

Tunisia: Violence and the Salafi Challenge

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Executive Summary

The assassination of Chokri Belaïd, a prominent opposition politician, has thrown Tunisia into its worst crisis since the January 2011 ouster of President Ben Ali. Although culprits have yet to be identified, suspicions swiftly turned to individuals with ties to the Salafi movements. Founded or not, such beliefs once again have brought this issue to the fore. Many non-Islamists see ample evidence of the dangers Salafis embody; worse, they suspect that, behind their ostensible differences, Salafis and An-Nahda, the ruling Islamist party, share similar designs. At a time when the country increasingly is polarised and the situation in the Maghreb increasingly shaky, Tunisia must provide differentiated social, ideological and political answers to three distinct problems: the marginalisation of young citizens for whom Salafism – and, occasionally, violence – is an easy way out; the haziness that surrounds both An-Nahda's views and the country's religious identity; and the jihadi threat that ought to be neither ignored, nor exaggerated.

As elsewhere throughout the region, the Salafi phenomenon has been steadily growing – both its scripturalist component, a quietist type of Islamism that promotes immersion in sacred texts, and its jihadi component, which typically advocates armed resistance against impious forces. It made initial inroads under Ben Ali's authoritarian regime, a response to the repression inflicted on Islamists in general and An-Nahda in particular. A new generation of young Islamists, relatively unfamiliar with An-Nahda, has become fascinated by stories of the Chechen, Iraqi and Afghan resistance.

All that was changed by the 2010-2011 uprising. Scripturalist Salafis, rather discreet and loyal under Ben Ali, began to both vigorously promote their more doctrinaire ideas and pressure An-Nahda, notably on the role of Sharia (or Islamic law) in the new constitution. For their part, jihadis back armed struggle outside of Tunisia, even recruiting fighters for the cause, notably in Syria. Yet they claim to have renounced violence in their own country. Tunisia, they assert, no longer is a land of jihad. It is a land of preaching in which jihadis should take root peacefully, taking advantage of general disorder and the emergence of lawless areas in order to advance Islamic law. As a result, non-Islamists have grown more and more anxious, many among them accusing An-Nahda of conniving with the Salafis and of sharing their ultimate goals.

For now, despite the former regime's ouster, the security vacuum, economic problems, strikes and various protest movements as well as the release and return from exile of numerous jihadis, Tunisia has experienced neither armed conflict, nor widespread violence nor major terrorist attacks. Most instances of Salafi violence – the most striking of which was the 14 September 2012 assault on the U.S. embassy – have been more dramatic than deadly. An-Nahda played no small part, helping to avert the worst thanks to its prudent management of radical religious groups through a mix of dialogue, persuasion and co-optation.

Yet, such management has its limitations. An-Nahda finds itself in an increasingly uncomfortable position, caught between non-Islamists who accuse it of excessive leniency and laxity in dealing with the security threat and Salafis who denounce it whenever it takes a harder line. Based on circumstances – a flare-up in violence or a wave of arrests – the party is condemned by either the former or the latter. An-Nahda itself is divided: between religious preachers and pragmatic politicians as

well as between its leadership's more flexible positions and the core beliefs of its militant base. Politically, such tensions give rise to an acute dilemma: the more the party highlights its religious identity, the more it worries non-Islamists; the more it follows a pragmatic line, the more it alienates its constituency and creates an opening for the Salafis.

There is not much doubt that the non-Islamist opposition has displayed excessive and premature alarm and that it sometimes levels unsubstantiated accusations. Nor is there much question that it is finding it hard to accept the reality of Islamists governing their country. But the fact that they are exaggerated does not mean that these fears are baseless. Rather, it means that one must clearly define and distinguish them, and offer finely-tuned remedies. To arbitrarily lump together incidents linked to poverty and unemployment, attempts to impose a strict moral order, a political assassination and jihadi violence would only draw Salafis toward their more radical wings.

The first trend involves the growing presence of militant Salafis in poor neighbourhoods. They have stepped in to fill the vacuum created by atrophying public services in marginalised areas; in some places, they have become key economic actors. They are known to help with schooling and serve as mediators in local conflicts, administrative issues and even marital problems. In many poor villages and urban centres, they are deeply engaged in the informal economy.

