and taking into account its new mission in the post-Ben Ali era. This should entail a collective

reflection, particularly inside the interior ministry, as well as a national political debate on the notion of security, the role and mission of the police (as distinct from the military), the causes of the north/south fracture and jihadi violence, and the public's lack of confidence in the security apparatus.

The presidency, the government and Tunisia's international partners should understand that the urgent need to correct the ISF's dysfunctions enabling it to confront the country's security challenges, cannot be limited to improving the equipment of operational units or reinforcing counter-terrorism capabilities, even if this, too, is necessary. Strengthening the internal security apparatus requires first and foremost changing the laws governing the sector, establishing an ambitious human resources management plan and improving basic training and professional development.

Without an ISF reform that would allow for the formulation of a holistic security strategy, Tunisia will continue to stumble from crisis to crisis as its regional environment deteriorates and political and social tensions increase, at the risk of sinking into chaos or a return to dictatorship.

Preventing such a scenario will require a joint effort of the political class and the internal security sector. Such cooperation will be critical to preventing the temptation to restore the public's "fear of the police" or increasingly burden the national army with internal policing tasks to compensate for the ISF's weakness and poor management.

This set of measures amounts to an essential preliminary step before rethinking the state's response to increased social and political violence. This is a national challenge that encompasses more than the security forces' mission: it also entails tackling the need to make progress on implementing regional development projects in border regions, rehabilitating degraded living conditions in the urban peripheries, improving prison conditions and promoting alternatives to jihadi ideology, among others. The ISF should not find itself alone in compensating for the lack of strategic vision of the political class.

Recommendations

In order to bring a balanced and proportional response to the rise of jihadism and social violence, and help the country escape the false choice between order and liberty

To the president of the republic and to the government:

1. Avoid the temptation of assigning policing tasks to the national army as a way of sidestepping the ISF's dysfunctions and improving security only in the short term.
2. Increase meetings of the security coordination cell and promote a counter-terrorism discourse that is not anti-religious.
3. Ensure the creation of a security information gathering centre ("fusion centre") that includes, in addition to the defence, interior, justice and foreign affairs ministries, the education, professional development and religious affairs ministries.
4. Organise a national conference, open to all, on the notion of security in a law-abiding society, the role and mission of the police, the causes of the north/south fracture and jihadism, the public's lack of confidence in the security apparatus and the democratic means to tackle existing problems, with the purpose of breaking taboos and establishing an objective assessment of the state of security institutions.

To the main political parties:

5. Avoid the political use of the terrorism threat by casting blame on opponents.

In order to improve the ISF's professionalism to ensure it responds to the security challenges of the post-Ben Ali era

To the government and the Assembly of the People's Representatives (APR):

6. Put in place a series of internal consultations on the manner in which security officials conceive of their profession in the post-Ben Ali era, with the conclusions of these exchanges serving as the basis for a new ISF code of conduct.
7. Establish, in collaboration with the interior and justice ministries, a High Committee for Security Sector Reform and Management, whose members should be elected from within the ISF and whose goal it should be to reinforce the sector's cohesion and ensure that principles of ethics and competence are respected and the quality of security services is guaranteed. This committee should:
 - a) participate in the drafting of a new ISF code of conduct in cooperation with the relevant parliamentary committees;
 - b) establish, in coordination with the interior ministry's General Directorate for Professional Training, a strategy for human resources management (including a psychological unit for recruitment, a frame of reference for job descriptions and functions, and computerisation of skillsets);
 - c) help revise the legal statutes that define the mission, procedures for recruitment, training and promotion, and hierarchy of ISF staff and officers, and in particular reduce the interior minister's powers of appointment and reas-

signment under Law Number 82-70 of 6 August 1982 on the general statutes of the internal security forces.

8. Accelerate the creation of a professional development division for national security at the interior ministry.

To international NGOs, to international institutions and to Tunisia's partner states in the security domain:

9. Support, as a priority, statute reform, implementation of an ISF human resources management plan, improvement of basic training and professional development, and especially the creation of a professional development division for national security at the interior ministry.
10. Coordinate bilateral and multilateral aid.

In order to improve the democratic oversight of the ISF and encourage its professionalisation

To the government and APR members, especially members of the General Legislative Committee, Organisation of the Administration of the Armed Forces Committee, and Security and Defence Committee:

11. Participate in developing a new ISF code of conduct and co-sign, with the High Committee for Security Sector Reform and Management, a clear agenda for reforming the security sector. The APR should enact this reform through an organic law, as mandated by the constitution.
12. Support the parliamentary oversight work of the APR's organisation of the administration of the armed forces and the security and defence committees (by training APR members on security questions and hiring of parliamentary staff).

Tunis/Brussels, 23 July 2015

Reform and Security Strategy in Tunisia

I. Introduction

Between March and June 2015, as two terrorist attacks caused the death of 62 people, including 59 foreign tourists, Tunisia's security became a matter of national and international concern. Armed with kalashnikovs and grenades, two assailants in the first attack and one, officially, in the second, opened fire upon Western holidaymakers after breaking into premier Tunisian tourism destinations – the Bardo museum in Tunis and the beach of Port el Kantaoui in the heart of the Sousse touristic zone on the eastern coast. Beyond their death toll, these tragedies had a destabilising impact on a still fragile Tunisia, beset by growing fears over the state's capacity to face a variety of challenges.¹ Tourism, an essential sector of the Tunisian economy, is gravely threatened.²

Political polarisation appears to be on the rise again. The government coalition uniting Islamists and “secularists” is showing signs of strain. The authorities, stridently criticised for their repeated security failures, are failing to deliver a unifying, balanced and persuasive discourse on the struggle against jihadism.³ Some Tunisians now openly express nostalgia for the dictatorship's alleged efficacy in matters of security.⁴ Furthermore, the reactions of non-Islamist politicians have been much harsher in the wake of the Sousse attack than they were after the Bardo attack. For example, President Béji Caïd Essebsi announced the re-activation of a state of emergency (suspended in March 2014) and a ban on the radical, but non-violent, Islamist party Hizb ut-Tahrir.⁵

Initiating a substantive reform of the internal security forces (ISF),⁶ accompanied by the rapid implementation of a public security policy,⁷ seems necessary to avoid a

¹ See Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°41, *Tunisia's Borders (II): Terrorism and Regional Polarisation*, 21 October 2014.

² The tourism sector represents 7 per cent of GDP and employs, directly or indirectly, about 400,000 people or 10 per cent of the working population. See “Tunisie le secteur du tourisme”, *Trésor direction générale, Publications des services économiques*, November 2013.

³ Sybil Bullock, “Experts Claim that Tunisian Government Ignored Pre-Sousse Security Warnings”, *tunisia-live.net*, 27 June 2015.

⁴ See Amna Guelali, “Après les attentats du Bardo, rhétorique anti droits humains en Tunisie”, (“After the Bardo attacks, anti-human rights rhetoric in Tunisia”), Human Rights Watch, 26 March 2015.

⁵ President Essebsi has also accused the social movement “Où est le pétrole?” (“Where is the oil?”), launched in May 2015 to demand more transparency regarding the country's natural resources, of having weakened the government and therefore made the jihadist attacks possible. See “Béji Caïd Essebsi: nous prendrons des mesures antiterroristes sévères”, *Agence Tunis Afrique Presse*, 26 June 2015. Mohsen Marzouk, the secretary general of Nida Tounes, has called for the creation of anti-terrorist citizen watchdog groups that would assist the ministry of interior, while several commentators and intellectuals close to Nida Tounes have blamed An-Nahda. The head of the government, Habib Essid, announced the closure of 80 places of worship controlled by Salafis; called on army reservists to assist the security forces; and suggested an increase in raids and police searches to dismantle jihadi cells across the country. See “Tunisie: Fermeture de 80 mosquées, et mesures contre des partis (Essid)”, *Gnet.tn*, 27 June 2015.

⁶ The internal security forces (ISF) designates the agents of National Security, the police, the National Guard, civil defence (ministry of interior) as well as correctional officers (ministry of justice).

relapse into authoritarian rule and likely to radicalise part of the population.⁸ Too often, security sector reform experts depict reform as a struggle between political forces with democratic ambitions and a security apparatus with authoritarian tendencies.⁹ In the context of rising jihadi violence in the last three years,¹⁰ reducing the success of the police to the power dynamic between democrats and the security establishment has led the force to turn in on itself. Taking into account the technical as well as political and sociological aspects of the internal security sector is essential in order to avoid the police becoming impervious to reform and the security climate deteriorating further.

See Law n° 82-70 of 6 August 1982 on the general statute of the ISF. This report will concentrate on the senior officers and agents of the general directorates of the ministry of interior that include the overwhelming majority of the IFS: National Security and the National Guard. For ease of reading, we will consider terms such as police apparatus, security forces, security establishment, police forces, security agents, etc, as synonymous with internal security forces.

⁷ The expression “public security policy” designates the manner in which the state ensures the safety and security of its population. Generally, prevention is an important component of such policy. Efforts to improve living conditions in underprivileged areas or develop cultural and sports activities for young people are also included. See Alain Bauer and Christophe Soulez, *Les politiques publiques de sécurité* (Paris 2011). Public security policies were under-developed under Beni Ali and remain so today.

⁸ See Amna Guelali, “Après les attentats du Bardo, rhétorique anti droits humains en Tunisie”, *op. cit.*

⁹ See “An Overview of the Arab Security Sector Amidst Political Transition: A Reflection on Legacies, Functions and Perceptions”, UN, 2013. Also see Yezid Sayigh, “Missed opportunity, the politics of police reform in Egypt and Tunisia”, Carnegie, Middle East Center, March 2015.

