

# Jihadist Violence in Tunisia: The Urgent Need for a National Strategy

---

**Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°50**

Tunis/Brussels, 22 June 2016. Translation from French

---

## I. Overview

---

Tunisia faces a jihadist threat that arises as much from its own national territory as from neighbouring Libya. To confront it, the authorities must urgently publish a counter-terrorism strategy that adopts a multidimensional approach, prioritising prevention and including a mechanism for wide consultation. This would enable a coordinated response and help build broader national consensus around it. The priority is to overcome the mostly institutional and bureaucratic obstacles that have delayed the launch of a strategy since a new constitution was adopted in January 2014. Publishing and implementing a strategy against jihadist violence, which could destabilise the country and encourage an authoritarian drift, will mean revitalising security governance. Failing to respond coherently would allow some of the most vulnerable segments of Tunisian society to continue to radicalise, a primary goal of jihadist groups.

Jihadist violence in Tunisia has expanded and diversified since the 2010-2011 uprising against the regime of then President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. While the government is determined to tackle this security challenge, it has yet to implement a multidimensional strategy that would enable it to address the root causes of violence, thereby preventing it and appropriately increase the capacity of security forces to anticipate the threat, react quickly and coordinate and adapt their responses. Releasing a national strategy would clarify the requirements and priorities for a fight of this kind, and would enable a public debate, encouraging popular buy-in and thus pre-empting resistance to its application. It would also improve security collaboration between Tunisia and its regional and international partners, which are keen to see their financial and technical support integrated into a clear strategic vision.

Political actors agree more or less on the strategic direction needed to tackle the problem, despite some divergence on the level of control over spaces of religious teaching and the balance between prevention and repression. The main problem is that the government has not yet published or implemented a responsive strategy – one whose operational components can evolve to become more effective. The context is unfavourable: Tunisia's security challenges are urgent and tend to provoke a repressive response; coordination between the heads of state and government is poor; numerous administrative obstacles remain between and within ministries; and the

multiple ad hoc counter-terrorism commissions often underperform and even fragment policymaking.

Two strategic documents were prepared in 2014 and 2015, but never published. These should now serve as a base for the drafting and dissemination of a new text that should reflect a deep understanding of jihadist groups. Two elements will be essential for its success: better cooperation between public institutions and a mechanism for evaluating the strategy's effectiveness with a view to making the necessary adjustments.

The agency best placed to produce this type of document in coordination with the relevant ministries is the new National Counter-Terrorism Commission, established on 22 March 2016, which brings together various parts of the government, including from the security sector. It could also put in place a mechanism for consultation across a broad spectrum of political and civil society actors.

As a first step, to give new impetus to the finalisation and dissemination of this strategy, the head of state and the head of government should agree on their respective roles in the security sector. Secondly, the head of government should strengthen its inter-agency coordination mechanisms, in particular the National Counter-Terrorism Commission and the Security Management Follow-up Cell, and create the position of high commissioner for counter-terrorism, who should be given the status of minister without portfolio. The high commissioner's task would be to improve coordination between the two heads of the executive, the relevant ministries, other government agencies (both inside and outside the security sector) and the various ad hoc counter-terrorism commissions. The high commissioner should have the appropriate profile and status to be able to support the National Counter-Terrorism Commission in the analytical aspects of its work, namely the completion of the strategy, and help revitalise security governance.

*To finalise a multidimensional strategy emphasising prevention and based on a solid understanding of jihadist groups, and to ensure its effective application:*

- ❑ The National Counter-Terrorism Commission should draw on the two previous strategic documents to complete a new text, ensuring the active participation of all ministries and government agencies.
- ❑ The commission should present a public version of this new text and put in place a participatory evaluation mechanism that would allow consultation with a broad range of political and civil society groups representing Tunisia's many political and regional sensibilities, specifically those of border regions most affected by violent groups. Their perspectives should be taken into consideration to enable the adaptation of the document's operational elements in response to an evolving threat.
- ❑ The head of state should take charge of publicising the strategy's guiding principles and encourage a process of public consultation.

*To revitalise governance mechanisms and improve coordination between the two heads of the executive in order to enable the implementation of the strategy:*

- ❑ The heads of state and government should define their respective roles in the security sector, without necessitating a change in the constitution.
- ❑ The head of government should strengthen its inter-agency coordination mechanisms, in particular the National Counter-Terrorism Commission and the Security Management Follow-up Cell, in order to overcome the bureaucratic resistance and cronyism that are weakening the chain of command within each ministry, especially the interior ministry.
- ❑ The head of government should appoint a high commissioner for counter-terrorism, with the status of minister without portfolio, who is politically independent and has the relevant legal expertise and experience in security management. This person should be tasked with supporting the National Counter-Terrorism Commission and improving coordination between the heads of state and government, as well as between different ministries, government agencies and ad hoc bureaucratic structures involved in counter-terrorism policy both inside and outside the security sector.

## **II. A Constantly Evolving Jihadist Threat**

---

Since the departure of President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali on 14 January 2011, jihadist violence in Tunisia has taken different forms and, though of low intensity, has expanded steadily. During a first phase, in 2011 and 2012, the Salafi-jihadist movement tried to structure itself as a political force around the Ansar al-Sharia group, but soon turned to violence.<sup>1</sup> Its proselytising in favour of violent acts against atheists and “infidels” proliferated on social networks and through preaching in prisons, high schools, universities, mosques, public spaces, sports clubs and elsewhere. It established vice squads in certain disadvantaged areas, and several suspected Ansar al-Sharia militants desecrated and burned various *zawiyas* – religious shrines that belong to Sufi brotherhoods and serve as tombs or mausoleums for their *walis*, or saints.

After the attack on the U.S. embassy in September 2012, organised in part by Ansar al-Sharia, the Troika<sup>2</sup> began to take a more severe security approach to radical Islamism.<sup>3</sup> As a Salafi-jihadist noted in 2013, the measures taken at that time restricted Ansar al-Sharia’s freedom of movement, which “thwarted its social activities, designed to win the sympathies of the people and take root” throughout the country.<sup>4</sup> The discourse of Abou Iyad al-Tounisi, the group’s leader, became more threatening toward the state, suggesting that Tunisia might become a “land of jihad” like Syria or Iraq.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°137, *Tunisia: Violence and the Salafi Challenge*, 13 February 2013.