The second trend has to do with the spread of a more dogmatic form of religious expression, signalling a tug of war between two conceptions of Islam, one more and the other less tolerant. Initially relatively minor, vigilante-style violence has become increasingly commonplace; some citizens are reluctant to conduct their business publicly, fearful of provoking the Salafis' ire. The Salafis' influence also is manifested through their control over places of worship and of learning. An-Nahda wagers that this radicalisation of religious discourse is a temporary phenomenon, the unavoidable letting-out of pent-up frustrations after years of repression. It is confident that, by integrating the Salafis into the political system, they will become more moderate. But many party critics view this as a risky gamble that will hasten society's gradual Islamisation from below.

The third trend concerns the existence of armed groups. They have yet to conduct large-scale operations. True, many Tunisian jihadis have been departing for Syria, Mali or Algeria, where they constituted a large portion of the hostage-takers at the In Amenas gas plant. But most jihadis seem willing to focus on proselytising in Tunisia and, at least for now, are not prepared to engage in more serious violence on its soil.

Yet this could get worse. Instability in the Maghreb, porous borders with Libya and Algeria, as well as the eventual return of jihadis from abroad, could spell trouble. Already, the government has had to harden its stance given the rise in violent incidents; the jihadis' tougher discourse vis-à-vis An-Nahda; and growing pressure from parts of public opinion, elements within the interior ministry and, in the wake of the attack on their ambassador, the U.S. As a result, relations between Salafi jihadis and An-Nahda followers have deteriorated. This could lead to a vicious cycle between intensified repression and Salafi radicalisation.

The government and An-Nahda face considerable challenges, made all the more urgent by Chokri Belaïd's murder. The most immediate task is to resolve the current political crisis. Beyond that, it will be to devise responses calibrated to these distinct problems while avoiding a cookie-cutter approach that would stigmatise the most devout of their citizens; provide greater coherence to an increasingly cacophonous

religious space while reassuring secularists; bolster law and order without embracing an exclusively security agenda and while reforming the police and judiciary; and, finally, strengthen cooperation with neighbouring countries in a tense and chaotic context.

In the absence of an appropriate answer by the authorities and the dominant Islamist party, violence in all its shades – whether tied to social, demographic, urban, political or religious causes – could well cross a perilous threshold.

Recommendations

In order to tackle the immediate crisis

To the prime minister, presidency, National Constituent Assembly, An-Nahda, as well as Islamist and non-Islamist political and civil society groups and the Union générale tunisienne du travail (UGTT):

1. Establish an independent committee to investigate Chokri Belaïd's assassination.
2. Establish a national council for dialogue comprising the main political and civil society organisations as well as trade unions to agree on a clear roadmap for the next stages of the transition.

In order to tackle social roots of violence

To the government, National Constituent Assembly and Islamic as well as secular associations:

3. Implement policies designed to provide social and economic support for young residents of poor neighbourhoods and underprivileged regions, focusing on educational and professional opportunities.
4. Support the work of civil society associations in underprivileged areas and encourage cooperation between Islamist and secularist organisations.

To the religious affairs ministry, the scientific committee of Tunis' grand mosque and political as well as civil society organisations, both Islamist and non-Islamist:

5. Issue, after widespread consultation, a charter to guide religious teaching at the grand mosque that would promote a version of Islam rooted in Tunisia's reformist movement and adapted to contemporary challenges.

To An-Nahda:

6. Promote this concept of Islam in its publications and encourage associations with close ties to the party to spread it to its rank and file.

In order to bolster security

To the government and National Constituent Assembly:

7. Lessen feelings of insecurity and reassure security forces by adopting a new law clearly defining their legal status, rights and responsibilities.

To the justice and interior ministries:

8. Implement programs designed to provide consistent law enforcement training.
9. Provide modern, non-lethal crowd-control equipment to the police and national guard.
10. Compile a list of areas most at risk of violence and requiring neighbourhood policing.

To Tunisia's international partners, notably France, Italy, Germany and the U.S.:

11. Support the interior ministry's reforms by:
 - a) establishing exchange and training programs for law enforcement officers; and
 - b) providing financial backing for the modernisation and improvement of non-lethal crowd-control equipment.

