



Country Report on Terrorism 2012 - Chapter 2 - Tunisia

Overview: Tunisian security forces continued to deal with new threats from inside and outside the country, attacks on facilities, a dearth of resources, an inefficient and often ambiguous command and control structure, and a poor public image. Amid these challenges, Tunisia faced numerous security threats and clearly identifiable terrorist activities, while also taking action against individuals and cells. The most significant attacks were the September 14 events at the U.S. Embassy and the American Cooperative School of Tunis, which highlighted to the Government of Tunisia and Tunisian citizens the extent of the internal threats to security and stability. Tunisia also saw an increase in religiously motivated acts of vandalism and harassment, generally carried out by violent Salafist extremists.

With the ouster of Ben Ali's regime, Tunisia experienced a rise in political Islam and the emergence of hard-line Salafists, who reject Western values, seek the reestablishment of an Islamist Caliphate, and contend the Islamist Nahda Party is too accommodating to the West. Salafists repeatedly disrupted social order in 2012. As incidents of religious intolerance increased in Tunisia, the government at times vacillated in responding to excesses by Tunisia's Salafist movement. Both President Marzouki and Prime Minister Jebali denounced certain incidents and appealed for religious tolerance. The most notable examples included:

- On January 5, after a crowd shouted anti-Semitic slogans during the airport arrival of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, the Nahda party publicly condemned the anti-Jewish statements.
- On April 5, the Tunisian Court of the First Instance formally accepted a complaint filed by Jewish Community President Roger Bismuth against a preacher who called for Tunisian youth to wage war against Jews. In response to the complaint, the government launched an investigation of the incident.
- On April 11, President Marzouki visited the El Ghriba synagogue in Djerba to commemorate the 10-year anniversary of the al-Qa'ida (AQ) attack there that killed 21 people. In the ceremony, Marzouki reiterated that Tunisian Jews were equal citizens under the law and the government was committed to the security of the 2,600 year-old community. Marzouki called the terrorist attack "cowardly," and expressed sympathy for the families of the victims who died.
- On April 14, President Marzouki visited the Russian Orthodox Church in Tunis, responding to the church's call for protection and displaying the Government of Tunisia's support for religious freedom. The visit followed the arrest of the individual who covered the church's crosses on March

30, and culminated in a series of actions taken to halt incidents of vandalism and intimidation against the church.

2012 Terrorist Incidents: The list of incidents below highlights some of the most significant terrorism-related events that took place during the year. There was a marked increase in the number of incidents fueled by violent extremism.

- On February 1, Tunisian security forces exchanged gunfire with suspected weapons smugglers near the town of Bir Ali Ben Khalifa in the governorate of Sfax. In the exchange, Tunisian forces killed two gunmen and arrested a third after the gunmen wounded a National Guard officer and three soldiers.
- On February 23, 200 Salafists confronted police in Jendouba with sticks, swords, and Molotov cocktails, setting fire to a police station.
- On May 19, bars were vandalized and an alcohol storehouse set on fire in Sidi Bouzid. The Justice Minister responded that the period of tolerance for violent extremist activities was over and that “all red lines have been crossed,” but no clear enforcement actions followed.
- On May 26, between 200 and 500 Salafists clashed with police in Jendouba, who used tear gas and shotguns to break up the disturbance. Prime Minister Jebali warned that the law would be upheld, but was vague about what actions his government would take.
- From June 10-12, Salafists stormed an art exhibit in the Tunis suburb of La Marsa, sparking a wave of violence around the capital. The Tunisian government temporarily imposed a curfew and increased security. Interior Minister Laarayedh accused the instigators of having connections with AQ.
- From June 12-13, violent extremists torched three regional offices of the General Union of Tunisian Labor in Tunis, Jendouba, and Ben Guerdane.
- On June 21, Tunisian military aircraft, after taking fire, engaged suspected weapons smugglers near the Libyan border, destroying three vehicles.
- On September 14, a mob of 2,000-3,000, including individuals affiliated with the militant organization Ansar al-Sharia, attacked and attempted to destroy the U.S. Embassy and the American Cooperative School of Tunis, looting the school and causing extensive damage to both facilities. The authorities arrested more than 120 individuals suspected of being part of the attacks.
- On November 1, Tunisian police foiled a hostage-for-ransom plot involving four Tunisians, one of them a police officer, who allegedly planned to kidnap young Jewish people living in Zarzis.
- On December 10, four gunmen attacked a National Guard unit near Feriana, in Kasserine governorate, killing one Guardsman. Officials suspected an armed group of 40 men to be hiding in the Mt. Chaambi region.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Human rights groups maintained that the Ben Ali regime used Tunisia’s counterterrorism law to repress dissent and imprison political