¹⁰ See Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°137, *Tunisia: Violence and the Salafi Challenge*, 13 February 2013. Also see Crisis Group Briefing, *Tunisia’s Borders (II): Terrorism and Regional Polarisation*, *op. cit.*

II. The Deterioration of the Security Forces

A. *Politics of Fear and Weakening of the ISF Under the Former Regime*

While the former regime was efficient at monitoring and intimidating Tunisians, it had difficulties guaranteeing the population's safety. In the last decade of Ben Ali's rule, jihadism, criminality and juvenile delinquency were on a steady rise. On 11 April 2002, a tanker truck exploded in front of the Ghriba synagogue in the town of Djerba. The attack, claimed by al-Qaeda, killed 21, including fourteen European tourists. In December-January 2006-2007, tens of thousands of police officers were mobilised and required ten days to neutralise a group of 30 armed jihadis, some of whom had entered the country through Algeria.¹¹ Also at that time, crime was increasing in urban peripheries and the police faced difficulties containing the violence that broke out on a regular basis during football matches.¹² The authorities were largely unable of resolving social conflicts, leaving the police to manage them through repression.¹³

If we forget these facts today, it's partly because fear of the police made the ISF appear more efficient than it really was. The authorities had succeeded in establishing an effective surveillance system, in which the dominant party, the *Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique* (RCD) played a central role (the party was dissolved on 9 March 2011). People lived in an atmosphere of generalised suspicion; in the words of one former dissident, many Tunisians had "a little Ben Ali in their head".¹⁴

Once the wall of fear fell, the police was no longer capable of maintaining order. Today its weakness has become apparent. As a former member of an elite unit notes:

We felt strong because the majority of citizens feared us. In reality, we were weak. Whenever the people were determined to fight, we had to retreat. If we had been efficient and professional, there might not have been a revolution.¹⁵

Most opposition figures and human rights activists incorrectly attributed the climate of self-censorship and informing that the regime succeeded in establishing to the power and sophistication of the domestic security apparatus. They believed the "political police" disposed of up-to-date technology and that the security services were enormous – between 100,000 and 200,000 agents.¹⁶ In reality, they were just over

¹¹ See Crisis Group Report, *Tunisia: Violence and the Salafī Challenge*, op. cit., p. 14. Crisis Group interview, former head of an elite national police unit, Tunis, June 2015.

¹² Thousands of policemen were deployed for sports matches, which generally ended in clashes that left hundreds of police injured. Crisis Group interview, former head of an elite national police unit, Tunis, June 2015.

¹³ This was the case, two years before the revolution, in the mining region of Gafsa, which for six months witnessed violent demonstrations calling for jobs and regional development. Police forces used 30,000 canisters of tear gas and resorted to live ammunition against the protesters. This was also the case in August 2010, during protests against the closure of the border crossing of Ras Jedir, in the Ben Guerdane region near the Tunisian-Libyan border. See Larbi Chouikha and Vincent Geisser, "Gros plan: retour sur la révolte du bassin minier", *L'année du Maghreb*, 2010. Crisis Group interviews, leftist activists, union activists, Tunis, Sfax, 2012-2015.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, human rights activist, Tunis, March 2012.

¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, former head of an elite national police unit, Tunis, June 2015.

¹⁶ See Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°106, *Popular Protests in North Africa and the Middle East (IV): Tunisia's Way*, 28 April 2011. Crisis Group interviews, leftist activists, union activists, Tunis, Sfax, 2012-2015.

50,000.¹⁷ Their operational capacity and the analytic skills of the intelligence services were weak.¹⁸ Their equipment was defective and inadequate. The competency of new recruits, their professional ethics and their integrity were in constant decline.¹⁹ Corruption was endemic, and interference by the former president's family deepened divisions within the force.

Despite attempts to reform some police cadres drawn from the officer corps,²⁰ the institution was poorly managed. Since the security apparatus aimed at ensuring the safety of the regime rather than that of citizens,²¹ it was inefficient. ISF salaries were generally quite low and working conditions very demanding, in order to control staff and ensure its loyalty. According to one police officer, "it was a doctrine of 'starve your dog, and he'll follow you!'"²²

B. *The Security Apparatus Since the Revolution: Structural Break-down and Arbitrary Management*

Since the 2010-2011 uprising, the police forces' problems have taken on new forms and worsened. Despite some progress, the management of the security sector is worse than it was under the former dictatorship. The budget of the ministry of interior has grown by 60 per cent between 2011 and 2015. Its staff's base salary has increased by one-third.²³ ISF employees have the right to join professional unions and can express themselves in the media. Nevertheless, agents report that their psychological state has suffered and their sense of insecurity increased.

During the months of confusion that followed Ben Ali's departure, the minister of interior, Ferhat Rahji (27 January to 28 March 2011), took several hasty decisions regarding security. First of all – under pressure from human rights associations, long-term opponents of the dictatorship, and hurriedly reappointed former general directors – he forced 42 high-level ISF officials into early retirement.²⁴ Albeit partial, this purge was significant: it led to a freeze of the activities of several departments under the General Directorate of Special Affairs, an important unit in terms of information gathering.²⁵

¹⁷ See "La Tunisie post Ben Ali face aux démons du passé: Transition démocratique et persistance de violations graves des droits de l'Homme", International Federation for Human Rights, July 2011.

¹⁸ See Moncef Kartas, "Foreign Aid and Security Sector Reform in Tunisia: Resistance and Autonomy of the Security Forces", *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 19, n°3, 2014.

¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, former high-level official at ministry of interior, Tunis, March 2015.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, former high-level official at ministry of interior, Tunis, March 2015; former general director of the study and development of skills at the ministry of interior, Tunis, May 2015. Also see Michel Camau et Vincent Geisser, *Le syndrome autoritaire. Politique en Tunisie de Bourguiba à Ben Ali* (Paris, 2003).

²¹ See Farah Hached et Wahid Ferchichi, *Révolution tunisienne et défis sécuritaires* (Tunis 2014).

²² Crisis Group interview, police officer, Tunis, May 2015.

²³ See Yezid Sayigh, *Missed opportunity, the politics of police reform in Egypt and Tunisia*, op. cit., p. 1. Also see Ministry of Interior, "Budget", MARSAD.budget (budget.marsad.tn), 2012-2015.

²⁴ Crisis Group interview, former general director at the ministry of interior, Tunis, January 2015.

²⁵ This was the case for Internal State Security (sûreté intérieure de l'Etat): some of its agents were removed, others transferred, and it was renamed the Special Services Directorate (direction des services spécialisés). The interior minister and the media incorrectly presented these changes as the dissolution of the political police. See Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°123, *Tunisia: Combating Impunity, Restoring Security*, 9 May 2012. It was also the case of the General Directorate for the Prevention of Terrorism (Direction générale de prévention anti-terrorisme, DPAT) and of the Joint Committee on Intelligence and Borders (Comité commun des renseignements et

The minister of interior also dissolved the police's internal affairs department, the *Inspection supérieure de la police nationale*, known as "the police's police," which had played an important oversight role. According to several members of the ISF, the dissolution of this department led to greater insubordination and a rise in petty corruption within the force.²⁶

Another hasty measure that had unintended consequences was the reintegration of nearly 2,200 agents and senior officers of the interior ministry who had been relieved of their posts in the previous decade, either by the honour councils (*conseils d'honneur*) of the police and National Guard or by commissions in charge of disciplinary proceedings, for professional shortcomings or infractions of the law. Under the former regime, some of those removed had been targeted for political reasons (if they were religiously observant they were considered, rightly or wrongly, as members of the Islamist movement), but others had engaged in criminally liable behaviour.²⁷

After the uprising, these officers removed under Ben Ali applied strong pressure to regain their posts.²⁸ That, according to a retired senior officer, is how they re-joined the services. "Cases were reviewed hastily. What mattered to the transitional authorities was to show that all sanctions imposed by the former regime were illegitimate".²⁹ Some of these officers have since been dismissed again for recidivism, but others have strengthened their position within the ministry, thanks to their union. This has troubled many senior officers who see it as a clear injustice and an attack on the professional values of the force.³⁰

The violent clashes of December-January 2010-2011 – which involved dozens of unsolved deaths,³¹ thousands of wounded,³² police stations set on fire³³ and private homes attacked, mob assaults and public humiliations – traumatised many policemen. Furthermore, after a handful of general directors were convicted by military

des frontières) supervised by the Central Directorate for General Intelligence (direction centrale des renseignements généraux, DCRG). Crisis Group interviews, senior officers in the ministry of interior, Tunis, 2013-2015.

²⁶ Crisis Group interview, police officers, Tunis, 2014-2015.

²⁷ A former general director at the interior ministry explains that "out of a hundred people fired, thirty were fired because they seemed close to An-Nahda (the Islamist party). Some for example were too diligent in their Friday prayers. Thirty had broken internal regulations, by for example taking on a second job as taxi drivers. The other forty were real dirty cops: murderers, rapists and drug traffickers". Crisis Group interview, former general director at the ministry of interior, Tunis, April 2015.

²⁸ On 31 January 2011, they were among the 2,000 policemen who forced their way into the ministry of interior and attacked the minister. See Ridha Kefi, "Tunisie: Bisbilles au sein des services de sécurité", Kapitalis (kapitalis.com), 2 February 2011.

²⁹ Crisis Group interview, former senior officer at the ministry of interior, Tunis, April 2015.

³⁰ How is it, one of them asks indignantly, that "agents with no principles, who managed to get themselves fired for misconduct under Ben Ali, when the regime covered up many abuses, have been able to grab decision-making posts following the so-called revolution? The truth is that our staff has less integrity than it did before the uprising". Crisis Group interview, police officer, Tunis, March 2015.

³¹ Crisis Group interviews, members of the police force, Tunis, 2013-2015. See Amine Boussofara, *Ghosts of the revolution*, World Press Photo (worldpressphoto.org), 2012.

³² See "La Tunisie post Ben Ali face aux démons du passé: Transition démocratique et persistance de violations graves des droits de l'Homme", op. cit., p. 7.

³³ During the uprising, more than 600 police stations were attacked. Police took flight and were completely overwhelmed. See Crisis Group Report, *Tunisia: Violence and the Salafi Challenge*, op. cit., p. 40.

judges³⁴ in the cases of those killed and wounded during the revolution,³⁵ members of the police force came to fear the courts. For two years, officers were unsettled by the possibility of being tried by military or civil courts, in the absence of a new legal framework that established what constituted the legitimate use of violence within a democratic system.

As a result, between 2011 and 2013, until internal directives and a return of popular legitimacy caused by the growing terrorist threat finally reassured them, many policemen let public gatherings degenerate – notably sit-ins, protests over social issues and violent Salafi demonstrations.³⁶ They tended to justify this passivity by saying that, if they fully applied Law 96-4 regulating demonstrations in public places, they risked the ire of judicial authorities.³⁷

After the Islamist An-Nahda party reached power at the head of a government coalition (which was in office from December 2011 through January 2014), the domestic security apparatus was also disrupted by the massive recruitment of non-commissioned officers. Between 2012 and 2014, between 9,000 and 12,000 high school graduates joined the police force as constables or sergeants in the National Guard – the lowest rank in each – after just one month of shared basic training and fifteen days of experience in the field.³⁸

Even if this type of recruitment decreased between 2013 and 2014 and came to an end in 2015, the ISF's staff stood officially at 75,000 at the end of 2014, up from 50,000 in 2011.³⁹ Several senior officers lament the fact that this rapid increase in badly trained agents, recruited in large numbers for social and electoral reasons, has diminished the integrity and the professional skills of the average policeman, weakened supervision and allowed petty corruption to flourish.⁴⁰

Even worse, according to several officers,⁴¹ is the rise in rank of nearly a third of ISF personnel since 2013, according to criteria other than education and professional development. Following a strong movement in favour of what has been called “career regularisation”,⁴² supported by the security forces' unions, and particularly by the *syndicat des fonctionnaires des directions générales des unités d'interventions*

³⁴ Policemen can be referred to military courts for certain incidents that take place in the course of exercising their functions. See article 22 of Law n° 82-70 of 6 August 1982 on the general statute of the ISF.