To the Tunisian, Libyan and Algerian governments:

12. Ensure greater security cooperation and improve intelligence coordination in border areas.

Tunis/Brussels, 13 February 2013

Tunisia: Violence and the Salafi Challenge

I. Introduction: The Rise of Salafi Violence

Since the fall of the Ben Ali regime in January 2011, violence has been on the rise in Tunisia.¹ Many of the attacks and threats against people and property, particularly vigilante-style activities, have been carried out by Salafis.² The murder of Chokri Belaïd, general secretary of the Parti des patriotes démocrates,³ is symptomatic. Threatened on several occasions by bearded individuals wearing kamis,⁴ 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.⁵ Within hours of his death, activists from the secular party were already accusing Salafis and their supporters of primary responsibility for the crime.⁶

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.⁷ Salafi groups commonly, if discreetly, patrol poor areas to identify alcohol dealers.⁸ 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.⁹

¹ According to the interior ministry, between February 2011 and February 2012, more than 400 police stations were attacked and 12,000 individuals arrested for looting, assault or attempted murder. See "Political transition in Tunisia", Report of the Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Europe, 7 June 2012.

² Autonomous or vigilante justice is the enforcement of laws or moral codes outside official judicial procedure.

³ This is an extreme-left party, with a strong presence on university campuses; it was especially prominent in the 1980s. It is also known as Watad (al-Wataniyyoun al-Demoqratiyyoun). Several leaders of the main trade union, the Union générale tunisienne du travail (UGTT), formerly were members. It is now part of a coalition of twelve extreme left and Arab nationalist political parties and associations called the Front populaire.

⁴ The *kami* or *jellabah* (long white robe) is the usual Salafi form of dress, traditionally worn by the Prophet Muhammad. It was popularised in Islamist circles by the Afghan jihadis in the 1980s. It can be worn over jeans and is generally ankle-length.

⁵ "Tunisie-Chokri Belaïd: 'des salafistes et des nahdhaouis sont derrière mon agression au Kef'", Business News (businessnews.tn), 2 February 2013.

⁶ Crisis Group interviews, secularist party activists, Tunis, 6 February 2013.

⁷ Crisis Group interview, elite brigade officer, Tunis, July 2012. Brothels are tolerated and regulated in Tunis and are located in the old Arab neighbourhoods of big urban centres.

⁸ Crisis Group interviews, residents, Tunis, December 2012.

⁹ This association is led by Adel Almi, a Salafi sheikh known for his ultra-conservative and sometimes bizarre comments. He affirmed on national radio that polygamy helps to fight cancer of the uterus. See "La polygamie aide à lutter contre le cancer de l'utérus !, selon Adel Almi", Business News (businessnews.com.tn), 29 August 2012. Adel Almi reportedly coordinated the attack that led to the resignation of the director of the religious radio station, Radio Zitouna. Graduated from the

Certain incidents attracted international media attention. On 26 June 2011, 100 Salafis destroyed the Afric'Art cinema in Tunis, which was showing a controversial film – “Ni Allah, ni maître”, by the director Nadia Féni, a Tunisian living in France. On 9 October, two weeks before the elections for the National Constituent Assembly (NCA), 200 Salafis tried to set fire to the offices in Tunis of the private television channel Nessma, which had just broadcast Persépolis, a French-Iranian film by Marjane Satrapi.¹⁰

The violence increased and diversified after the new An-Nahda-dominated government took office in December 2011.¹¹ Artists and associations considered secular were the first to suffer.¹² The offices of the main trade union central, the Union générale tunisienne du travail (UGTT), and opposition political party meetings were among the targets.¹³ Initially, the attacks were relatively minor, but as they became more common, especially in the interior, some associations hesitated to move around in the country's interior, where the attacks were more numerous.¹⁴

Salafis clashed with the security forces in the north west, in Jendouba, on 23 February 2012, and with trade unionists on the east coast, in Sfax, on 11 March. On 7 March, there was a major incident when a Salafi took down the national flag from the roof of Manouba University in Tunis and replaced it with the movement's black flag. When a student tried to stop him, a violent brawl ensued.¹⁵ On 25 March, during demonstrations in favour of integrating Sharia into the new constitution, Salafis climbed the clock tower on Habib Bourguiba Avenue, the capital's main road, and again hoisted the black flag, while their comrades violently attacked artists a few hundred metres away.