<sup>2</sup> “Troika” refers to the coalition government formed after the election of the National Constituent Assembly in October 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Crisis Group Report, *Tunisia: Violence and the Salafi Challenge*, op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> Crisis Group interview, Ansar al-Sharia militant, Tunis, July 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia and Libya has made a distinction between “lands of preaching” and “lands of jihad”; the dichotomy derives originally from Abou al-Nour al-Maqdisi’s 2004 differentia-

Jihadist violence intensified and diversified in 2013. According to a researcher, the Salafi-jihadist movement then entered a new phase, seeking to:

Strike the state, its representatives and its interests, and exhaust security forces. Its strategy was to weaken institutions in order to better organise itself, while diverting the democratic process to show Tunisians that this non-Islamic state is tyrannical in essence and encourage them to join the movement.<sup>6</sup>

In February and June 2013, two leftist political figures were killed; the Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for both assassinations in December 2014.<sup>7</sup> In May 2013, the Troika established stronger security measures, targeting in particular Ansar al-Sharia. The police and the National Guard uncovered several weapons stockpiles in different parts of the territory.<sup>8</sup> Skirmishes between security forces and small jihadist brigades intensified in the country's western border areas and have not stopped since.<sup>9</sup> In August 2013, the interior ministry classified Ansar al-Sharia as a terrorist organisation, and within a year, the group appeared to have been eradicated.<sup>10</sup>

After parliamentary and presidential elections in late 2014, Tunisia became a privileged target of IS just as it was increasing its international terrorist operations. In March and June 2015, more than 60 foreign tourists were killed in the Bardo Museum in Tunis and at the Marhaba Hotel in Port el Kantaoui (an east coast touristic area) in attacks claimed by IS.<sup>11</sup> In November 2015, a dozen members of the presidential guard died in a suicide attack also claimed by IS. More recently, in March 2016, a commando squad of 60 mostly Tunisian jihadists attempted to seize the city of Ben Guerdane, 30km from the Libyan border in the country's south east, by storming the military barracks and the National Guard post.<sup>12</sup>

Although Tunisian armed forces successfully thwarted the operation and Ben Guerdane locals – several of whom are known to have taken part in armed conflicts across the Middle East and North Africa – did not join the insurrection, the threat

---

tion between *qital al-nikaya* (fighting to hurt or damage the enemy) and *qital al-tamkin* (fighting to consolidate one's power). See Aaron Y. Zelin, "Maqdisi's disciples in Libya and Tunisia", *Foreign Policy*, 14 November 2012. See also Abou Khaled al-Adam, *Kitab al-Tamkin* (unknown city, 2011). And Crisis Group Report, *Tunisia: Violence and the Salafi Challenge*, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> Crisis Group interview, former researcher at the Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies (the research centre of the presidency, known by its French acronym, ITES), Tunis, March 2016.

<sup>7</sup> "Tunisie: Boubaker Al Hakim revendique les assassinats de Chokri Belaïd et Mohamed Brahmi", Agence France-Presse (AFP), 18 December 2014.

<sup>8</sup> See Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°41, *Tunisia's Borders (II): Terrorism and Regional Polarisation*, 21 October 2014.

<sup>9</sup> At regular intervals, clashes along the northern part of Tunisia's border with Algeria, including gunfights between armed groups and security forces at border checkpoints and mobile military camps, have caused casualties among soldiers and National Guard members, and improvised explosive devices have damaged military vehicles, injuring or killing their occupants. See Crisis Group Briefing, *Tunisia's Borders (II)*, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> See Crisis Group Briefing, *Tunisia's Borders (II)*, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Assaultants (two in the Bardo Museum and one in the Marhaba Hotel, according to police) armed with Kalashnikovs and grenades opened fire on Western tourists.

<sup>12</sup> No one has claimed this attack. See Michaël Béchir Ayari, "Seven Ways to Steady a Tunisia under New Attack", *In Pursuit of Peace*, International Crisis Group commentary (blog.crisisgroup.org), 9 March 2016.

remains prevalent at the national level.<sup>13</sup> A large number of Tunisian citizens, between 3,000 and 6,000 depending on the source, have joined the ranks of IS in Iraq, Syria and Libya;<sup>14</sup> nearly 600 are thought to have returned home. “Given the weakness of the external intelligence services, the justice system cannot prove that they have blood on their hands”, a former director general of National Security said. “So they are merely put under house arrest and monitored closely by the police”.<sup>15</sup>

Some of these returnees, still active in IS, could organise violent operations in Tunisia. This “would complement IS’s scattering strategy from its strongholds in neighbouring Libya”, a French expert on jihadism argued.<sup>16</sup>

Another strike on Tunisia would be a way for IS in Libya to threaten Algeria on its eastern border while also boosting the group’s propaganda, given the international media attention garnered by each new attack on Tunisian soil. Jihadist groups in the country can rely on significant networks (isolated jihadists, small groups either autonomous or linked to larger movements). Several sleeper cells, some of which are in contact with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and IS, reportedly exist throughout the country in both urban and suburban areas.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, nearly 150 armed jihadists from Oqba Ibn Nafaa, a group close to AQIM that has been significantly weakened by the army and the national guard,<sup>18</sup> and from Jounoud al-Khilafa (close to IS) still operate in the mountainous and forested areas near the Algerian border. Jounoud al-Khilafa enjoys support among disadvantaged fringes of the population within a 100km radius in the direction of Sidi Bouzid (centre-west).<sup>19</sup>

Given the strengthening of their strategic capabilities in Libya, jihadist groups could in the future be a step ahead of security forces (the police, National Guard and

---

<sup>13</sup> See Crisis Group Report, *Tunisia: Violence and the Salafi Challenge*, op. cit. Crisis Group interviews, Ben Guerdane resident, former military officer, Tunis, April 2016. And Ayari, “Seven Ways to Steady a Tunisia under New Attack”, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Crisis Group interviews, senior interior ministry official, Tunisian and foreign experts on jihadism, Tunis, 2015-2016. See also, Brian Dodwell, Daniel Milton and Don Rassler, “The Caliphate’s Global Workforce: An Inside Look at the Islamic State’s Foreign Fighter Paper Trail”, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 18 April 2016. In December 2015, the interior ministry spokesperson announced that 3,000 Tunisians were fighting or had fought with jihadist groups in Syria, 800 of whom had been killed and 600 had returned to Tunisia. “Walid Louguini: 3 000 Tunisiens en Syrie, 600 sont revenus et 800 ont été tués”, Business News (businessnews.com.tn), 25 December 2015. The high number of Tunisians in the ranks of IS has puzzled observers. A range of religious, social, identity, political and economic factors can explain it. Since 1948, Tunisians have traditionally supplied a relatively large number of volunteers to armed conflicts in the Middle East; in the first half of 2011, a security vacuum allowed for the establishment of numerous recruitment networks and reinforced this trend.