³⁵ “Tunisie: Peines de prison contre des policiers impliqués dans l'affaire des ‘martyrs de la révolution’”, Anadolu agency (aa.com.tr), 8 April 2014.

³⁶ See Crisis Group Report, *Tunisia: Violence and the Salafi Challenge*, op. cit., p. 42.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 41. Article 21 of Law 69-4 stipulates that: “If security agents find themselves in the presence of demonstrators who refuse to disperse despite receiving the warnings outlined in the preceding articles of this law, they will progressively use the following means to disperse them: 1. Water cannons or charges using batons; 2. Tear gas; 3. Shooting in the air in pairs to frighten demonstrators; 4. Shooting above their heads; 5. Shooting at their legs”. See Law n° 69-4 of 24 January 1969 regulating public gatherings, processions, marches, demonstrations and assemblies.

³⁸ Crisis Group interviews, member of the *syndicat des fonctionnaires de la direction générale des unités d'intervention* (SFDGUI, syndicate for employees of the general directorate for intervention unit), former official in the general training directorate, Tunis, May 2015.

³⁹ See ministry of interior, “Budget”, op. cit.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interviews, former state secretary for security affairs and former general director of research and expertise development at the ministry of interior, Tunis, March-May 2015.

⁴¹ Crisis Group interviews, senior officials at the ministry of interior, Tunis, January-June 2015.

⁴² See decree n° 2014-3632 of 30 September 2014 approving the 2014 promotion lists for agents of Security, the national police, the National Guard and civil defence according to “career regularisation” criteria.

(SFDGUI, syndicate for employees of the general directorate for intervention unit), tens of thousands of employees, particularly non-commissioned officers with only secondary educations, were promoted several ranks.⁴³ According to a trade unionist from the SFDGUI:

At the time of Ben Ali, senior officers and agents rose in rank with difficulty. From 2006 onward, in theory one was required to be receiving continuous training that were reserved to a lucky few. So in the name of fairness and in the same spirit as the February 2011 decree⁴⁴ that allows for reparations to the victims of the former regime's arbitrary decisions, we demanded that the highest-ranking officer in a graduating class grant all his comrades the same rank. We won the argument. Until now over 28,000 officials – including customs officials, who as members of the armed forces are represented by our union – have obtained higher ranks and began to receive the compensation that comes with them.⁴⁵

But only a fraction of the posts corresponding to these ranks has been created or opened for the newly promoted. This has generated significant frustration among those waiting to assume their new positions. Corporals have become captains but still work directing traffic.⁴⁶ Non-commissioned officers have been promoted to management positions for which they are far from qualified. Relations of authority based on educational attainment and professional training have been undermined.

This “democratisation of the ranks” has been criticised by most policemen, even those who have benefited from it, and has caused ripples even within the army.⁴⁷ But most important to note is that four years after the fall of the regime, the ISF remains an extremely centralised institution, still regulated by laws issued under the dictatorship, and in which the hierarchy, less coherent now, still exercises almost discretionary power.⁴⁸ Several police agents say they work within a bureaucracy whose internal management is as arbitrary as ever. As one of them says,

under the old regime, it's true, there were much stricter restrictions on our freedom of expression. It was very difficult to discuss our work with someone [outside the service]. But other than this change, today, it's all the same. For example we need an authorisation from the ministry of interior to get married or to travel outside the country. Our superiors can transfer us whenever they choose if we

⁴³ Crisis Group interview, member of syndicat national des forces de sécurité intérieure (SNFSI), the national syndicate of internal security forces, Tunis, May 2015.

⁴⁴ See legal decree n° 2011-1 of 19 February 2011 declaring amnesty.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, member of SFDGUI, Tunis, May 2015.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, security expert, Tunis, April 2015; Crisis Group observations, Tunis, April 2015.

⁴⁷ Several members of the army say that this inflation of ranks diminishes their value, including within the armed forces, and that it is not appropriate in terms of professional ethics for a non-commissioned officer without a university degree to outrank an officer who attended the military or police academy. Crisis Group interview, retired military officers, security expert, Tunis, March-May 2015.

⁴⁸ Laws n° 69-4 of 24 January 1969 regulate public gatherings, marches, processions, demonstrations and assemblies. Laws n° 82-70 of 6 August 1982 on the general statute of the internal security forces still determine, today, the modes of intervention, the mission, the rights and obligations of agents. See Law n° 82-70 of 6 August 1982 on the general statute of the internal security forces. This law was amended only once after the revolution, in 2011, when the transitional authorities added the right to form unions. See article 12 of law n° 82-70 of 6 August 1982 on the general statute of the ISF.

don't follow their orders, whatever they may be. What's more, the minister decides everything. He has the power, together with the prime minister, to push anyone into early retirement. And above all he can name any officer to any management position and promote whomever he chooses, all according to his own criteria.⁴⁹

The repercussions of the uprising and the persistence of arbitrary and anachronistic management procedures have, in the new context created by the fall of Ben Ali, weakened the ISF. Its rules and regulations have hardly changed since 1982. The law regulating the use of force during demonstrations dates from 1969. Laws determining criteria for recruitment and career advancement based on job performance and competence are no longer respected.⁵⁰ Police officers no longer inspire fear in citizens, as they did in the past. Democratic expectations are higher, terrorist threats graver, and social protests more widespread.

The result is that policemen feel increasingly insecure and misunderstood. They find that their work is even more difficult, thankless and dangerous than under the dictatorship. This pushes them, on the one hand, to demand a law that would protect them against external dangers, and on the other, to insist on their independence from political authorities and from democratic oversight. The new unions that security officials have organized themselves around are actually weakening the institution of the police. They are exacerbating its internal divisions and reinforce policemen's feelings of insecurity and their lack of motivation.

C. *From the Autonomy of the ISF to their Fragmentation*

This vicious cycle began immediately after the revolution. Security forces were considered counter-revolutionary, henchmen of the former regime. This was in contrast to the army, which took on a heroic role, since it was perceived to have "refused to shoot on the crowds" during the 2010-2011 uprising.⁵¹ The ISF on the other hand were deeply weakened – "defeated" to quote one officer.⁵²

The interior ministry's first instinct was to protect itself against a potential witch-hunt. In the tense and uncertain political climate of that time, when police stations were still being regularly targeted and burnt down by demonstrators (to little public indignation), the ministry's leadership could have been the victim of a serious purge (dismissals, criminal prosecutions) or even of violent reprisals from political dissidents who were imprisoned and tortured by the former regime, such as the Islamists of An-Nahda.⁵³ According to several police officers, some general directors pre-emptively appealed to influential businessmen capable, thanks to their relations with the judiciary and the media, of offering them protection if things should take a turn for the worse.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, police agent, Tunis, May 2015. See articles 8, 15, 25 and 68 of law n° 82-70 of 6 August 1982 on the general statute of the ISF.

⁵⁰ It is the case of decree n° 2006-1160 of 13 April 2006 on the specific statutes of National Security agents and the national police.

⁵¹ See Abdelaziz Barrouhi, "Le général Ammar, l'homme qui a dit non", *Jeune Afrique* (jeuneafrique.com), 7 February 2011.

⁵² Crisis Group interview, police officer, Tunis, August 2013.

⁵³ Maryam Mnaouar, "Pour son nouveau syndicat, la police tunisienne ne doit pas être le bouc émissaire", *Afrik* (afrik.com), 12 May 2011. Crisis Group observations, May 2011.

⁵⁴ A former high level interior ministry official notes that "on an individual level, the directors had no judicial cover. They remembered that some among them had paid a price for carrying out in-

At that time, social and corporatist mobilisation was widespread across the country,⁵⁵ and security forces also began organising themselves into unions. The first union, the *syndicat national des forces de sécurité intérieure* (SNFSI, national syndicate of internal security forces), was born in May 2011. A few months later, a competing federation, the SFDGUI, was created.⁵⁶

Even before members of the security forces began creating their first unions in August 2011, they immediately, out of an instinct for self-preservation, sought to protect their working conditions and their independence from political authorities. To make a break with the practices of the past – brutality, corruption, political demands, the doctrine of “starve your dog, he’ll follow you” – they united behind the motto “republican police”, a term that made its way into the new constitution adopted in January 2014.⁵⁷ This term reflects security officials’ aspiration to place themselves above every day politics. But it also entails them gaining the greatest possible autonomy from the executive and legislative, to the point of becoming in some sense untouchable.⁵⁸

As one international security sector reform expert explains, members of Tunisia’s internal security forces understand the fight for their independence as a struggle against political authorities, with the goal of acquiring enough autonomy to withdraw from the democratic debate over security.⁵⁹ To their minds, it comes down to denying “the right and obligation of the government to assert its control or hold recalcitrant officers accountable”,⁶⁰ and to denying that politicians may be competent on security matters.⁶¹ Many ISF members believe that they are the only ones qualified to handle these matters, all the more so as they consider themselves the primary targets of jihadism and social protests.⁶² In May 2013, a security forces union activist

structions during the revolution. With no clear legal framework, they turned to patronage outside the force to protect themselves”. Crisis Group interview, former secretary of state for security affairs, Tunis, mars 2015.

⁵⁵ See Crisis Group Report, *Popular Protests in North Africa and the Middle East (IV): Tunisia’s Way*, op. cit.

⁵⁶ Several administrative bodies and intervention units joined the SFDGUI, which gave birth in May 2012 to the *l’Union nationale des syndicats des forces de la sûreté tunisienne* (UNSFST, national union of syndicates of Tunisian security forces). Then, following internal disagreement, the SFDGUI quit the l’UNSFST. At the time of writing, the SFDGUI has 23,000 members, the SNFSI 8,000 and the UNSFST 3,000. The SFDGUI does not court media attention and is more of a professional than a political organisation. The other unions sometimes describe it as close to An-Nahda. The SNFSI and the l’UNSFST, on the other hand, are more politicised and more active in the media – particularly the UNSFST, which repeatedly took strong stances against the governing coalition and An-Nahda, particularly in 2013. Security agents have created more than 50 small independent unions, some of which only include a few members. Crisis Group interviews, ISF syndicate members, Tunis, 2013-2015. Also see Thierry Brésillon, “Tunisie: des policiers défient le gouvernement. Bluff ou menace ?”, Rue89 (rue89.nouvelobs.com), 27 octobre 2013.