The Tunisian human rights organisation, the Ligue tunisienne des droits de l'homme (LTDH), began to publish alarming statements.¹⁶ Opposition politicians,

Sorbonne in Islamic history, she was judged to be too liberal. See Asma Ghribi, “Tunisian Islamic radio station in chaos as gov't appointed director rejected”, Tunisia Live (tunisia live.net), 31 January 2012.

¹⁰ A scene from this very left-wing and liberal film, dubbed in Tunisian dialect, was felt to be particularly shocking: the scene where God is represented as having a big grey beard and holding in his hand the film's heroine, with whom he is in conversation. The following Friday, a major demonstration of several thousand people in the capital protested this representation of God. Many An-Nahda activists participated and succeeded in preventing the demonstration getting out of control. In retrospect public reaction was symptomatic of the Arab world's anger at the broadcast of an excerpt from the film “Innocence of Muslims” on YouTube in September 2012.

¹¹ The governmental alliance, or Troika, is composed of An-Nahda, Front démocratique pour le travail et les libertés (FDTL) – the party of Mustapha Ben Jaafar, who is also president of the National Constituent Assembly – and Congrès pour la République (CPR), the party led by President Moncef Marzouki.

¹² In December 2011, at Mekkassi, there was an attack against members of a musical troupe called Awled al-Manajem (Children of the Mines), which gave a concert at the town's cultural centre. In April 2012, a meeting of the Doustourna Association in the south of the country was interrupted violently and its organisers threatened with knives. Crisis Group interview, Jahwar Ben M'Barek, spokesperson for the Doustourna network, Tunis, October 2012.

¹³ On 5 June at Jendouba, Salafis attacked the national office of the UGTT following the general strike organised by the trade union.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, association activists, Tunis, June-December 2012.

¹⁵ The republic's president, the leader of the government and the interior minister, united in their condemnation of this “outrage against one of the symbols of national sovereignty”, paid official homage to this student.

¹⁶ “Les-violences salafistes menacent la sécurité publique” dit la LTDH”, News of Tunisia (newsoftunisia.com), 23 April 2012; “Violence salafiste: la LTDH tire la sonnette d'alarme”, Kapitalis

such as Yadh Ben Achour, former president of the defunct Higher Authority for the Realisation of the Objectives of the Revolution, Political Reform and Democratic Transition (Instance supérieure pour la réalisation des objectifs de la révolution, la réforme politique et la transition démocratique, ISROR), warned of civil war.¹⁷ In May 2012, in Jendouba, a hotel that served alcohol was trashed.¹⁸ Violent clashes between youths in poor neighbourhoods and the security forces followed. The LTDH's president declared, "violent and lawless groups are spreading terror".¹⁹

A series of riots between 12 and 15 June 2012 ended with the reimposition of a curfew for two nights; the climate of fear was such that the three presidents (of the republic, of the NCA and the government) seemed to be afraid while addressing the nation. Many believed that a military coup was imminent.²⁰ These riots followed a Salafi attack on a painting exhibition in a wealthy suburb of the capital. Some Salafis seemed to be galvanised by a message from al-Qaeda ideologue Ayman al-Zawahiri, distributed two days earlier.²¹ Demonstrators burned down police stations, courts, opposition party and UGTT offices and other public buildings. Clashes with the security forces lasted several days, until elite brigades intervened in the peri-urban areas of the capital and negotiations between Nahdawis and Salafis restored calm.²²

During Ramadan in the summer of 2012, clashes involving knives and tear gas among Salafis and between Nahdawis and Salafis regularly erupted near mosques: for example, on 6-7 August, in front of the An-Nour town mosque in the governorate of Siliana, and inside the mosques in al-Hidaya, at Ksar Bardo, in the Béja region.²³ On 16 August, a hundred Salafis wielding swords broke up a cultural event, wound-

(kapitalis.com), 29 May 2012; "Tunisie. La LTDH dénonce les violences des extrémistes religieux à Gabes", Kapitalis, 29 August 2012.