<sup>15</sup> Crisis Group interview, former director general of National Security, Tunis, May 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Crisis Group interview, French expert on jihadism, Tunis, February 2016. IS’s “scattering strategy” refers to possible IS plans to abandon its Libyan stronghold of Sirte and move to the (scarcely populated) south in order to forge an alliance with jihadists active in the Sahel as part of building an “African army” whose members would carry out attacks in Libya, Tunisia and Algeria.

<sup>17</sup> Crisis Group interviews, senior interior ministry officials, Tunisian and Algerian experts on security, foreign diplomats, Tunis, 2015-2016.

<sup>18</sup> Crisis Group interviews, former military officer, security expert, Tunis, March-April 2016. See also, “Najem Gharssali: ‘Okba Ibn Nafaa’ a été détruite à 90 %”, Tunisie Numérique (tunisienumerique.com), 13 July 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Crisis Group interviews, lawyers, inhabitants of the Sidi Bouzid region, security experts, Tunis, January-May 2016.

army),<sup>20</sup> who despite their success in Ben Guerdane are at risk of being overwhelmed.<sup>21</sup> IS militants, among others, would then be in a position to carry out simultaneous attacks in several parts of the country. This would be a way for the group to show that it is capable of destabilising the state while pushing security forces to overreact,<sup>22</sup> to highlight the frailty and fundamentally unfair nature of the “godless state”.<sup>23</sup>

In the wake of the three 2015 attacks, arbitrary arrests and police brutality and violence have already increased.<sup>24</sup> The country’s main media outlets have also intensified their pro-security message, taking to task human rights advocates.<sup>25</sup> The presidency has declared and repeatedly prolonged a state of emergency.<sup>26</sup>

To be effective, the state’s response cannot be limited to security measures; it should also take into account the strategy of jihadist groups, which have exploited citizens’ growing sense of injustice.<sup>27</sup> As hatred for police spreads in some fringes of the population during periods of heightened security clampdowns that follow attacks, it is crucial not to “give credence to jihadist propaganda in Tunisia”, according to an expert on jihadism.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Crisis Group interviews, interior ministry official, security experts, foreign diplomats, Tunis, March 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Ayari, “Seven Ways to Steady a Tunisia under New Attack”, op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> Crisis Group interview, interior ministry official, Tunis, March 2016. Since mid-2013, several security experts and border region inhabitants have evoked this scenario, calling it *Youm el Zelzel* (“the day of the earthquake”). Crisis Group interviews, Tunis, Kasserine, 2013-2015.

<sup>23</sup> Crisis Group interviews, journalists, interior ministry official, experts on jihadism, inhabitants of the Sfax region and of poor districts in the capital, Tunis, January-May 2016. See also Walid Mejri, “Stratégie terroriste en Tunisie: de la propagande à l’immersion”, Inkyfada (inkyfada.com), 27 June 2015.

<sup>24</sup> In 2015, thousands of citizens were arrested, in particular men donning the trappings of religiosity (beards or Salafi outfits, for example); dozens of NGOs have denounced police brutality. See “Tunisia: Case Tests Political Will to End Torture”, Human Rights Watch, 14 August 2015, and “Tunisia: Suspicious Deaths in Custody”, Human Rights Watch, 25 October 2015. Crisis Group interviews, civil society activists, inhabitants of poor districts in the capital, Tunis, 2015. In January 2016, twenty Tunisian and international associations, notably human rights organisations, created a coalition. See “Tunisie: recommandations du collectif pour les libertés individuelles”, Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EuroMed Droits), 19 January 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Crisis Group interviews, human rights activists, Human Rights Watch analyst, Tunis, January-May 2016. See also Eric Gobe, “La Tunisie en 2015: la présidentialisation de l’impuissance politique?”, *L’année du Maghreb*, N°14 (2016).

<sup>26</sup> This theoretically allows authorities to suspend any activities that threaten security or public order and to ban demonstrations and rallies of any kind. See Presidential Decree n°78-50 dated 26 January 1978, regulating the state of emergency. See also, “L’état d’urgence en Tunisie prolongé de trois mois”, AFP, 22 March 2016.

<sup>27</sup> See Oqba Ibn Nafaa and IS propaganda videos regarding Tunisia in 2015. This propaganda targets primarily young men from disadvantaged rural and suburban areas and exploits their sense of social exclusion and injustice, insisting on the security forces’ brutality, presented as encroaching on the dignity of Tunisian citizens.

<sup>28</sup> Crisis Group interview, Tunis, December 2015. Crisis Group interviews, residents of the region of Sfax, Tunis, March 2016. See also Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°163, *Reform and Security Strategy in Tunisia*, 23 July 2015.

### III. **Toward a Multidimensional Strategy Against Jihadist Violence**

---

#### A. *The Case for a Dynamic, Multidimensional Strategy*

In order to cope with the evolving jihadist violence, which authorities should neither under- nor over-estimate, the state should implement a multidimensional strategy, whose operational aspects must be dynamic to allow for a coordinated response and avoid the pitfall of a security-only approach. A broad spectrum of ministries should help with its development – youth, religious affairs, culture, education, justice, interior, defence, employment, etc.