⁵⁷ Article 19 of the Tunisian constitution stipulates that: “The forces of national security are republican forces entrusted with preserving safety and public order, with protecting individuals, institutions and property, with applying the law with neutrality and while respecting freedoms”. See the constitution of the Tunisian republic, promulgated on 27 January 2014.

⁵⁸ Moncef Kartas, “Foreign Aid and Security Sector Reform in Tunisia: Resistance and Autonomy of the Security Forces”, op. cit.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, international expert on security forces reform, Tunis, April 2015.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, international expert on security forces reform, Tunis, February 2015.

⁶¹ See Moncef Kartas, “Foreign Aid and Security Sector Reform in Tunisia: Resistance and Autonomy of the Security Forces”, op. cit.

⁶² Crisis Group interview, member of a parliamentary committee, Tunis, March 2015.

argued that, given the Salafi-jihadi threat, politicians and members of civil society should unite behind the forces of law and order and meet their demands without quibbling over their content:

Civil society must support the security establishment against extremists. All political parties, the government and the president of the republic must understand that it is essential to respond to the immediate needs of all the country's policemen, particularly concerning their salary and equipment.⁶³

Moreover, in early 2011, officers who had been dismissed by the former regime, particularly those whose integrity was questionable, quickly established the cores of the new unions with a view toward using them to obtain their professional reintegration. General directors have used the clout of these unions to safeguard their own positions within the interior ministry. Figures from the business world (entrepreneurs and industrialists who wield influence within various regional, economic and family networks) who had offered directors protection, took advantage of their leverage to extend their influence within the police and customs in order to obtain privileges⁶⁴ and to push the political agenda best suited to their economic interests. Over time this patronage mechanism appears to have spread to different levels of the bureaucracy, involving a growing number of individuals inside and outside the security apparatus.⁶⁵

In fact, as numerous agents point out,⁶⁶ the process of granting the security apparatus greater autonomy – as promoted by a number of police unions – does not strengthen the force but rather allows greater interference from business networks. In the view of a former secretary of state for security affairs, the security forces' desire to free themselves from political supervision (the government, parliament) has put them under the sway of new centres of power:

Under the former regime, Ben Ali ran the force himself with an iron fist, even if his family interfered in its activities. The revolution freed the interior ministry from this hold. It no longer submits itself to political authorities – whoever they may be. It was able to find external support in order to avoid submitting to the authorities. At that time, it was the troika. In that context, he had to figure out new allegiances. Even though the troika has now left power, these patron-client relationships now resist the state and have become uncontrollable. The apparatus has created centres of power within itself. It is now governed by relationships of clientelism determined by businessmen.⁶⁷

In the end, rather than being united as a professional force that defends its interests, the security forces are riven by numerous divisions. In the words of one high-level official, the interior ministry resembles a "sick body".⁶⁸ The police apparatus tends to reject oversight by political institutions (government, parliament) even though it does not have efficient means of internal oversight ("the police's police" has been

⁶³ Crisis Group interview, senior official in the UNSFST, Tunis, May 2013.

⁶⁴ For example tax exemptions, facilities to transport merchandise, or various authorisations, through the intercession of local and regional authorities.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interviews, ISF trade unionists, political and community activists, Tunis, 2012-2015.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, police agents, Tunis, 2014-2015.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, former secretary of state for security affairs, Tunis, March 2015.

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interview, senior official in the ministry of interior, Tunis, January 2015.

dissolved, internal affairs units are weak⁶⁹) and its professional ethics are becoming increasingly dubious (due to the rise of petty corruption and cronyism).

A significant portion of agents, says one former general director, have “neither a sense of professional responsibility nor a sense of institutional responsibility. All they think about is how to increase their earnings”.⁷⁰ This is why the police unions’ victories that increase the number of employees or raise some salaries (by re-hiring officials dismissed by the former regime, expanding recruitment, granting collective increases in rank) ultimately weaken the institution and encourage divisiveness and corruption. And this, in turn, increases police officers’ sense of insecurity, makes them defensive toward outsiders and pushes them toward pursuing their sectoral interests in a narrow manner, through unions that appear to be indifferent to the institution’s broader interests.

D. *Politicisation of the Security Apparatus and Failure of Reforms*

The ministry of interior, a central institution of Tunisian society in terms of public safety and the management of regional and municipal authorities, today appears to be a fiefdom that the main political parties – An-Nahda, Nida Tounes, the Front populaire and the Congrès pour la République (CPR) – hope to conquer without reforming the arbitrary and unfair regulations that govern it.⁷¹ Their objective may be to preserve these regulations to use them against their adversaries. To have a foothold within the interior ministry, or at least avoid being on bad terms with it, is necessary to political and electoral success.⁷² As some police officers note, no party, including An-Nahda, has tried to root out this flaw in the system. A former general director explains that:

the laws that allow the minister of the interior to name and to dismiss whomever he chooses still exist. Ben Ali promulgated them in order to dominate the institution. Even An-Nahda, the main victim of the forces of law and order under the dictatorship and therefore the most likely to want to reform them, did not wish to

⁶⁹ Several officers say internal affairs units find it difficult to sanction unionised personnel who have not met their professional obligations. Crisis Group interviews, officials in the ministry of interior, Tunis, May 2015.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, former senior official in the ministry of interior, Tunis, April 2015.

⁷¹ The interior ministry is no longer in charge of authorising political parties, organising elections and censoring the press and publishing industry. But it still ensures “the implementation of government directives in all domains”. It directs criminal investigations and exercises its authority on “the regional administration, which it directs, coordinates and controls”. In other words, the state’s 24 governorates apply its economic and social policy and maintain public order under the ministry’s supervision. See law n°75-52 of 13 June 1975 establishing the remit of senior officials of the regional administration (articles 6 to 21). Since the December 2010-January 2011 uprising, only three decrees issued during the first phase of the transition (January-December 2011) have modified the de facto prerogatives of the minister of interior. By law, the minister is still governed by decree n° 75-342 of 30 May 1975 establishing the remit of the ministry of interior, and decree n° 2001-1454 of 15 juin 2001 modifying decree n° 75-342 of 30 May 1975. The interior ministry’s organisation has been modified by decrees n°96-1188 (1^{er} July 1996), n°2001-1455 (15 June 2001), n°2004-2332 (4 October 2004) and n°2011-1261 (5 September 2011).

⁷² Crisis Group interviews, activists with Nida Tounes, An-Nahda, Front populaire and the Congrès pour la République (CPR), Tunis, 2014-2015.

annul these laws. Instead the Islamist party intended to gain from a police under its control.⁷³

For policemen, this is regrettable. Political parties have competed to gain control of their institution, even if this weakens it.⁷⁴ Since the revolution there have been five ministers and six secretaries of state for security affairs. Each of them has transferred agents to new departments and proceeded to push some senior officials into early retirement.⁷⁵ As one former officer notes:

This has prevented a generational transfer [of knowledge] from taking place. Each time new ministers and the secretaries of state have used their prerogatives to appoint, transfer, or indirectly dismiss staff [through early retirement] without understanding the real internal power dynamics, or following the advice of general directors who are trying to protect their own while excluding their enemies, they have destabilised the security apparatus. Because first of all, one needs to know, who really does what? What is the real job of such-and-such an officer? Who owes him something, inside and outside the corps?⁷⁶

In the eyes of the security forces, the language of revolution and democratic transition came to symbolise destabilising, partisan power struggles, particularly between 2012 and 2014. The question of security sector reform was also engulfed by political polarisation. During this period, anti-Islamists accused An-Nahda of putting in place a parallel security apparatus and of being directly or indirectly responsible for jihadism. Meanwhile, pro-Troika “revolutionaries” were suspicious of the institution. Some considered it a counter-revolutionary entity whose putschist tendencies needed to be reined in; hence their hesitation to make the question of security a political priority.⁷⁷ Others accused elements of the interior ministry and of foreign secret services with ties to Ben Ali’s supporters of encouraging jihadi violence in order to justify a return of the police state and of repressive measures.⁷⁸

Some police officers’ view of An-Nahda is still coloured by the former regime’s propaganda, and more than a few Islamists still harbour resentment against the security forces. In the words of a supporter of An-Nahda:

The security apparatus is rabid. It wants to regain its hold over the people. For the moment, the government can’t go along with this because this will create chaos and violence. If nothing is done to make [the security apparatus] abandon bad

⁷³ Crisis Group interview, former general director of research and skill development at the ministry of interior, Tunis, May 2015.

⁷⁴ Since Bourguiba, the ISF and the army share a vision of being apolitical that is evident in their codes of conduct. Members of the military, customs and the ISF do not have the right to vote or to found political parties. The right to form and join unions and to speak to the media was only granted in May 2011 to the ISF and not to the army. This way of thinking leads some agents to exaggerate how politicized their institutions are, the better to denounce them.

⁷⁵ Ferhat Rahji (the first interior minister after Ben Ali’s departure) pushed 42 agents into early retirement; his successor Habib Essid between ten and twenty, Ali Laraidh, between 80 et 130 et Lotfi Ben Jeddou between 45 et 50. Crisis Group interviews, former senior security officials, trade unionists, Tunis, 2013-2015.

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interview, former police officer, Tunis, March 2015.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, Ettakatol activist, ex-troïka party, Tunis, April 2015.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interviews, pro-troïka and anti-troïka, Tunis, 2012-2013.

habits inherited from the past, the result could be a catastrophe. Particularly since more and more Tunisians support the Islamic State.⁷⁹

At a time of strong political polarisation, the self-proclaimed revolutionary and democratic forces have dismissed the ISF as supporters of the dictatorship and of counter-revolution, and as a result to a certain extent neglected their concrete problems. This has contributed to closing off the police from embracing change, which the institution views as traumatic and which goes against its culture of secrecy.⁸⁰ It is not by chance that the most successful security sector reform projects date from the first months of the transition, when “the people were mobilised against the police and the police was too weak to resist”.⁸¹ It’s also not by chance that, with the exception of the promising practice of parliamentary oversight,⁸² most reform projects were not implemented once the police regained its confidence.⁸³

In conclusion, security and security sector reform should be envisioned in terms of joint management by political authorities and the security establishment, rather than in terms of a power struggle between the two. The government should offer the security apparatus the chance to regulate itself to a greater extent, if it can prove that it is capable of doing so and of respecting an agreed upon professional code of conduct.