¹⁷ "Tunisie. Des voix mettent en garde contre le spectre de la guerre civile", *Le Courrier de l'Atlas*, 24 April 2012. The ISROR, led by Yadh Ben Achour, was formed in March 2011 and dissolved shortly before the elections of 23 October 2011. Playing the role of a small parliament, it brought together 155 representatives of political parties, civil society, the regions and reputedly independent prominent personalities.

¹⁸ On 3 September 2012, at Sidi Bouzid, in the country's centre-west, the last hotel serving alcohol was also wrecked by the Salafis. "Les salafistes détruisent le dernier débit d'alcool de Sidi Bouzid", *France 24*, 4 September 2012; Crisis Group interview, resident of Sidi Bouzid, Tunis, September 2012.

¹⁹ "Tunisie: les salafistes multiplient les coups d'éclat", *Jeune Afrique*, 27 May 2012.

²⁰ Crisis Group observations, Tunis, June 2012.

²¹ This message ("Dear honest and free Tunisians, the masks have come off. Arise to support the Sharia") appeared to be a response to An-Nahda's refusal to integrate the Sharia into the constitution. At the end of March 2012, Rached Ghannouchi said that article one of the old constitution would not be amended in order to insert a reference to the Sharia.

²² Crisis Group interviews, elite brigade officers, Tunis, July 2012; police superintendent in the poor district of Ettadhamen, Tunis, September 2012; An-Nahda militant, Tunis, 16 June 2012. *Nahdawis* describes An-Nahda supporters.

²³ Crisis Group interview, Béja resident, Tunis, September 2012. An imam was removed violently from the Ain Khadra mosque in Tunis on 23 August. According to a local resident, "the Salafis made him leave the mosque and now want him to get out of the living accommodation attached to it; they cut off the water and electricity. They train with their swords at night, making a noise on purpose. They want to replace him with a Tunisian Salafi imam and invite a Saudi Wahhabi imam who offers the faithful fully-funded three-month training courses in Saudi Arabia". "Tunisie. Des salafistes maltraitent l'imam de la mosquée Errahma à la cité el-Khadhra", Kapitalis (kapitalis.com), 23 August 2012; Crisis Group interview, resident of Ain Khadra, Tunis, September 2012.

ing several people. It seemed that the attack was in response to the presence of Samir Kuntar, a Palestinian militant assumed by many to be Shiite.²⁴

On 14 September, 100 attackers, protesting the film “Innocence of Muslims” on YouTube, breached the defences of the U.S. embassy in Tunis; they were urged on by more than 1,000 demonstrators whose leaders waved Salafi black flags. They caused significant damage. Across the road, the American school was ransacked by Salafis and residents from the surrounding working-class neighbourhoods.

At the end of October, fierce clashes erupted in the poor peri-urban area of Douar Hicher. Salafis attacked a security officer who intervened after they had confronted alcohol dealers. Following the arrest of one of the attackers, Salafis attacked the police station using long knives. Police officers responded with firearms, killing an imam from a local mosque. Violent clashes between Salafis and the National Guard followed, leaving another Salafi dead and several police officers wounded.²⁵

Several *zawaya* (Muslim tombs, mausoleums and religious buildings) belonging to the Sufi brotherhoods and housing *awliya* (sing. *wali*, here meaning saint) were desecrated or burned down: for example, the Saïda Manoubia mausoleum in Tunis, the centrepiece of the *shadiliya* branch of Sufism in Tunisia, on 16 October 2012 and those at Sidi Abdelaziz al-Mahdaoui and Sidi Bou Saïd in the north of the capital on 10 and 12 January 2013.²⁶ Although all the perpetrators of the vandalism were not stopped by the security forces, Salafis were identified on several occasions and arrested.²⁷

After Ben Ali’s fall, some Salafis used firearms in response to attempts by the security forces to apprehend them. For example, on 18 May 2011, at Rouhia, in the west near the Algerian border, locals spotted a group of five Libyans and four Tunisians allegedly with links to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and in possession of weapons and explosives. An exchange of fire between soldiers and the armed group followed, killing two army officers and two members of the armed group.²⁸ On 1 February 2012, at Bir Ali Ben Khalifa, a few dozen kilometres from Sfax, two Salafis –