Around 20 per cent of the public budget is devoted to security in 2016, twice as much as in 2011, when Ben Ali fled the country.<sup>29</sup> But thus far no strategy going beyond security in the narrowest sense (defence, interior, justice) and including mechanisms for fine tuning based on an evaluation of impact in the field, has been made public or implemented.<sup>30</sup>

As an international expert said, such a strategy would make it possible to “address the terrorist phenomenon upstream (prevention) and downstream (repression) by optimising the country’s limited security resources (equipment, budgets) depending on the effectiveness of the mechanisms in place and the evolution of the threat”.<sup>31</sup> In other words, ministries that do not deal with security could jointly tackle the causes of jihadist violence, and the capacity of the security system to anticipate, coordinate, react and adapt would improve distinctly.<sup>32</sup>

Such a strategy would also encourage foreign partners to significantly increase the level and quality of their technical support in the framework of regional and international cooperation. Despite their commitment to the fight against jihadist violence, these partners have been reluctant to increase financial support to Tunisia in the absence of a clear vision of the state’s doctrine and strategic and political objectives in this realm.<sup>33</sup> “A large part of the aid cannot be delivered as long as the Tunisian administration has not carried out a concrete assessment of the needs at the national level through a detailed and budgeted strategy”, a foreign aid worker said.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> The state budget for 2016 is around 30 billion dinars (13 billion euros). Of that, the interior ministry’s budget reaches nearly 2.9 billion dinars (1.3 billion euros) and the defence ministry’s comes to almost 2.1 billion dinars (950 million euros). See “Budget”, interior ministry, defence ministry, MAR-SAD.budget (budget.marsad.tn), 2012-2015. See also Finance Law 2016, finance ministry (finances.gov.tn), 2016. After the suicide attack on a presidential guard bus in downtown Tunis in November 2015, the head of government and the finance minister granted an additional 500 million dinars (235 million euros) for emergency counter-terrorism expenses. Roughly 300 million dinars went to the interior and defence ministries, and the remaining 200 million to other ministries. Crisis Group interview, adviser to the head of government, Tunis, May 2016. “Budget 2016: 500 millions de dinars pour les dépenses urgentes de la lutte antiterroriste”, Webdo (webdo.tn), 28 November 2015.

<sup>30</sup> See Crisis Group Report, *Reform and Security Strategy in Tunisia*, op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> Crisis Group interview, security expert, Tunis, February 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Crisis Group interviews, security experts participating in the G7+3, adviser to the head of government, ITES researcher, Tunis, January-May 2016. The mechanism called G7+3 is a dialogue between the European Union (EU) and Tunisia established in September 2015. Its objective is to strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation and discuss measures that might help Tunisia confront terrorism and jihadist radicalisation. See “L’UE et la Tunisie renforcent leur coopération en matière de sécurité et de lutte contre le terrorisme”, Business News (businessnews.com.tn), 22 September 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Crisis Group interviews, security experts participating in the G7+3, Tunis, January-May 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Crisis Group interview, foreign aid worker in the security sector, Tunis, February 2016.

## B. *Finalising and Publishing the Strategy*

Since 2014, two strategic documents have been prepared. The task now is “to use them, in particular the sections describing the jihadist phenomenon and prevention measures to be implemented, as a foundation for drafting a new more inclusive and operational text”, an advisor to the head of government said.<sup>35</sup>

A group in charge of monitoring and policy planning under the authority of former Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa coordinated the drafting of the first document in 2014. The government’s Crisis Cell,<sup>36</sup> the Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies (Institut tunisien des études stratégiques, ITES), several national and international NGOs and the main concerned ministries were involved in the production of this several hundred-page text. It established five strategic principles in the fight against terrorism: balance between the implementation of effective security measures and consideration for human rights; sustained political consensus; preservation of the Tunisian societal model; strengthening of regional and international cooperation; and the need to adapt the security policy to the evolving jihadist threat while anticipating it.<sup>37</sup>

At the beginning of 2015, with Béji Caïd Essebsi taking office as president and the formation of a new coalition government that brought together Nida Tounes and An-Nahda, development of a national security strategy began again from scratch.<sup>38</sup> Six weeks after his swearing in, the new head of state convened the president’s National Security Council,<sup>39</sup> which set up a National Commission Against Terrorism and Violent Extremism within the foreign affairs ministry.<sup>40</sup> This ad hoc commission, which

---

<sup>35</sup> Crisis Group interview, adviser to the head of government, Tunis, May 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa created this Crisis Cell in the aftermath of the 16 July 2014 attack against the army by Oqba Ibn Nafaa, which occurred near Tunisia’s border with Algeria and killed fourteen soldiers. In one year, the group met more than a hundred times, bringing together the interior, foreign affairs and defence ministers, as well as media advisers to the presidential cabinet and senior security officials. The cell facilitated coordination between the army, the National Guard and the police by unifying local command chains under the army. The group also made a number of controversial decisions: freezing the activities of more than 150 charitable and religious organisations suspected of financing the Salafi movement; closing media outlets; and arresting dozens of young Tunisians for advocating terrorism on Facebook. See Crisis Group Briefing, *La Tunisie des frontières (II)*, op. cit. After legislative and presidential elections in late 2014, the Crisis Cell gave way to a Security Management Follow-up Cell, which meets far less regularly.

<sup>37</sup> Crisis Group interviews, senior interior ministry official, adviser to the head of government, former secretary of state for security affairs, ITES researcher, Tunis, November 2015–March 2016.

<sup>38</sup> This government, formed in February 2015 and reshuffled in January 2016, includes independent deputies and members of four parties: Nida Tounes, An-Nahda, the Free Patriotic Union (known by its French acronym, UPL) and Afek Tounes.

<sup>39</sup> The National Security Council was created in 1990. Its mission is “to collect, study, analyse and evaluate all information and data relating to national security in the realms of domestic and foreign policy and defence policy in order to preserve the domestic and foreign security of the state and strengthen its basis”. It falls under the authority of the head of state, who presides over the council and brings together representatives of the sovereign ministries. See Presidential Decree n°90-1195, dated 6 July 1990. President Ben Ali rarely convened the council, but it became more important after the 2010–2011 revolution. In 2013, President Marzouki held monthly National Security Council meetings. See Sharan Grewal, “A Quiet Revolution: The Tunisian Military After Ben Ali”, Carnegie Middle East Center, 24 February 2016.

<sup>40</sup> This ministry answers in part to the president who, according to the constitution, has the right to inspect diplomatic appointments. Furthermore, the presidency sets the state’s general approach to foreign policy. See Article 89 of the constitution of the Republic of Tunisia, 27 January 2014.

was composed of eighteen representatives from security bodies, ministerial departments (mainly the justice and interior ministries) and advisers to the president, drafted a new strategic document.