This presupposes that the security establishment can engage in a real internal debate on the identity, role and mission of the Tunisian police. But such an initiative, with the potential of clearing the air, is missing. The police corps therefore continues to withdraw into itself. The governmental “co-habitation” and the parliamentary collaboration between An-Nahda and its “secular” rival Nida Tounis that began in 2015 have eased political rivalries but haven’t altered this trend. The draft law to suppress attacks on the security forces demonstrates this.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, supporter of the Mouvement du peuple des citoyens, Tunis, mars 2015.

⁸⁰ The ministry of interior, often referred to as a “black box”, operates in an opaque manner. In fact, its organisational chart is confidential. Since Bourguiba, the ISF and the army share a culture of secrecy, incorporated into their code of conduct. The freedom to form and join unions and the possibility of speaking to the press date from May 2011 for members of ISF and are not available to members of the armed forces.

⁸¹ Yezid Sayigh, *Missed opportunity, the politics of police reform in Egypt and Tunisia*, op. cit., p. 1. At this time, several Tunisian associations develop a detailed agenda for security sector reform. The ministry of interior and international organisations like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Arab Institute for Human Rights established several partnerships addressing good governance of the security sector. The Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) collaborated closely with the interior ministry. Lazhar Akremi, a deputy minister at the ministry of interior, wrote a white paper that remains one of the most ambitious plans for reform. See Querine Hanlon, *Security sector reform in Tunisia, a year after the jasmine revolution*, United States Institute of Peace, special report N°304, March 2012.

⁸² The Assembly of the People’s Representatives (APR), Tunisia’s parliament, whose sessions began in late 2014, includes two committees that in theory have oversight over the internal security forces: the (permanent) Organisation of the Administration of the Armed Forces Committee and the (special) Security and Defence Committee.

⁸³ Some measures inspired by the principles of security sector reform – transparency, accountability and inclusiveness – have nonetheless been implemented: a neighbourhood police pilot project, weekly press conferences, better access for human rights defenders to prisons and detention centres. Crisis Group interviews, members of NGOs specialised in security sector reform, Tunis, January-May 2015; members of ISF acting as experts for the UNDP, Tunis, January-May 2015. See also “Police de proximité en Tunisie”, *Politique ministérielle*, June 2014.

⁸⁴ See Law n° 25/2015 regarding the suppression of attacks against the security forces. This draft law strongly limits freedom of expression and of the press and makes agents who wound or kill a

The risk is that the drive for greater independence for the internal security forces will intensify at the same time that bad police practices do. This will hasten the spread of clientelism across the security apparatus and exacerbate internal divisions. Security forces could become impervious to reform, growing even weaker and more discredited in the eyes of a majority of the population, just as social and jihadi violence reaches new levels.

person who attacks a security installation or security personnel, practically unaccountable before the law. Intended to protect the security forces, the law stipulates ten-year prison sentences for anyone who divulges a national security secret and five-year sentences for anyone who makes any criminal threat against a member of the security forces or one of their relatives. Political figures, judges and police union organisers reportedly prepared the first version of this law in July 2013, when jihadi violence began intensifying. Crisis Group interviews, ISF trade union activists, official at a human rights NGO, Tunis, May 2015. Several civil society associations, some police unions and political figures have severely criticised this proposed law. Public opinion also gave it a highly negative reception. Crisis Group interviews, political figures, ISF trade union activists, Tunis residents, Tunis, April-May 2015. See also "Tunisia: Drop or Amend Security Bill", Human Rights Watch, 13 May 2015; Houssein Hajlaoui, "Projet de loi de protection des forces armées: protection ou immunité ?", Inkyfada.com, 9 June 2015.

III. The Isolation of the ISF

During the legislative and presidential elections of 2014, the political polarisation between pro- and anti-An-Nahda forces faded only to be replaced by a deeper social divide.⁸⁵ Then, following the Sousse attack on 26 June 2015, the anti-Islamic discourse of part of the educated middle class reappeared in the media with renewed shrillness.⁸⁶ On the one hand, the established elites (of Tunis and the eastern coast) argued for order and security and considered democracy and human rights increasingly superfluous.⁸⁷ On the other, marginalised communities and emerging elites (of the South and the interior), frustrated in their economic, social and political aspirations, tended to develop a subversive, anti-police discourse that has affinities with the anti-*taghout* jihadi discourse.⁸⁸

At the political level, the government coalition has not, for the moment, put in place any public policy on security that would help it prevent jihadi violence or manage social protests at the source. As under the former regime in the years 2000–2011, the ISF finds itself – except in border areas where the presence of the military is significant – facing the country’s security problems alone. Meanwhile, the fragmentation of law enforcement personnel and their abuses have cut them off from citizens and greatly diminished their ability to mediate conflicts with local communities. Although weakened, they must manage an explosive day-to-day social situation, at a time of polarisation and lack of confidence in the institution of the police, and do so while jihadi attacks intensify.

A. *The ISF and Citizens: A Growing Divide*

The lower a citizen stands in the social hierarchy, the more he is in daily contact with the police. And the more these forces are in contact with the population, the more their image is tarnished.

In general, the educated middle class has frequent interactions with policemen working in civil registry offices (which issue identity cards and passports), traffic police, and – when they travel abroad – border and customs officers. Traffic police are undoubtedly the police officers that well-off Tunisians come most frequently into contact with – an interaction often marked by class tensions.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ See Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Briefing N°44, *Tunisia’s Elections: Old Wounds, New Fears*, 19 December 2014.

⁸⁶ Crisis Group interviews, activists and supporters of different political movements, Tunis, Kairouan, Médenine, March–May 2015.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Tunisian jihadis often employ the term *taghout*. It designates tyrannical regimes and the individuals who support them, notably the army and the ISF.

⁸⁹ Residents of the rich northern suburbs of Tunis, especially young women, don’t appreciate being victims of “the class hatred” of traffic policemen, to use the description of a sociologist. Crisis Group interview, sociologist, Tunis, October 2014. These police recruits are often from lower-class backgrounds. They don’t get along with “the rich”: during traffic stops, the policemen try to subvert social hierarchies by showing they can decide when and in exchange for what (a fine, bribe, display of fear or respect) they will let a vehicle stopped at a checkpoint leave again. In some circumstances the traffic police takes advantage of the ordinary citizen’s ignorance and the ambiguity of the penal code – especially regarding matters of public morality, such as when unrelated men and women ride in cars together. Libyans, many of whom are single young men who enjoy night-time outings, are regularly “taxed”. “Libyans don’t drive around with Tunisian girls anymore, its costs them too

The inhabitants of urban peripheries and under-developed regions, meanwhile, are in daily contact with traffic police, municipal inspectors⁹⁰ and most of all with the National Guard. In their everyday life, those who live in border regions meet all of the above in addition to army officers.⁹¹ When social protests take place, most often in the country's interior, riot-control police (Brigade d'ordre public, BOP) are also on the scene.

Many inhabitants of the interior and especially of border regions have a very low opinion of law enforcement. For them, security forces, especially municipal inspectors and the National Guard, are thieves in uniform, always looking for money.⁹² In the regions adjoining the western border where armed jihadi groups operate, the corruption of some officers of the National Guard is a serious security concern: in certain circumstances a bribe is enough for a vehicle to be allowed to pass a checkpoint without being searched. The value of the bribe increases in direct proportion to the level of suspicion that the vehicle or truck provokes.⁹³

The lack of integrity of some officers means dangerous materials are not seized. Worse still, it encourages some businessmen to develop patronage networks in the police and customs – where petty corruption is so widespread⁹⁴ as to be a common joke.⁹⁵

Furthermore, the fragmentation of the ISF and the collapse of relationships of authority based on educational level have fractured the chain of command. Sometimes mutually exclusive clans form within the same brigade, so that information is lost along the way and each sub-group tries to sabotage the other's work. As one police trade unionist sums it up: "We know who's who. Who's with who. That's why sometimes in the field, we don't even speak to each other".⁹⁶

This dents the confidence that some political activists and members of civil society have in the human intelligence gathered by the special services. As a candidate in the last legislative elections notes, "agents come to ask me for information, but I don't know which clan is going to exploit it. That's why I don't easily grant them my trust".⁹⁷

much in bribes, they pay taxis to take the girls to the discos and they meet them there". Crisis Group interview, resident of Ennaceur (a neighbourhood with many Libyan immigrants), Tunis, May 2015.

⁹⁰ It was municipal inspectors who confiscated the fruit and vegetable stall of the young Mohamed Tarek Bouazizi à Sidi Bouzid, which led to his self-immolation and to the outbreak of the uprising of December 2010-January 2011. Since June 2012, they are part of the national police.

⁹¹ The army cannot carry out the tasks of criminal investigators or interact with citizens (asking for identity papers, searching vehicles) except in the southern cone of the country: the desert area that begins from Lorzot and El Borma and ends at Borj El Khadra, where Lybia, Tunisia and Algeria meet. In this region, the army alone monitors suspicious activity. Crisis Group interviews, former military officers, Tunis, April-May 2015.

⁹² The National Guard administers more and more checkpoints along the roads that connect regions and cross many small towns.

⁹³ Crisis Group interviews, residents of Kasserine and Médenine, Tunis, Médenine, February-March 2015.

⁹⁴ See "Climat des affaires et compétitivité de l'entreprise. Résultats de l'enquête compétitive 2013", Institut tunisien de la compétitivité et des études quantitatives, November 2014, p. 29.

⁹⁵ Jokes about customs agents are common. A resident of Ben Guerdane says they cry when they have a day off, given how much under-the-table income they lose. Crisis Group interview, Ben Guerdane resident, Ben Guerdane, March 2015.

⁹⁶ Crisis Group interview, ISF trade unionist, Tunis, May 2015.

⁹⁷ Crisis Group interview, former candidate in the 2014 legislative election, Tunis, April 2015.

B. *The Rise of Anti-central Government and Anti-police Discourse*

1. Young people in the underprivileged urban peripheries

Since May 2013,⁹⁸ young people from deprived outer urban areas have become the main victims of the increased police presence in the name of fighting terrorism.⁹⁹ According to sources, they make up the majority of the 1,400 to 3,200 people who are being held in preventive detention in terrorism-related cases.¹⁰⁰ Only a fraction of them are ever convicted of a crime. The representative of a human rights NGO notes that:

Many individuals are detained on suspicion and are kept in custody without any evidence against them. After the Bardo attack of 18 March 2015, a young man was called in for questioning simply because his name was found in the mobile telephone of one of the two terrorists killed by the anti-terrorist brigades during the assault. The truth is the police mostly catches people who are at the wrong place at the wrong time.¹⁰¹

According to residents of the outskirts of Tunis, police brutality is frequent.¹⁰² Several young residents of the neighbourhood were reportedly arrested for calling policemen *taghout* or for posting the flag of the Islamic State (IS) on their Facebook page.¹⁰³

According to a citizen who was jailed in 2015, those who are detained on suspicion of terrorism face prison conditions that are even harsher than usual.¹⁰⁴ “People arrested on terrorism charges are in a separate corner. The prison staff can do what it wants to them. Everything is allowed”.¹⁰⁵ This violence and ill-treatment contribute to the radicalisation of youth from lower-income neighbourhoods.¹⁰⁶ Some claim – often as a provocation – that the police deserve to be treated as IS treats its hostages and that the arrival of Daech (a pejorative Arabic acronym for IS) in Tunisia is the only solution to the country’s economic and social problems.¹⁰⁷

2. The dilemma of the border regions

In regions adjoining Tunisia’s borders, some residents make no distinction between the National Guard and the traffickers-jihadis who operate in the mountains and forests.¹⁰⁸ They see them both as groups that position themselves along the routes

⁹⁸ This is the date on which Ali Laraidh’s government assumed office, following the political crisis triggered by the assassination of the leftist figure Chokri Belaïd.