²⁴ Samir Kantar is a Lebanese Druze of Palestinian origin and a Palestine Liberation Front activist, famous for having spent long years in Israeli prisons. He was released in July 2008 following the war between Israel and Hezbollah and the subsequent accord between the two protagonists. On the morrow of this attack – which was World Al-Quds Day, instituted by the Ayatollah Khomeini in solidarity with the Palestinians – clashes erupted at Gabès, in the south of the country, between two groups composed respectively of about 50 Shiites and Sunni Salafis. See “Tunisie: Bataille rangée entre Chiïtes et Salafistes à Gabès”, Mag14 (mag14.com), 14 August 2012. The Shiites are a very small minority but are a target for the Salafi movement’s rhetoric. Shiites formed a micro-party inspired by the Lebanese Hizbollah, the Parti de l’Union and a pro-Shiite association (Ligue tunisienne pour la tolérance). The Salafis accuse it of being funded by the Iranian Embassy in Tunis in order to spread Shiism in the country and have even created a league to fight Shiism. “La ligue pour la lutte contre le chiisme appelle la fermeture du centre culturel iranien”, Business News (businessnews.com.tn), 21 August 2012.

²⁵ Crisis Group interviews, residents of Douar Hicher, Tunis, November 2012.

²⁶ “Tunisie – Le saccage des mausolées continue ... dans l’impunité”, Tunisie numérique (tunisienumerique.com), 1 November 2012; “Tunisie: le mausolée de Sidi Abdelaziz attaqué”, Investir en Tunisie (investir-en-tunisie.net), 11 January 2013. Sufism is an Islamic mystical practice. It is ostracised by Salafi currents, who believe the mausoleums housing Sufi saints are illicit and idolatrous in the eyes of Islam. *Shadiliya* Sufism is the dominant current of Sufism in North Africa.

²⁷ “Tunisie: arrestation des extrémistes religieux incendiaires du mausolée Saïda Manoubia”, Kapitalis (kapitalis.com), 3 December 2012.

²⁸ See Abdelaziz Barrouhi, “Kaddafi, Aqmi: comment la Tunisie fait front”, *Jeune Afrique*, 6 June 2011; Abdelaziz Barrouhi, “Tunisie: un quatuor d’Al-Qaïda bien inquiétant”, *Jeune Afrique*, 7 June 2011; “Deux morts dans des affrontements à Rouhia”, *La Presse*, 18 May 2011.

convicted under the previous regime for their involvement in the shoot-out at Soliman in January 2007²⁹ – were transporting a bag of weapons in a bus while an accomplice followed them by car. An inspector uncovered their scheme and stopped the bus near a National Guard vehicle; an exchange of fire ensued. After summoning reinforcements, the security forces killed two Salafis and wounded and arrested the accomplice.³⁰

On 10 December 2012, at Kasserine, in the centre west, not far from Algeria, a clash between an armed group and the National Guard resulted in the death of a non-commissioned officer. Following a search in this mountainous area, the interior minister announced the dismantling of Okba Ibn Nafa, a terrorist group under the authority of AQIM, some members of which regularly attended demonstrations organised by Ansar Sharia (Defenders of Sharia),³¹ the main Tunisian Salafi group.³² Finally, on 30 December 2012, following a search for firearms at a house in the poor district of Douar Hicher, the wife of a Salafi was killed and her husband wounded in an exchange of fire with the police. According to the interior ministry, the police responded after being fired upon.³³

Despite the spectacular nature of the violence – some observers compare it to that in neighbouring Algeria during the lead-up to civil war in 1992³⁴ – it should not be exaggerated, or confused with terrorism and assumed to spring from the same causes. It certainly indicates that firearms are moving around the country, sometimes winding up in the hands of radical Islamists. But few have been killed, all of whom have been Salafis; of the fourteen who have died, two did so while on a hunger strike against the arrests following the attack on the American embassy.³⁵

²⁹ This shoot-out, southeast of Tunis, set a group of Salafis against the security forces.

³⁰ Crisis Group interview, police superintendent, Ettadhamen, Tunis, September 2012; “Tunisie. Le groupe de Bir Ali Ben Khalifa est lié à Al Qaïda”, Kapitalis (kapitalis.com), 13 February 2012; Crisis Group interview, senior officer in the special intervention brigades, Tunis, August 2012.

