



Tunisia – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 17 December 2014

Information on terrorist groups that aim to de-arabize the country. Such organizations might have existed since 1998. E.g.: Do they plan to re-establish a Tunisian (maybe Berberic?) alphabet? Do they envisage changing all Arabic names –of people, places, etc. – into the aforementioned languages? Any other information.

The following information was found in relation to the above queries.

Information on Amazigh (Berber) terrorist groups in Tunisia was not found among sources available to the Research and Information Unit.

The following reports refer to alleged terrorist groups currently believed to be operating in Tunisia.

An International Crisis Group report, in a section titled “Introduction: The Rise of Salafi Violence”, states:

“Since the fall of the Ben Ali regime in January 2011, violence has been on the rise in Tunisia. Many of the attacks and threats against people and property, particularly vigilante-style activities, have been carried out by Salafis. The murder of Chokri Belaïd, general secretary of the Parti des patriotes démocrates, is symptomatic. Threatened on several occasions by bearded individuals wearing kamis, he was attacked in the north west of the country during a meeting of his political party on 2 February 2013, four days before he was assassinated. He accused An-Nahda militants and Salafis of being responsible for the attack. Within hours of his death, activists from the secular party were already accusing Salafis and their supporters of primary responsibility for the crime. Although the assassins remain unidentified and Salafi involvement has not been proven, Salafis have been implicated in many acts of violence since the fall of the dictator. In January and February 2011, they targeted a cultural centre in Tunis’s medina (old town) and brothels in Tunis, Kairouan and Sfax. Salafi groups commonly, if discreetly, patrol poor areas to identify alcohol dealers. Salafis have formed a national association calling on citizens to display moral rectitude and obey Sharia (Islamic law): the Association de promotion de la vertu et de prévention du vice, which was granted legal status in February 2012 under the name of Association centriste de sensibilisation et de réforme.” (International Crisis Group (13 February 2013) *Tunisia: Violence and the Salafi Challenge*, p.1)

The 2013 United States Department of State report on terrorism in Tunisia states:

“The rise of violent extremist organizations in Tunisia since the January 2011 revolution – most notably Ansar al-Shari'a in Tunisia (AAS-T) – has posed

serious security challenges to a post-revolutionary government previously inexperienced in counterterrorism operations. The assassination of two opposition politicians in February and July, as well as the attack on the U.S. Embassy and the American Community School in Tunis in September 2012, demonstrated the extent of the terrorist threat. The Tunisian government continued to face challenges that included the potential for terrorist attacks, the influx of arms and violent extremists from across the Algerian and Libyan borders, and the use of improvised explosive devices. The disproportionate numbers of Tunisians among those traveling to fight in Libya, Mali, and Syria – and the ensuing return of these fighters – is another cause for concern.” (United States Department of State ((30 April 2014) *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013 – Tunisia*)

A report from the United States Congressional Research Service states:

“Local Tunisian groups over the past two years have staged attacks against government, tourist, and Western targets within the country. A Tunisian suicide bomber blew himself up outside a hotel in the beach resort of Sousse in October 2013, and another bomber was apprehended by police the same day in the coastal city of Monastir before he could detonate his vest. Two secularist opposition politicians were killed by gunmen in February and July 2013 outside their homes. A mob attack on the U.S. embassy in September 2012 caused extensive damage to the building’s outer enclosure and killed four in subsequent clashes. Officials regularly claim to have broken up domestic terrorist plots, including plans to attack the upcoming elections.” (United States Congressional Research Service (22 October 2014) *Political Transition in Tunisia*, p.7)

This report refers to the group Ansar al Sharia as follows:

“Tunisian authorities have accused the Tunisian Salafist group Ansar al Sharia of being involved or associated with many of the attacks to date, although the group has not claimed responsibility. Ansar al Sharia shares a name with other extremist organizations in North Africa, but the degree of coordination among them is uncertain. The Tunisia-based group, established in 2011 and initially focused on non-violent preaching and social works, has developed an increasingly acrimonious relationship with the state since 2013. Clashes between group members and security forces, followed by threats of violence from Ansar al Sharia’s leadership, led Tunisian officials in May 2013 to declare the group illegal. The State Department designated Ansar al Sharia as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) in January 2014, accusing it of involvement in the 2012 embassy attack and stating that the group ‘represents the greatest threat to US interests in Tunisia.’ Media reports suggest that the group’s leader, Seifallah Ben Hassine (aka Abou lyadh)—who is wanted in Tunisia and designated for U.N. and U.S. sanctions—may be in Libya.” (ibid, p.7)

This report also refers to a number of smaller groups, stating:

“A number of smaller Salafist and jihadist groups also operate in Tunisia. Although less is known about their role, some may have ties to terrorist organizations and/or to foreign fighter pipelines to Syria, Mali, Algeria, and elsewhere. Tunisian security forces have repeatedly clashed with armed militants, reportedly including foreign fighters, in recent years. Recent military

operations have targeted terrorist 'training camps' and weapons depots along the mountainous border with Algeria, in an area known as Mount Chaambi, west of the town of Kasserine. Tunisian officials have stated that Mount Chaambi cells are linked to AQIM and include individuals who fought in Mali. Insecurity along the Libyan border to the east and in the remote desert south is also of particular concern, as both areas appear to be transit zones for regional smuggling networks. Some observers trace jihadists' presence in Tunisia to the release of over 1,000 'political' prisoners of various stripes in early 2013; security force disorganization in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution; and events since 2011 in Mali and Libya. Jihadist groups may also draw on support from Tunisian Salafist groups and communities." (ibid, pp.7-8)

A report published by the Jamestown Foundation states:

"2013 marked the return of terrorism to Tunisia. Since the middle of the year, terrorist incidents have occurred with greater frequency and now pose an alarming threat to the safety of Tunisia. During the first half of 2013, the Tunisian security forces were the target of several jihadist attacks, especially in the mountainous area of Jebel Chaambi, on the border with Algeria. This phase, which cannot yet be declared completed, reached its peak with the terrorist attack of July 29, 2013 that resulted in the death of eight soldiers, the worst terrorist attack in recent years in Tunisia. The Tunisian government, with the Ministry of the Interior in the front row, has repeatedly accused the Salafist Ansar al-Shari'a in Tunisia (AST) movement to be responsible for the attacks, but failed to provide evidence." (Jamestown foundation (9 January 2014) *Tunisian Extremists Expand Beyond Their Bases in Jebel Chaambi*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

References:

International Crisis Group (13 February 2013) *Tunisia: Violence and the Salafi Challenge*

[http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/North%20Africa/Tunisia/137-tunisia-violence-and-the-salafi-challenge.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/North%20Africa/Tunisia/137-tunisia-violence-and-the-salafi-challenge.pdf)

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