⁹⁹ See Olfa Lamoun et Mohamed Ali Ben Zina (dir.), *Les jeunes de Douar Hicher et d’Ettadhamen, une enquête sociologique*, International Alert, 2015.

¹⁰⁰ A trade unionist for correctional officers mentions the figure 1,400, a representative of an international human rights groups that of 3,200. Crisis Group interviews, Tunis, January-May 2015.

¹⁰¹ Crisis Group interview, representative of a human rights NGO, Tunis, March 2015.

¹⁰² Crisis Group interviews, residents of neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Tunis, 2014-2015. See also Fadil Aliriza, “The Police Are Dogs”, *Foreign Policy* (foreignpolicy.com), 16 December 2013.

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interviews, residents of neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Tunis, March 2015.

¹⁰⁴ Rooms with 40 beds actually hold more than 200 prisoners. Ill treatment seems to be the rule rather than the exception. Crisis Group interview, trade unionist for correctional officers, Tunis, April 2015.

¹⁰⁵ Crisis Group interview, Tunis resident imprisoned in 2014-2015, Tunis, February 2015.

¹⁰⁶ See “Emino rend hommage au terroriste de l’attentat de Sousse”, *tuniscope.com*, 30 June 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Crisis Group interviews, resident in suburban area, Tunis, March 2015.

¹⁰⁸ See Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°148, *Tunisia’s Borders: Jihadism and Contraband*, 28 November 2013.

used by local entrepreneurs (smugglers) in order to take a cut of their profits. As a resident of the Kasserine region says:

To travel clandestinely into Algeria to smuggle merchandise, one needs to cross small strips of steep terrain that are controlled by jihadi splinter groups. Often one has to give them money or food. After the attack on soldiers in July 2014,¹⁰⁹ many police and National Guard checkpoints were set up a few kilometres before entering these areas. The difference is that they ask for more money than the jihadis.¹¹⁰

Several residents of the Kasserine region in the west remark that those who live near the borders prefer Islamist radicals to the police, and are becoming increasingly receptive to the Islamists' discourse.¹¹¹ In the south, where no jihadi group has ever attacked the army or the security forces, opposition to the central government is on the rise, motivated by the inequality in regional development.¹¹²

In Ben Guerdane (on the Tunisian-Libyan border), for example, the heads of smuggling rings have taken advantage of the state's weak presence to develop a parallel commercial system. This is often the only economic activity that allows many residents to survive without emigrating.¹¹³ The heads of these smuggling networks make fortunes, but do not reinvest their profits in the region. They only distribute the paltriest percentage to their local employees and hired hands.

The authorities must therefore manage contradictory demands. If they develop economic projects, these may be sabotaged by cartels whose economic interests are threatened. If the authorities do not implement development projects – which is more often the case – the poorest residents accuse them of doing nothing to right the injustices they face everyday. Both cases fuel a discourse of opposition to the central authorities. Each time the security forces and the army reinforce their control over the southern border zone – largely out of concern for the security threats posed by a deepening crisis in Libya¹¹⁴ – smuggling activities are curtailed and anti-government, anti-army and especially anti-police and anti-customs sentiment flares up.

¹⁰⁹ The evening of 16 July 2014 witnessed the worst attack on the army since the 1960s. Encampments a few kilometres from the Algerian border, in Boulaaba near mount Chaambi were the target of simultaneous attacks by two groups of about thirty jihadis. They used machine guns and rocket-propelled grenade launchers, killing fourteen soldiers and wounding twenty. See Crisis Group Briefing, *Tunisia's Borders (II): Terrorism and Regional Polarisation*, op. cit.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, resident of Kasserine region, Kairouan region, March 2015.

¹¹¹ A resident of the Kasserine region sums it up as follows: "The state, the eastern coast of the country and the capital don't care about us. Worse than that, they want to keep our business [smuggling with Algeria] from succeeding. So we need to attack their armed forces to make them as weak as they were in the early months of 2011. At that time we earned a lot of money for our families". Crisis Group interview, residents of Kasserine, Kairouan region, March 2015.

¹¹² The question of identity is also important. The debates that took place between the two rounds of the presidential election of 2014 between Béji Caïd Essebsi, who is from the north, and Moncef Marzouki, a southerner, demonstrated this. See Crisis Group Briefing, *Tunisia's Election: Old Wounds, New Fears*, op. cit.

¹¹³ Crisis Group interviews, local notables in Ben Guerdane, former supporters of Ben Ali's party, An-Nahda deputies, civil society representatives, merchants, Médenine, Ben Guerdane, Zarsis, mars 2015.

¹¹⁴ This has particularly been the case since 2014. The government of Mehdi Jomaa (January 2014–February 2015), which was very unpopular in Ben Guerdane, reinforced border posts and built a wall around the Ras Jedir post. It also increased mixed patrols, put in place extra military forces as is the case in the west of the country and proceeded to transfer many ISF and customs officers so as to, as one government official remarked, "make the necessary changes to regain control of a bu-

This in turn leads to confrontations with law enforcement. Riots have taken place from Ben Guerdane to Gafsa, in the mining region in the interior of the country. They generally follow a familiar script: local authorities and associations, the UGTT and the representatives of political parties – particularly An-Nahda and the CPR – try to channel demands (right to work, regional development) to avoid violence.¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, young men throw stones at the police and National Guard. The ISF uses tear gas to disperse the demonstrators. Tensions rise. The protesters attack police stations with Molotov cocktails. Riot police and National Guard forces chase the demonstrators into their homes and treat them brutally. Less often, rapid response units make use of live fire.¹¹⁶ The ISF ends up retreating from the city while the army deploys to protect public buildings.¹¹⁷

C. *The ISF and the Military: A Problematic Relationship?*

At the moment, the authority of public institutions is weak and there is a lack of confidence between the elites and ordinary citizens. In this context, there is a risk that social and jihadi violence will overlap, combine and reach a critical mass. This could lead the army to decide to compensate for the operational shortcoming of the ISF and its very limited power of mediation.¹¹⁸ The problems within the police and the National Guard have a negative effect on relations between the ISF and the military establishment. They harm the fight against terrorism in the border regions and this in turn pushes the army to reinforce its capacities and may lead it to take on domestic security responsibilities across the country.

reaucracy tempted by smuggling”. Crisis Group interview, former political official (2014-2015), Tunis, March 2015.

¹¹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, residents of Médenine and Ben Guerdane, Médenine, Ben Guerdane, March 2015.

¹¹⁶ See “Les évènements de Dhehiba”, report by an independent committee of inquiry, Forum tunisien pour les droits économiques et sociaux, Tunis, February 2015. Crisis Group interview, member of the committee of inquiry into the Dhehiba events, Tunis, March 2015.

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, member of the committee of inquiry into the Dhehiba events, Tunis, March 2015. Crisis Group interviews, residents of the Gafsa region, Tunis, 2013-2015.

¹¹⁸ Traditionally, the relationship between the army and the internal security forces has been quite competitive, even if their respective domains are sharply defined and compartmentalised. Since independence, the army has played the role of auxiliary force for the ISF during serious crises in the country: it maintained order, shooting into crowds, in 1978 and 1984, and assisted the ISF and protected public buildings in 2008 and 2010-2011. The army is under the Ministry of National Defence. According to its statute, the ministry must “ensure, in all circumstances and against all forms of aggression, the security and integrity of the national territory and the protection of political life” and “participate in maintaining and reestablishing order” as well as “organise the contribution of the armed forces to the struggle against natural catastrophes and to the social and economic development of the country”. The Tunisian army is composed of both conscripts and professionals. It is of modest size compared to that of other countries in the region. Its doctrine consists in resisting the shock of an external aggression (24 to 48 hours) until the international community and friendly countries intervene. In 2014, there were 27,000 men in the terrestrial army, 4,000 in the air force and 4,500 in the navy. In the decade before Ben Ali’s fall, the army’s budget was lower than it had been in the mid-1980s. Meanwhile, the budget of the interior ministry was constantly on the rise. This allowed, for example, the formation of elite police units like the anti-terrorist brigade (BAT). See decree n° 75-671 of 25 September 1975 stipulating the national defence minister’s remit. Also see Michel Camau et Vincent Geisser, *Le syndrome autoritaire. Politique en Tunisie de Bourguiba à Ben Ali* (Paris, 2003).

Despite better coordination in the field through mixed patrols, cooperation between the two institutions remains problematic, particularly when it concerns the exchange of information regarding jihadi groups and sleeper cells in urban areas.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, given the divides within the ISF, many military officers doubt the reliability of its information, which in any case is rarely shared. As one expert, in contact with units that are active in the field, puts it:

When a soldier captures a jihadi, he has to turn him over to the National Guard, that is to the ministry of interior, which is divided. And they almost never share back with us the data they gather through their interrogations.¹²⁰

It is not surprising that members of the National Guard and the army criticise each other frequently, particularly over their lack of independence in the field. But the rift between the two institutions seems to run deeper.¹²¹ Some army officers would like the army to adapt its doctrines to the evolving terrorist threat, even if that means re-defining the traditional relationship between the army and the ISF. On the operational level, this would entail the army adapting to a new non-conventional enemy (armed jihadis), pursuing greater professionalisation and training more forces specialised in counter-guerrilla warfare in urban and rural settings.¹²² But it would also require the army to strengthen its domestic intelligence-gathering capabilities, which could encroach on those of the ISF.

In 2014, the government of Mehdi Jomaa decided to consolidate the intelligence-gathering operations of the ministries of interior and defence, so as to integrate them into a hub for the struggle against jihadism and organised crime, which would include the ministries of interior, defence, justice and foreign affairs. Following several inter-ministerial meetings, the army seized the initiative by creating an Agency for Intelligence and Defence Security.¹²³ If the project of integrating the different services moves forward, the new agency should become a “fusion centre” for gathering security data – a strategic unit attached to the presidency or the prime minister’s office that would coordinate the analyses of different departments and establish operational strategy. But, for the moment, given the extent of the problems within the ISF, only the army would move forward in this direction. Doing so would reinforce its domestic intelligence-gathering capabilities while those of the police stagnate.