Without contradicting the principles defined in the document developed under Jomaa, the new text proposes a set of measures against jihadist violence based on four pillars: prevention, protection, prosecution and response.<sup>41</sup> Several experts and senior officials, including international specialists involved in the G7+3 dialogue, have said in its support that the document is less theoretical than the previous one and more oriented toward international collaboration – the UN Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) took an active role in its drafting. But this new document does not take into account the political nature and strategic dimension of jihadist violence; furthermore, unlike the text prepared under the Jomaa government, its development was not sufficiently inclusive given that certain ministries “didn’t want to collaborate”, according to a Tunisian security expert.<sup>42</sup>

The text includes a certain number of mechanisms for public action to tackle recruitment networks, radicalisation and operationalisation. It argues in particular for improved regional and international intelligence coordination, heightened border controls, establishment of support mechanisms for victims of terrorism and compliance of Tunisian anti-terrorism legislation with international standards; the document also stresses that, for the fight against terrorism to be effective, it must respect human rights.<sup>43</sup>

At the time of writing, neither of these strategic documents had been made public or implemented. Authorities should draw on both documents to produce a new text that is as precise as the first one in its description of the jihadist phenomenon and as concrete and oriented toward international collaboration as the second. It should be drafted in a collaborative manner between the different ministries. To this end, use should be made of existing institutional mechanisms, including the National Counter-Terrorism Commission set up by the head of government on 22 March 2016 in accordance with the Counter-Terrorism Act of 7 August 2015.<sup>44</sup>

The commission reports to the head of government who, as the immediate supervisor of the various ministers, is better equipped than the head of state to ensure the cooperation of the administration. Composed of twenty representatives from most security and non-security ministries and directorates, it has extensive powers, including to conduct “a national study to diagnose the terrorist phenomenon” and to coordinate efforts and gather information, data and statistics on “the fight against terrorism”.<sup>45</sup>

Despite its name, the commission is focused more on improving inter-agency coordination and commissioning studies than on actively countering the jihadist threat, and it is theoretically in a position to ensure that all ministries take an active role in developing a text that is more complete than both existing documents. Such

---

<sup>41</sup> These draw on the counter-terrorism strategy of the European Union (EU). See “The EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy”, Council of the EU, 30 November 2005. See also Mohamed Nafti, “Pour une stratégie de lutte contre le terrorisme”, *Leaders* (leaders.com.tn), 9 July 2015. Crisis Group interviews, security experts participating in the G7+3 meetings, Tunis, January-May 2016.

<sup>42</sup> Crisis Group interview, Tunis, May 2016.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> See Organic Law n°2015-26 on fighting terrorism and suppressing money laundering, 7 August 2015.

<sup>45</sup> See Article 64 of the Organic Law n°2015-26, *op. cit.*

collaboration is essential; as an employee of a company specialised in strategic action said, “you can have the best strategy in the world, but if it is not recognised and approved by all the administrations in charge of its implementation, it is difficult to apply”.<sup>46</sup> The same problem would arise if the country’s main political actors and NGOs rejected it.

*C. Involving Political Parties and Civil Society in Evaluating and Improving the Strategy’s Operational Elements*

The major political parties generally agree on the guiding principles of the fight against jihadist violence as outlined in the existing strategic documents, but differences remain on specific points. After publishing a strategic framework, it will be important to consult a wide spectrum of political players and NGOs and involve them in a participatory evaluation mechanism; this would allow for the adjustment of the strategy’s operational elements to make it more dynamic, and facilitate implementation of its major provisions.

Broad public consensus exists with regard to the major areas of intervention in the fight against jihadist violence: integrated and community-led border management, economic development of border areas and poor regions, provision of leisure activities for youth, promotion of messages of peace and tolerance in spaces of religious education, improvement of prison conditions, strengthened coordination between security forces (police, army and National Guard) and development of cyber and human intelligence capacities.<sup>47</sup> The main political parties recognise the need to respect human rights while combatting the jihadist threat, but in practice often neglect to report abuses.

Some differences of opinion remain nonetheless. For supporters of zero tolerance, some of whom are nostalgic for the fallen regime, the country is at war and the emergency necessitates going beyond theoretical considerations and taking firm action.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, several experts and activists, notably those who took an active part in the drafting of the first strategic document under the Jomaa government, hold that preventive measures should be given priority over punitive ones.<sup>49</sup> According to a former ITES researcher close to the Troika, it is necessary to avoid security-only responses and put in place fundamental reforms:

Tunisia’s identity – that is, a tolerant and moderate country with a democratic constitution – is in itself a way to fight jihadism. Addressing this phenomenon cannot be limited to increasing the capacity of the security apparatus. A bad reaction from the security forces could fuel the sense of injustice. The strategy must include economic development of marginalised regions and increased participation in public affairs among youth.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Crisis Group interview, employee of a company specialised in strategic expertise, Tunis, February 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Tunisian security experts, Tunis, 2015-2016. Crisis Group observations, round tables organised by local associations with close ties to political parties, various seminars, particularly those organised in partnership with German foundations, Tunis, 2015-2016.

<sup>48</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Tunis residents, former supporters of the Democratic Constitutional Rally (known by its French acronym, RCD), former President Ben Ali’s party, Tunis, Hammam Sousse, 2015-2016.

<sup>49</sup> Crisis Group interviews, politicians, security experts, Tunis, January-May 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Crisis Group interview, former ITES researcher, Tunis, March 2016.

These differing views on the balance between prevention and repression are not necessarily linked to ideological stances,<sup>51</sup> but Islamists and anti-Islamists disagree on the definition of “religious extremism” and on the intensity with which the state should combat it, especially when it comes to organisations, mosques, prayer rooms, Quranic schools and private nursery schools. These disagreements have grown in the wake of jihadist attacks, which have revived resentment between the two camps.<sup>52</sup>

The National Counter-Terrorism Commission should make public the first draft of the new document defining strategic lines. It should also provide an evaluation mechanism allowing for different types of actors to participate in public forums on the subject; involvement should extend well beyond those traditionally entitled to give their opinions on issues of jihadist violence, such as members of the security forces and high-ranking politicians.<sup>53</sup> This approach would permit to take into account the views of grassroots activists (especially Islamists and leftists), members of associations active in a range of sectors (youth, culture, security, religion, human rights, etc), and representatives of regions, especially border governorates that have had to deal with armed groups. These consultations would enrich and adapt the operational elements of the strategy, making it more inclusive and dynamic, which would increase its probability of success.