opponents and religious leaders on trumped-up charges. Because of this focus on political opposition, the Ministry of Interior's capabilities were depleted after the revolution, and the two subsequent transition governments were at times hesitant to arrest and prosecute suspected terrorists. The Government of Tunisia has recognized that some of these capabilities must be resurrected to address other security priorities, including civil unrest.

The Government of Tunisia arrested more than 120 individuals for their alleged involvement in the September 14 attacks on the U.S. Embassy and American Cooperative School of Tunis, but has shared little information with U.S. officials. There have been no trials or convictions, and some suspects have been released on bail or subject to small fines. Other arrests and prosecutions included:

- On February 13, in a follow-up operation to the February 1 attacks, Tunisian authorities announced the arrests of 12 suspects belonging to a terrorist cell with links to AQ. The group possessed 32 Kalashnikov automatic rifles, 2,500 bullets, and over US \$60,000, which were confiscated by authorities. Tunisian Minister of the Interior Ali Laarayedh stated that interrogations of the suspects showed they "were stockpiling arms to be used when the time was ripe to impose an Islamic Emirate on Tunisia." Most of the suspects had a record of terrorist involvement and had been released from Tunisian prisons during the presidential amnesty granted after the 2011 revolution. Eight additional members of the group reportedly remained at large and in Libya.
- On April 30, the Tunisian army apprehended six Salafists near Sejnane and seized Kalashnikov rifles, ammunition, and unspecified documents.
- In mid-May, Tunisian authorities detained and ultimately deported two radical Moroccan theologians, Hassan Kattani and Omar El Hadouchi, who were implicated in the May 16, 2003 Casablanca bombings.
- On August 4, Tunisian security forces arrested a group in possession of firearms and grenades near Sfax.
- On October 24, the government sentenced Slim ben Belgacem ben Mohamed Gantri (alias Abou Ayoub) to one year in jail for his role in the June 10-12 clashes in La Marsa under Articles 50 and 51 of Decree No. 115, which stipulate punishment for any act or speech that leads to violence or hatred, or threatens stability and peace.
- On December 6, authorities arrested two Salafists in Fernana, near the Algerian border, and charged them with possession of illegal firearms, stun guns, other explosives, maps, military uniforms, and narcotics.
- On December 11, border police arrested three Salafists caught with automatic weapons, explosives, and illegal drugs near Jendouba, in western Tunisia.
- On December 12, Tunisian authorities arrested 11 violent extremists believed to be involved in a December 10 gun battle that took the life of a National Guardsman and wounded four others. Neither the number of people arrested nor their possible link to the December 10 event were confirmed by the MOI.

- On December 15, Tunisian officials announced they had uncovered and dismantled a terrorist cell in western Tunisia that had been recruiting violent extremists to serve in strongholds controlled by al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Several AQIM members were killed. They also announced that another seven had been arrested and indicted before the Tunis Court of First Instance on December 13.

- On December 21, Interior Minister Laarayedh announced that security forces had dismantled a terrorist cell called the “Militia of Uqba Ibn Nafaa in Tunisia,” affiliated with AQIM. The authorities captured 16 members and pursued another 18. Firearms, military fatigues, and plans were confiscated.

The fall of the Ben Ali regime resulted in the release or repatriation of individuals implicated in violent extremism. Of particular concern, two convicted terrorists, Seif Allah Ben Hassine (alias Abou Iyedh) and Tarek Maaroufi, returned to Tunisia in 2012. The two men are co-founders of the Tunisian Combatant Group. Ben Hassine was among those granted presidential amnesty after the collapse of the Ben Ali regime and is the political leader of the violent Salafist movement, Ansar al-Sharia. He was implicated as the mastermind behind the September 14 attack on the U.S. Embassy and at year's end, remained at large. On March 24, Maaroufi returned to Tunisia after serving nine years in a Belgian prison on terrorism charges; his Belgian citizenship has since been revoked. Maaroufi is a well known terrorist who took part in the planning and execution of the assassination of Afghan Northern Alliance Leader Ahmad Shah Mehsud on September 9, 2001. In addition, cleric Slim ben Belgacem ben Mohamed Gantri (alias Abou Ayoub) emerged as an influential leader in the Tunisian Salafist movement.