Moreover, in order to improve the army’s efficacy in populated border areas, several experts propose that either the National Guard be integrated into the ministry of

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, former military men, security experts, Tunis, May 2015.

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interview, security expert, Tunis, April 2015.

¹²¹ In the west, the National Guard is the first line of defence against jihadis – the Tunisian army cannot have fixed units less than 10km from the Algerian border. It is only since the deadly attack that took place in July 2014 in Boulaaba near mount Chaambi against mobile military patrols that the army has positioned mixed auxiliary forces (infantry, military engineering, communications, armoured vehicles) between its advanced posts in the regions of Kasserine, Kef and Jendouba and can now more easily support the National Guard in case of emergency, without the go-ahead from Tunis. According to one serviceman, the National Guard is responsible for the fact that the army cannot come to its assistance quickly. It must “ask for authorisation from its general directorate in Tunis, which itself must contact the interior ministry, to ask for reinforcement from the army in case of an attack”. Crisis Group interview, former military man, Tunis, May 2015.

¹²² Crisis Group interviews, former military men, security experts Tunis, May 2015.

¹²³ See decree n° 2014-4208 of 20 November 2014 on the creation of a public establishment with administrative functions under the remit of the Ministry of National Defence, officially called Agence des renseignements et de la sécurité pour la défense.

defence; the ministry take over National Guard posts in the border regions under a new joint force;¹²⁴ or the army be granted the powers of criminal investigators.¹²⁵

Within the political class, these proposals provoke some misgivings. As one parliamentarian remarks:

Some experts would like the army [to acquire the remit] of criminal investigators with regards to smuggling and terrorism. If the army obtains this, it will become a police. It will fall into the trap of petty corruption and will be disliked. If there is a serious conflict in the country, what security unit will be most popular? Moreover, if the army takes on this function, with all the means it possesses, sooner or later it will be capable of posing a threat to democracy. It will be able to take people into custody, arrest citizens, carry out investigations, all while benefiting from the degree of confidentiality that its rules and regulations offer. It will also be able to influence judges, as criminal investigators do.¹²⁶

But according to a former military officer, politicians have always advanced such arguments. They have “always been afraid of the army, been afraid that a simple colonel could carry out a coup. So they don’t want anything to change. It’s our destiny to suffer from our lack of equipment and our dependency on divided police forces”.¹²⁷

These arguments raise the thorny question of how to redefine the missions of the police and army in an increasingly fragile security environment. Since the revolution, the popularity of the former has eroded while that of the latter has remained intact.¹²⁸ After the Sousse attack, and following an inter-ministerial meeting held by the presidency’s security coordination cell, the prime minister called on army reservists to help the police and National Guard maintain public order.¹²⁹ There have been calls for the army to take on a greater role in matters of domestic security – particularly by protecting industrially strategic sites, like phosphate mines, if not managing

¹²⁴ Crisis Group interviews, military experts, Tunis, March-May 2015.

¹²⁵ According to some experts, this would increase its ability to fight terrorism. Outside of the desert triangle of Lorzot, Borma and Borj El Khadra, the army cannot search vehicles or question individuals (unless they threaten violence or are armed) without the assistance of a customs or ISF agents. That’s the case in the 10-15km wide strip along the Tunisian-Libyan border that extends for several hundred kilometres from Lorzot to Ras Jedir. The army and National Guard have set up checkpoints at regular intervals and they have joint patrols with the police and customs. It’s also the case along the western border, where the army requires the presence of agents from other security bodies to search vehicles. Soldiers must travel to advance posts several kilometres away so that National Guards can accompany them on their patrols. Crisis Group interviews, experts, former service men, Tunis, April-May 2015.

¹²⁶ Crisis Group interview, parliamentarian, Tunis, March 2015.

¹²⁷ Crisis Group interview, former officer, Tunis, May 2015.

¹²⁸ The percentage of citizens who declare their trust in the army is regularly many percentage points above that of those who say they trust the police. Crisis Group interview, manager of association that carries out opinion polls, Tunis, May 2015. Also see, “Tunisia, Breaking the Barriers to Youth Inclusion”, *World Bank Group*, 2014, p. 14.

¹²⁹ “Tunisie: Fermeture de 80 mosquées, et mesures contre des partis (Essid)”, op. cit.

them outright¹³⁰ – and to fill the void left by the forces of law and order across the country.¹³¹

The divisions in the ISF have weakened the institution and damaged the army's trust in it. They have also had negative repercussions on the fight against terrorism, which has caused the authoritarian tendencies of some fringes of the population to harden. These believe that the country's army is the only force capable of preventing chaos, by protecting the republic against some of its citizens.¹³²

¹³⁰ "According to its statute, the army has to contribute to the effort to develop the country economically and socially. Why doesn't it manage the strategic industries that are on the brink of bankruptcy because of the increase in social protest movements, backed behind the scenes by irresponsible unions and political forces?" asks a Tunis resident. Crisis Group interview, Tunis resident, Tunis, May 2015.

¹³¹ Crisis Group interview, residents of Tunis, Gafsa, union activists from the l'Union générale tunisienne du travail (UGTT), investigative journalists, activists for Nida Tounes, the Front Populaire, An-Nahda, the CPR Tunis, Médenine, 2014-2015.

¹³² Ibid.

IV. From Reform to Strategy

Four years after the revolution, most of the internal and external problems that the ISF faced under the former regime seem to have only gotten worse. Institutional governance remains arbitrary, deepening officers' sense of insecurity and leading them to keep their distance from political authorities and to demand immunity, as demonstrated in the recent proposed law to suppress attacks against the security forces.

Security bodies should adapt in three fundamental ways: to the new democratic framework, to the jihadi threat, and to demands for social justice that were unleashed by the fall of the dictatorship and radicalised by the authorities' poor mediation capacity. For its part, the political class urgently needs to regain control of the security dossier by increasing the inter-ministerial meetings of the presidency's security coordination cell.¹³³ A new approach is necessary as a first step to short-circuit the power networks that have fragmented the security apparatus and undermined its hierarchy and structure. With this in mind, the government must take a series of strong measures, not necessarily in terms of their scale, but in terms of their symbolic import.

It would be beneficial if these measures were addressed to all Tunisians, including those who elected the Islamist party An-Nahda and former President Moncef Marzouki. The authoritarian, anti-religious rhetoric of the Ben Ali era should be avoided. A better approach would be to channel the sources of radical Islamism in a different direction (by energising Sufi brotherhoods and religious associations that promote a non-violent discourse, etc.), rather than choking them off. These measures should above all reflect the government's will to restore discipline within the security apparatus – for example by dismissing corrupt senior officers and agents.

But these steps will not be enough, and could even produce adverse effects if they are not taken as part of a comprehensive strategy that addresses the security establishment and society at large.

The domestic security bodies harbour many collective neuroses. The ministry of interior would benefit from organising a series of consultations with senior officers and agents, so that they could share the traumas they have suffered since the time of the dictatorship, air out their feelings of insecurity and above all articulate their vision for their profession in post-Ben Ali Tunisia. The outcome of these debates could serve as the foundation for a new professional code of conduct for the domestic security forces, which the relevant parliamentary committees should also discuss.

Partisan struggles and a polarised discourse push the security establishment to turn in on itself; its mistrust of the political field grows. The fault lines of the past must be drained of their potential for violence and today's rifts must be discussed publicly, even if that shatters some taboos.¹³⁴ The current divides won't be bridged unless they are made the object of true political debate. Law enforcement personnel should be willing to listen to what different sectors of the population think of them.

In this framework of truth seeking and construction of compromise, the presidency and the government should organise as soon as possible, despite the degrada-

¹³³ See "Les 12 décisions annoncées par Habib Essid suite à la réunion de la Kasbah", Tuniscope.com, 27 June 2015. This coordination cell is, in a way, an extension of the Jomaa government's crisis centre, (2014-2015), which met more than a hundred times and took a series of sometimes hasty decisions in the field of the struggle against jihadi violence and smuggling. Crisis Group interview, crisis centre member, Tunis, April 2015. See also "Mehdi Jomaa et la cellule de crise prennent de nouvelles mesures pour faire face au terrorisme", Tunivisions.net, 21 July 2015.

¹³⁴ See Crisis Group Briefing, *The Tunisian Exception: Success and Limits of Consensus*, op. cit.

tion of the security environment, a national conference on the concept of security in a state of law, the role of the police, the causes of the north/south divide and of jihadi violence, and the democratic means to address them. The constitution is in fact vague and ambiguous on the notion of security. Responsibilities are not clearly defined¹³⁵: Security for whom? In the name of which values? In what proportion? In the face of which threats? By which means? And at what price and for how long?¹³⁶

Members of the ISF and the army and representatives of the main political currents, of civil society and of religious associations, should draft a platform to pursue avenues of shared reflection on these pressing issues. Following the attacks of March and June 2015, there is an openness to discussing the causes of violence and the shortcomings of the security forces. The proposed conference could benefit from this atmosphere to question unspoken assumptions and carry out an impartial assessment.

Another factor that might also help break the silence: the first hearings with victims of torture and of police brutality, and with those who committed these crimes, have taken place as part of the transitional justice process embodied by the Instance vérité et dignité (IVD, truth and dignity commission). This body should continue its work and its proceedings should be broadcast on public and private media. More than 13,000 case files, nearly three-quarters of which concern violations of political rights from 1955 to 2013, have already been filed with the IVD. It is important that all political and security forces as well as the main private and public media outlets understand that the objective of transitional justice is not to settle scores but to “keep the bad memories of the dictatorship alive, so that another one doesn’t install itself”.¹³⁷

The necessary conditions must be created so that political authorities and the security establishment can stop viewing each other with mistrust. To this end, the government and parliament – particularly the Organisation of the Administration and of the Armed Forces Committee (Commission de l’organisation de l’administration et des forces armées) and the Security and Defence Committee (Commission sécurité et défense) – should consider whether the best way to exercise democratic oversight over the ISF may be to channel their demands for more independence towards improving their own internal oversight mechanisms.

Besides drafting a new professional code of conduct for the ISF, it should also be a priority to raise the standing of the general directorates for professional training and internal inspections and to reactivate “the police’s police”. Given the many divisions within the service today, these measures should be accompanied by the creation of a High Committee for Security Sector Reform and Management.