#### **IV. Strengthening Inter-ministerial Coordination to Implement an Effective Strategy**

---

##### *A. Clarifying the Roles of the Two Heads of the Executive in the Security Sector in a Consensual Way*

As a Nida Tounes deputy said, “the problem is not the strategy but its effective implementation”.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, serious questions remain regarding the ability of different ministries to follow strategic directions with regard to security policy in a coordinated way.<sup>55</sup> According to several security sector reform specialists, a central problem

---

<sup>51</sup> Some Nida Tounes supporters are more in favour of prevention than members of An-Nahda or the far-left Popular Front, and vice versa. On the other hand, many young people from working-class neighbourhoods and poor regions put more emphasis on the need for preventive measures than the older inhabitants of Tunis. Crisis Group interviews, activists and supporters of different political parties, Tunis and Kasserine residents, Tunis, Kasserine, 2015-2016.

<sup>52</sup> See political programs on the major public and private radio and television channels in the days following the attacks. During these periods, activists and supporters of the far left in particular publicly accused An-Nahda of direct or indirect involvement in the murders of two leftist politicians, Chokri Belaïd and Mohamed Brahmi, in February and July 2013. An-Nahda members generally responded by accusing their critics of active participation in the Ben Ali dictatorship (1987-2011), especially during the period of brutal repression that targeted the Islamists in the early 1990s. Crisis Group interviews, far-left and An-Nahda activists, Tunis, 2015-2016. According to several politicians, the national conference on terrorism that had been scheduled for 24 and 25 October 2015 was cancelled because Nida Tounes and An-Nahda feared that political and ideological tensions would boil over on that occasion. Crisis Group interviews, politicians, Tunis, October 2015-January 2016.

<sup>53</sup> The political and security situations remain volatile. Consulting only these actors could lead to infringements on public freedoms and reinforced state control on the venues where the religious message is broadcast.

<sup>54</sup> Crisis Group interview, Nida Tounes deputy, Tunis, February 2016.

<sup>55</sup> Crisis Group interviews, senior government officials, security experts, Tunis, January-March 2016.

that needs to be addressed has to do with obstacles facing governance, notably within the security-related ministries of defence, interior and justice.<sup>56</sup> It appears most clearly in the lack of coordination between agencies; for a number of activists across the political spectrum, this problem is of a constitutional nature, and amending the constitution would be necessary to overcome it.<sup>57</sup>

The Tunisian constitution, enacted on 27 January 2014 and heralded internationally as the most democratic and liberal in Arab world,<sup>58</sup> stops short of ascribing clear responsibilities to the head of state and head of government with regard to “national security”, a term that is used but not defined anywhere in the text.<sup>59</sup> Security is thus a “shared area, constitutionally speaking, and has to be managed jointly by the two heads of the executive”.<sup>60</sup> The roles of the head of state and head of government can thus vary depending on the political context. With the change of government after the 2014 presidential and legislative elections, a kind of jurisdictional dispute between the presidency and the prime ministry emerged. “This has stood in the way of the publication of a counter-terrorism strategy”, a security expert said.<sup>61</sup>

Under the so-called “technocratic” Jomaa government (January 2014–February 2015) – put in place after the political crisis of 2013,<sup>62</sup> caused in part by accusations of laxity, or even complicity, against the An-Nahda-led coalition government with regard to the jihadist movement – the division of labour on security issues between the heads of state and government was clearer. The main political forces agreed to marginalise then President Moncef Marzouki.<sup>63</sup> Jomaa’s Crisis Cell edged out the president’s National Security Council, and the head of government enjoyed greater initiative in matters of security governance.

---

<sup>56</sup> Crisis Group interviews, security experts, Tunis, January–March 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Crisis Group interviews, political leaders, An-Nahda, Nida Tounes and Popular Front militants and supporters, Tunis, January–May 2016. See “Lotfi Zitoun: il faut réformer la Constitution!”, Business News (businessnews.com.tn), 23 February 2016. See also “Najib Chebbi: faut-il amender la Constitution?”, Leaders (leaders.com.tn), 4 April 2016.

<sup>58</sup> See Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°37, *The Tunisian Exception: Success and Limits of Consensus*, 5 June 2014.

<sup>59</sup> The head of state is in charge of defining general policies with regard to defence, foreign relations and national security, after consulting the head of government; he also presides over the National Security Council and the council of ministers in these three areas. The head of government is in charge of defining and implementing state policies except defence, foreign affairs and national security general policies. See articles 77, 91 and 93 of the Tunisian constitution, 27 January 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Crisis Group interview, legal expert, Tunis, June 2016.

<sup>61</sup> Crisis Group interview, security expert, January 2016.

<sup>62</sup> The national dialogue, led by four organisations that would go on to win the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize, brought together the country’s main political players to find a way out of the July 2013 political crisis. This dialogue sped up the constitutional process (finishing drafting the constitution), the electoral process (setting up the independent higher authority that would supervise the next elections), and the governmental process (choosing a new consensual head of government to form an independent “technocratic” government). See Crisis Group Briefing, *The Tunisian Exception*, op. cit.

<sup>63</sup> In December 2011, the National Constituent Assembly elected Moncef Marzouki to the presidency; An-Nahda supported him. He gradually began to lose the backing of the Islamist party leadership following the national dialogue in the second half of 2013, which he had opposed; An-Nahda then grew closer to the future head of state, Béji Caïd Essebsi, leader of the main opposition movement at the time, Nida Tounes.

At the end of 2014, the political configuration changed.<sup>64</sup> Essebsi enjoyed solid legitimacy as the new president; he was the first head of state elected by direct universal suffrage in a democratic context and presided over the leading party in the Assembly of People's Representatives (APR). According to several deputies, from the get-go Essebsi used all the leeway offered by the constitution to "presidentialise" the regime.<sup>65</sup> He proposed an independent head of government whom the APR quickly endorsed and whom he has tended to regard as a "chief of staff",<sup>66</sup> and reconvened the president's National Security Council. But he has not been able to fulfil his ambitions with regard to inter-ministerial security coordination.<sup>67</sup> The difficulties he has faced can be explained partly by the split that occurred within his party in January 2016; as a deputy recalled, "the Nida Tounes split weakened the president, with the group losing its position to An-Nahda as the leading party in the APR".<sup>68</sup>