Border security remained a priority as Tunisian authorities sought to collaborate with their Libyan and Algerian counterparts in stemming the flow of weapons being smuggled across their common borders. Several members of the Tunisian security services were killed in the line of duty combating suspected terrorists and militants from AQIM and other AQ-affiliated groups. A state of emergency first imposed following the January 2011 revolution remained in effect throughout 2012.

In 2012, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, and Ministry of Finance (from the Customs Service) officials participated in U.S.-organized regional workshops on how to combat bioterrorism, kidnapping for ransom, and border infiltrations. The latter workshop was conducted by the Global Counterterrorism Sahel Capacity-Building Working Group. Tunisia continues to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration and Sandia Laboratories in the safe use of radioactive materials.

Tunisia continued to participate in the Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program with Tunisian security professionals receiving ATA training in 2012 in the areas of border security, investigations, and critical incident management. In September, Tunisia signed a Letter of Agreement with the United States, to initiate a multi-year multimillion dollar bilateral assistance program on security sector reform. On December 24, Tunisia and Algeria signed a security pact to coordinate action in the fight against terrorism, human trafficking, and illegal immigration; the pact called for the creation of joint border patrols.

Countering Terrorist Finance: Tunisia is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, a Financial Action Task Force-style regional body. Since Tunisia has strict currency controls, it is likely that remittance systems such as *hawala* are prevalent. Trade-based

money laundering is also a concern. Throughout the region, invoice manipulation and customs fraud were often involved in *hawala* counter-valuation. Tunisia's Financial Intelligence Unit, the Tunisian Financial Analysis Commission (CTAF), is headed by the governor of the Central Bank and includes representation from the Ministry of Finance, Customs General Directorate, National Post Office, Council of Financial Markets, Insurance General Committee, Ministry of Interior, and "an expert specialized in the fight against financial infringements." However, these interagency representatives are not analysts, and CTAF lacks analytical capacity due to both insufficient analytical staff and not enough training for the staff already in place. The Tunisian penal code provides for the seizure of assets and property tied to narcotics trafficking and terrorist activities. For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, we refer you to the *2013 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume 2, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes*: <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/index.htm>.

Regional and International Cooperation: The Tunisian government has increased its cooperation with the United States on other law enforcement matters and at the second ministerial meeting of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) in Istanbul in June 2012, offered to host the GCTF-inspired International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law, which will provide a platform for the delivery of training to criminal justice officials in Tunisia and the wider region to prevent and respond to terrorist and related threats within a rule of law framework.

The principal focus of the Tunisian government's counterterrorism efforts continued to be securing its borders, especially in light of instability and armed conflict in neighboring Libya and the presence of violent extremists based in Algeria and Libya crossing clandestinely into Tunisia. Tunisian authorities intensified their coordination with Libyan and Algerian counterparts, and during a November trip to Algiers, Prime Minister Jebali reiterated that Tunisia and Algeria were committed to cross-border cooperation to stem illegal arms and drug trafficking, contraband smuggling, illegal immigration, and infiltration of armed gangs. On December 3, Prime Minister Jebali and Algerian Prime Minister Selial signed a joint statement vowing to fight terrorism, organized crime, and drug trafficking. On December 24, Algerian Interior Minister Dahou Ould Kablia announced that Algeria and Tunisia had signed an agreement to strengthen border security coordination to include the creation of joint patrols to combat terrorism, human trafficking, smuggling, and illegal migration. The signing followed two days of meetings between Kablia and Tunisian Prime Minister Jebali and Interior Minister Laraayedh.

At various times, the Government of Tunisia closed border crossings with Libya and supported the Algerian authorities' decision to close part of its border with Tunisia in an effort to prevent militias, militants, and armed bandits from entering Tunisia. The Tunisian and Algerian security forces launched joint operations in December to root out an AQIM cell in western Tunisia.

Countering Radicalization and Violent Extremism: In addition to expressions of solidarity with Tunisia's minority religious groups, the Tunisian government instructed the Ministry of Religious Affairs to undertake mosque educational programs designed to promote peaceful coexistence and religious tolerance.