The role of this committee, whose active members would be elected representatives of different branches of the ISF, would be to help shape a consensus around the

¹³⁵ As one constitutional law scholar notes: “The Tunisian constitution does not establish how responsibilities are shared between the head of state and the head of the government. The president is responsible for national security even though national security is never defined. New laws will therefore be necessary to clarify this. But they risk being negotiated in the midst of a security crisis and of fear of jihadi violence. By maintaining this ambiguity in the security sector, the ANC (national constituent assembly) exposed the country to a needless risk”. Crisis Group interview, Zaid al-Ali, constitutional law expert at the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Amman, May 2015.

¹³⁶ See David A. Baldwin, “The concept of security”, *Review of international studies*, 23, p. 5-26, 1997.

¹³⁷ Crisis Group interview, IVD member, Tunis, May 2015.

needed reforms. It would use its expertise – without encroaching on the prerogatives of existing police and National Guard high councils – to propose ways to re-structure and redefine the internal security forces in order to make them more cohesive. It would ensure respect for ethics and competence, guarantees of the quality of the security services' work.¹³⁸

This High Committee should establish a clear reform agenda, shared with the participants in the meetings of the presidency's security coordination cell – including the interior minister – and with the relevant parliamentary committees. In cooperation with the General Directorate for Professional Training (Direction générale de la formation), it should articulate a strategic and systematic human resources management plan – including a psychological unit for recruitment, a frame of reference for job descriptions and functions, and computerisation of skillsets. This would be the beginning of a comprehensive reform of basic training and professional development.¹³⁹

To carry this reform out, the new High Committee and the training directorate, in partnership with the relevant parliamentary committees, should agree on a reform of the statutes that determine the mission, the modes of recruitment, training and promotion, as well as the relations of authority between agents and senior officers in the ISF (while reducing the possibility of arbitrary appointments and transfers). They should also continue to pursue ongoing programs, such as unifying plainclothes and uniformed police into a single corps and making professional development available to staff members who have been promoted according to criteria other than their skills.¹⁴⁰

In exchange for granting the kind of independence that protects the genuine interests of the security services, parliament must use its constitutional prerogatives to pass an organic law that regulates the organisation of the ISF.¹⁴¹ It must exercise its powers of external oversight, while the ISF improves its internal oversight mechanisms. Taken together, these measures could channel the sentiment of insecurity of law enforcement personnel in a productive direction and strengthen their integrity. This reform process would have the dual advantage of counteracting the anti-police discourse that is becoming prevalent and of making the proposed law to suppress attacks on security agents superfluous.

Furthermore, army doctrine would benefit from evolving in relation to new internal and external threats. New laws should redefine its mission. Cooperation between the different ministries in charge of the ISF (defence, interior, justice) should be enhanced, but the army should avoid at all costs becoming the police. To gain the trust of the armed forces, the ISF need to improve its integrity, starting, for example, by putting in place the outlines of the reform discussed above. The plan to create a security information gathering centre (so-called fusion centre) should be pursued,

¹³⁸ Such a committee would allow the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next and the continuity of reforms regardless of rotations of general directors, who are often replaced when a new government or new minister of interior takes office. Former officers could be honorary members.

¹³⁹ This is meant to take place in two years, when the interior ministry inaugurates its national security professional training centre. Crisis Group interview, general director for professional training in the interior ministry, Tunis, June 2015.

¹⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, general director for professional training in the interior ministry, Tunis, June 2015.

¹⁴¹ See article 65 of the constitution of Tunisia, promulgated 27 January 2014.

and should include new ministries (education, professional training and employment, religious affairs) beyond those of defence, interior, justice and foreign affairs.

Members of the security forces are unanimous: the lack of strategy is the fundamental problem, the root cause of all others.¹⁴² Given the growth of jihadism in high-crime areas, it is imperative to outline a policy of public safety, which would include the renovation of degraded housing, the development of social and community life, and the improvement of prison conditions. The authorities need to find a solution that immediately delivers a balanced and proportional response to the rise of jihadi violence and that goes beyond simply reinforcing the operational capacities of the ISF. It is a matter, for example, of using every pretext besides security to consolidate the presence of the state in the border regions, and of offering citizens tempted by jihadism an alternative ideology.¹⁴³ The government could submit a comprehensive strategy to counter violence and radicalisation to the ARP. This strategy could be informed by the national conference suggested above.

Finally, the states¹⁴⁴ and international organisations¹⁴⁵ that are dedicated to improving Tunisia's security sector should better coordinate their projects. Too often, they are in competition, launching a variety of initiatives that are largely focused on enhancing equipment, improving operational and particularly anti-terrorist capacities, and providing human rights training. These actors should also acknowledge that in the present context, the inadequacy of Tunisia's counter-terrorism apparatus is largely connected to the systemic problems within the police force.

Supporting reform of the security forces' statutes, implementing an ISF human resources management plan and creating a professional development division for national security should be priorities. All bilateral and multilateral aid that overlooks the dysfunction of the internal security apparatus runs the paradoxical risk of further weakening it, encouraging its trend of autonomisation vis-à-vis political institutions, as well as a worsening of its lack of democratic oversight and its internal fragmentation.

¹⁴² Crisis Group interviews, police officers, security experts, Tunis, 2014-2015.

¹⁴³ See Crisis Group Briefing, *Tunisia's Borders (II): Terrorism and Regional Polarisation*, op. cit.

¹⁴⁴ The countries that have been the most involved in the last four years in bilateral security cooperation are the U.S., Germany, France, Great Britain, Turkey, Qatar, Japan and South Korea. Crisis Group interviews, members of NGOs specialised in security sector reform, Tunis, 2014-2015.

¹⁴⁵ These include the EU's UNDP, the United Nations Office on Drug and Crimes (UNODC), the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), DCAF, the Arab Institute for Human Rights, *Democrats Abroad Netherlands* (DAN), the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMDP), the International Office for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). It also includes Tunisian NGOs such as the Observatoire tunisien de la sécurité globale (OTSG), and private companies specialised in training senior security personnel such as Aktis Strategy. Crisis Group interviews, members of NGOs specialised in security sector reform, Tunis, 2014-2015.

V. Conclusion

To put in place a true public policy on security, it is necessary to confront the internal problems of the ISF. This is essential in order for political authorities to respond to citizens' expectations. Tunisia, even as it has made progress on the path of democratic transition, appears increasingly caught between the danger of jihadism on the one hand and the possibility of a return to dictatorship on the other.

Jihadi groups benefit from this, not in the absence of domestic security but from its systemic failings: police brutality, protection rackets targeting small businesses and smugglers and poor prison conditions all reinforce the sense of injustice of some Tunisians and renders them more receptive to radical Islamism. A comprehensive reform of the police, combined with a public policy on security, is urgently needed. Without adapting the mission and capacities of the security forces for the post-Ben Ali era, the temptation to reinstate a wall of fear between citizens and the security apparatus, and thus return to authoritarianism, risks becoming part of emergency measures taken when civil peace is threatened.

Tunis/Brussels, 23 July 2015

Appendix A: Map of Tunisia



Courtesy of the University of Texas at Austin.

Appendix B: Glossary of Abbreviations

APR – Assembly of the people’s representatives. Parliament that succeeded the Assemblée nationale constituante (ANC, national constituent assembly). Its first session was on 3 December 2014.

BAT – Brigade anti-terroriste (anti-terrorism brigades). Elite division of the national police created in the late 1970s.

BOP – Brigades d’ordre public (public order brigades). Anti-riot units of the national police created in the late 1960s.

CCRF – Comité commun des renseignements et des frontières (joint committee for intelligence and borders). Structure under the central department of general intelligence, dissolved in May 2011.

CPR – Congrès pour la République. Centre-left political party including both Arab nationalists and former Islamists, founded in 2001. Part of the illegal opposition under Ben Ali, it was headed until December 2011 by Moncef Marzouki, who then served as president of the republic (2011-2014). Its secretary general today is Imad Daïmi. The CPR works closely with the movement created Moncef Marzouki after his defeat in the December 2014 presidential election, the Mouvement du peuple des citoyens (people’s citizen movement).

DGAS – Direction générale des affaires spécialisées (specialised affairs department). This was one of five departments that were part of the DGSN, the Direction générale de la sûreté intérieure de l’Etat (DGSEE, domestic state security department), mistakenly called the political police, dissolved in May 2011 and renamed the department of special services ; Direction de la police des frontières et des étrangers (DPFE, borders and foreigners police department); Direction centrale des renseignements généraux (DCRG, central department for general intelligence); Direction générale des études et de la recherche (DGER, studies and research department); and Direction générale de la prévention anti-terroriste (DPAT, terrorism prevention department), dissolved in May 2011.

DGSN – Direction générale de la sûreté nationale (national security department). The DGSN is the structure that supervises security and national police agents. It heads the five following departments: public safety, special affairs, technical services, intervention units, and training.

IS – Islamic State, also known by its Arab acronym Daech.

ISF – Internal Security Forces: officers of Security, national police, National Guard, civil defense (interior ministry) as well as correctional officers (justice ministry).

RCD – Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique. Hegemonic party (1988-2011) of former President Ben Ali. Dissolved in May 2011.

SFDGUI – Syndicat des fonctionnaires de la Direction générale des unités d’intervention (syndicate for officers of the general directorate of intervention units). Created in July 2011. It reportedly has 23,000 members, more of them uniformed than civilian, and is the most numerically important union. But it is less known than its competitors in the media. It includes agents of the DGAS, National Guard, civil defence, public security as well as correctional and customs officers. The presidential guard union was part of the SFDGUI until 2012. It is headed by Lassad Kchaou.

SNSFI – Syndicat national des forces de sécurité intérieure (national syndicate of the forces of internal security). Primary police union. Created in May 2011. It has more civilian than uniformed members and is rather anti-Islamist. It was headed by Abdelhamid Jarray is now led by Nabil Ayari. It has about 8,000 members.

UGTT – Union générale tunisienne du travail (Tunisian general union of workers): created in 1946, this was the only central trade union federation until the fall of Ben Ali. It is headed by Houcine Abassi. It played a leading role in the national dialogue that took place in the second half of 2013.

UNSFST – Union nationale des syndicats des forces de la sûreté tunisienne (national federation of Tunisian security forces’ syndicates). The most important union federation, until the departure of the SFDGUI. It has about 3,000 members today. It was created in May 2012 and includes several administrative bodies and intervention units. This union is known for its opposition to the troika (the government coalition of An-Nahda, Ettakatol et the CPR between 2011 and 2013) and anti-Islamist stance. It has more civilian than uniformed members. It was headed by Montassar Materi (who died in October 2014) and is led today by Sahbi Jouini, the union organiser with the highest media profile.