To get past this impasse, which also manifests itself beyond the security sector, a growing number of political analysts and leaders, especially those stemming from the parties that make up the coalition government, have proposed revising the constitution; advocates of such a reform have suggested creating either a purely presidential regime or, more rarely, a purely parliamentary one.<sup>69</sup> The constitution outlines a hybrid regime and a system of proportional representation that prevents an outright political majority.<sup>70</sup> This has led to a fragmentation of power centres that has weakened institutions.<sup>71</sup> A kind of "three-headed executive" between "the president, the head of government and the APR" has impeded the adoption of major strategic directions and "paralysed political will in the area of counter-terrorism", a former senior interior ministry official said.<sup>72</sup>

Those advocating for constitutional reform, and to some extent for the return of a strong man, have used blockages that impede governance, particularly in the security sector, as an argument. While many political analysts argue that amending the January 2014 constitution, which has been the symbol of a successful transition, is

---

<sup>64</sup> In the October 2014 legislative elections, Nida Tounes secured 86 seats while the Islamist party An-Nahda won 69 seats. On the presidential ballot, Nida Tounes' Essebsi beat the incumbent, Marzouki. Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°44, *Tunisia's Elections: Old Wounds, New Fears*, 19 December 2014.

<sup>65</sup> Crisis Group interviews, deputies, Tunis, January-February 2016.

<sup>66</sup> Crisis Group interview, senior public official, Tunis, February 2016.

<sup>67</sup> As a diplomat said, "Béji Caïd Essebsi would have needed 100 people in his cabinet to fully implement his political strategy, but the total number of advisers has never got past ten or so". Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Tunis, March 2016. The president's cabinet consisted of eight members in May 2016.

<sup>68</sup> After Essebsi's victory in the presidential election at the end of 2014, divisions within Nida Tounes grew. They led to mass resignations from the party and the creation of a new 29-seat parliamentary bloc: "al-Horra" (The Free). Since early 2016, Nida Tounes has only held 57 seats (instead of the 86 it won in parliamentary elections) against An-Nahda's 69. The capture of so-called "useful" votes from citizens disappointed with the Troika thus failed to transform Nida Tounes, a political initiative built around Essebsi's presidential candidacy, into a mass-based political party.

<sup>69</sup> Crisis Group interviews, political analysts, An-Nahda, Nida Tounes and Popular Front militants and supporters, Tunis, January-May 2016. See "Lotfi Zitoun: il faut réformer la Constitution!", *op. cit.*, and "Nejib Chebbi: faut-il amender la Constitution?", *op. cit.*

<sup>70</sup> Crisis Group interview, sociologist, Tunis, March 2016.

<sup>71</sup> See "Lotfi Zitoun: il faut réformer la Constitution!", *op. cit.*

<sup>72</sup> Crisis Group interview, former senior security official, Tunis, May 2016.

not on the agenda,<sup>73</sup> it remains a possibility that could, according to a legal expert, “open a Pandora’s box”.<sup>74</sup>

To be sure, from a strictly constitutional perspective, a parliamentary system with a head of government enjoying broad powers and an administratively and financially autonomous parliament could strengthen governance while maintaining sufficient democratic guarantees.<sup>75</sup> But calls for order from several segments of the population that are nostalgic for the old regime and its strong presidency might move constitutional reform toward placing all control in the hands of a charismatic leader. Such a president would face difficulties in obtaining support from a civil society and public administration that have been divided since the 2010-2011 uprising, which would produce the opposite of the intended result.

It would thus be preferable for the presidency and the prime ministry to work together in divvying up security roles and defining their respective prerogatives without modifying the constitution. For example, the presidency could play a key role in developing a strategic framework, as it did during the drafting of the 2015 document, as well as promoting that strategy nationwide and even help implement a participatory evaluation mechanism together with the National Counter-Terrorism Commission.

## B. *Strengthening Inter-ministerial Coordination*

Administrative blockages both between and within ministries have become increasingly harmful to the country’s economy and security.<sup>76</sup> Overcoming them will be essential in order to implement a strategy against jihadist violence that is capable of tackling root aspects of the phenomenon.

Indeed, ministerial directives do not circulate easily between agencies and departments. Senior officials are sometimes reluctant to pass on instructions from a minister who might be “ousted within a year”.<sup>77</sup> Some engage in obstructionism and passive resistance to protest against the legal proceedings launched against them in 2011 and 2012 regarding embezzlement under the previous regime.<sup>78</sup> As Crisis Group observed in July 2015 with regard to the interior ministry, the administrative chain of com-

---

<sup>73</sup> Crisis Group interviews, political analysts, April-May 2016.

<sup>74</sup> Crisis Group interview, legal expert, Tunis, May 2016.

<sup>75</sup> Although it is included in the current constitution, this autonomy has not yet been translated into legal terms via an organic law. Crisis Group interviews, member of an NGO specialised in parliamentary capacity building, legal expert, political analyst, Tunis, May 2016.

<sup>76</sup> See Alexander Djerassi, Marwan Muasher, Marc Pierini, “Between Peril and Promise: A New Framework for Partnership With Tunisia”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 13 May 2016.

<sup>77</sup> Crisis Group interview, senior official, Tunis, January 2016. In just over four years, five governments succeeded one another. Each one changed a large number of administrative officials according to its own political criteria at both the regional (governors, district and area leaders) and local level (members of the special delegations that serve as provisional municipal councils), and brought in new individuals to fill director-general posts; these posts are the most important politico-administrative roles in the central administration, just under the minister’s office; the state secretariats were removed in January 2016. See Crisis Group Briefing, *The Tunisian Exception*, op. cit.

<sup>78</sup> Between 7,000 and 9,000 officials are undergoing legal proceedings, and 600 have been imprisoned, largely under article 96 of the Tunisian penal code. See Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°168, *Tunisia: Transitional Justice and the Fight Against Corruption*, 3 May 2016.

mand appears broken.<sup>79</sup> A senior official explained that given the weakness of political parties, with the exception of An-Nahda,<sup>80</sup> some ministers have become isolated:

The administrative personnel is hostile to them, and they find themselves in the crossfire between interest groups linked with unions, businessmen and former ministers who have kept their followers.<sup>81</sup>

As a former director general of National Security said:

You get the impression that no one is in the right place. Senior public officials who should be overseeing planning and coordination do not have the adequate stature. Given the contentious climate that prevails among the political class and public administration, ministers prefer to hire their supporters instead of competent officers.<sup>82</sup>

In this context, ensuring implementation of a multidimensional strategy against jihadist violence would mean significantly revitalising the head of government's mechanisms for inter-ministerial coordination, namely the National Counter-Terrorism Commission and the Security Management Follow-up Cell (which evolved from the Jomaa government's Crisis Cell). A close and active collaboration between these two bodies would short-circuit the administrative resistance and cronyism that have weakened the chain of command within each ministry, thus creating a dynamic similar to that inspired by Jomaa's now-defunct Crisis Cell.<sup>83</sup>

The latter met roughly 100 times in one year. Despite its flaws and some hasty decisions,<sup>84</sup> it managed to move forward on a number of sensitive issues, such as the Port of Radès.<sup>85</sup> It also significantly improved security governance, particularly by encouraging better collaboration between different operational units fighting armed groups in the border regions.<sup>86</sup>

### C. *Appointing a High Commissioner for Counter-Terrorism*

The numerous ad hoc bureaucratic structures created to confront the terrorist threat in 2013-2014 have not allowed for better administrative and inter-agency coordination, which is essential if a strategy against jihadist violence is to materialise.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> See Crisis Group Report, *Reform and Security Strategy in Tunisia*, op. cit.

<sup>80</sup> In the current coalition government, only the employment and vocational training minister is an An-Nahda member.

<sup>81</sup> Crisis Group interview, senior central government official, Tunis, April 2016.

<sup>82</sup> Crisis Group interview, former director-general of National Security, Tunis, May 2016.

<sup>83</sup> Crisis Group interviews, senior public officials, former secretary of state for security affairs, Tunis, January-February 2016.

<sup>84</sup> See Crisis Group Briefing, *The Tunisian Exception*, op. cit.

<sup>85</sup> The Port of Radès has often experienced clogging due to corruption and recurrent conflict between the central and regional administration, unions, customs officials and maritime transport companies, all of whom have divergent interests. Cargo ships often stay in the harbour for several days, which increases container prices. The Jomaa Crisis Cell was able to speed up the port's operations by creating a task force that successfully managed the conflicts and reduced corruption. Crisis Group interviews, former secretary of state for security affairs, harbour business leader, Tunis, January-March 2016. See also "Performance du port de Radès: le ministère des Transports lance une batterie de mesures", *African Manager* (africanmanager.com), 10 August 2014.

<sup>86</sup> See Crisis Group Report, *Reform and Security Strategy in Tunisia*, op. cit.

<sup>87</sup> Crisis Group interviews, lawyers, senior public officials, Tunis, April-May 2016.

On the contrary, a legal expert noted, “the proliferation of all kinds of commissions that do not actually serve much purpose has disrupted the decision-making process. We are lost in this limbo”.<sup>88</sup> Appointing a high commissioner for counter-terrorism, with the status of minister without portfolio, would help to significantly improve administrative and inter-agency coordination and revitalise security governance more generally.

Coordination between the many commissions is often insufficient, or even non-existent, and some of them resemble “hollow shells”.<sup>89</sup> As a lawyer explained, creating a new commission to coordinate existing commissions would serve little purpose and “would add to the prevailing administrative confusion”; but a high commissioner for counter-terrorism who is politically independent, a legal expert, capable of following the “twists and turns of the administration”, and has experience in security governance would create a new dynamic.<sup>90</sup>

As minister without portfolio enjoying the firm support of the two heads of the executive, the commissioner could bring different agencies together. He would be better able than any collective structure to encourage close cooperation between security and non-security ministries, counter-terrorism agencies and ad hoc commissions.

This high commissioner would also support the more analytical work of the president of the National Counter-Terrorism Commission, who is in charge of finalising an inter-ministerial strategy. In short, the commissioner’s task would be to strengthen collaboration between the offices of the president and the head of government and to improve coordination between the different ministries and administrative entities both strategically and in terms of operations.

## V. Conclusion

---

It is urgent to define the framework of a national strategy against jihadist violence that is multidimensional, based on an understanding of jihadist groups and comprising a substantive preventive component; to organise public consultations with political actors and NGOs in order to evaluate and improve the plan’s operational elements; and to revitalise security governance in order to overcome institutional obstacles to

---

<sup>88</sup> Crisis Group interview, legal expert, Tunis, May 2016.

<sup>89</sup> The various commissions include the Security Management Follow-up Cell and the National Counter-Terrorism Commission, which answer to the head of government; the Committee for the Organisation of the Administration of the Armed Forces and the Security and Defence Committee, which fall under the direction of the Assembly of the People’s Representatives (APR); the president’s National Security Council; the foreign affairs ministry’s National Commission Against Terrorism and Violent Extremism; the interior ministry’s Supreme Committee for Public Safety; the Fusion Center at the Agency for Intelligence and Defence Security (known by its French acronym, ARSD) as well as the ARSD itself, both of which are connected to the defence ministry; the justice ministry’s Legal Centre for Combatting Terrorism and Organised Crime; and the Security Centre for Combatting Terrorism and Organised Crime, which has no legal basis. These last two centres were created by unpublished decree at the end of 2014. They are designed to bring together in one building examining magistrates and security officials specialising in terrorist crimes, the goal being to speed up criminal procedures. Although the Legal Centre is functional, its activities are not coordinated with those of the Security Centre, the mission of which remains vague. Crisis Group interviews, lawyer, official in the office of the head of government, NGO expert specialising in the reform of security services, legal expert, Tunis, January-May 2016.

<sup>90</sup> Crisis Group interview, lawyer, Tunis, May 2016.

any strategy's implementation. Such a process would allow Tunisia to tackle the causes of jihadist violence through prevention measures coordinated at the inter-ministerial level, to improve the security forces' efficiency by ensuring they remain one step ahead of jihadist groups, and to avoid the pitfalls of the security-only approach to jihadism that would foster radicalisation of more citizens, all the while taking the wind out of the sails of those who wish to see a strong man return to power.

Implementing a national security strategy whose operational components could evolve and adapt, all without changing the constitution, would also reassure international partners in their willingness to help Tunisia strengthen its capacity to fight jihadist violence. There is no shortage of ideas for developing a strategic framework against this type of political violence, but the conditions to put these ideas into practice have not yet been met in a context of emergency in which repressive measures, quicker to put in place, have prevailed over prevention and consultation mechanisms necessary to find a lasting solution.

**Tunis/Brussels, 22 June 2016**

Appendix A: Map of Tunisia



With the kind permission of the University of Texas at Austin.