³¹ Ansar Sharia is a jihadi Salafi group formed in April 2011. See Sections II and III of this report.

³² A member of the security forces interviewed by Crisis Group said the group was engaged mainly in smuggling: “Large stocks of weapons circulate in Libya, traffickers have stolen weapons belonging to the Libyan army. Tunisia serves as a kind of transit zone. Some of these weapons are brought into the country and sometimes end up in the hands of AQIM members in Algeria”. Crisis Group interview, security forces member, Tunis, 20 December 2012. Nevertheless, the interior ministry announced that the security forces had arrested sixteen individuals belonging to an armed jihadi group involved in the events of Rouhia and Bir Ali Khalifa and allegedly planning attacks against security institutions. See “Evènements de Jendouba et Kasserine, l’Aqmi est dans le coup”, *La Presse*, 22 December 2012.

³³ “Echange de tirs à Douar Hicher: l’épouse d’un suspect extrémiste trouve la mort”, Leaders (leaders.com.tn), 30 December 2012. This version is disputed by the victim’s family and a human rights organisation. See “Décès de l’épouse d’un salafiste armé à Douar Hicher – La famille de la défunte dément, le MI se tait”, Shems FM, 8 January 2013.

³⁴ “La Tunisie en route vers une guerre civile”, *Le Grand Soir*, 11 June 2012; “Mezri Haddad – ‘La Tunisie est menacée d’une guerre civile identique à celle qui a frappé l’Algérie’”, Espace Manager (espacemanager.com), 17 September 2012; Crisis Group interviews, Algerian academics and journalists, Tunis, July-October 2012.

³⁵ Two Salafis were killed in the armed clashes at Bir Ali Ben Khalifa, four during the Abdellia events, four during the attack on the American Embassy, two during conflicts at Douar Hicher and two from the effects of a hunger strike. See “Attaque de l’ambassade américaine à Tunis: Quatre morts, zéro responsable”, Nawaat (nawaat.org), 26 September 2012. The identity of the commando unit members killed at Rouhia remains unknown. By way of comparison, disputes between clans were responsible for more deaths during 2011. See Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°124, *Tunisia: Confronting Economic and Social Challenges*, 6 June 2012.

The great majority of the violence is relatively limited and stems as much from social and urban problems as religious and political ideas.³⁶ Those involved are usually poorly educated young people, aged 15-35, living in peri-urban areas of major towns or small, neglected villages in the interior. Most are unemployed, have a criminal record and have been to prison.³⁷

The involvement of these youth in Salafism seems to be a way to assert their individuality in a society that rejects them and whose values contradict their religious beliefs.³⁸ Many of them are seasoned urban delinquents. In sociological terms, they broadly belong to the same group as the revolutionary youth that fought the security forces during the December 2010-January 2011 uprising and who, with nothing to do and often disorientated, find in Salafism an identity and outlet for their frustration.

The youth, while recognising that they sometimes slip out of control, say they are often wrongly accused. A young Salafi said:

When people die in a traffic accident, secularists blame the Salafis! If someone dies of a heart attack, it's because of the Salafis! However, it is true that there have been some excesses. The problem for those who have converted to good Islamism [Salafism] is that they continue to be affected by the vulgarity and baseness of their old life. When they have the opportunity to defend Islam, they don't realise what they are doing, resort to violence and cause problems.³⁹

Some of them go so far as to blame for the violence supporters of the old regime, who, they say, pay criminals to wear false beards and carry out attacks for which the sensationalist media blame them. A Salafi affirmed that:

The police found a truck carrying false beards. People stopped another one near Sfax. The "zero point" parties [a sarcastic name given by many Nahdawis and Salafis to opposition secular parties who received low votes in the election] pay unemployed people to create conflict and give us a bad reputation in the media.⁴⁰

³⁶ In many ways, the situation is comparable to that experienced in Cairo during the 1980s with the Jamaa Islamiyya. See Patrick Haenni, *L'ordre des Caid's. Conjurer la dissidence urbaine au Caire* (Karthala/CEDEJ, 2005).

³⁷ Crisis Group interviews, residents of several regions of the country, members of the security forces, An-Nahda militants, scripturalist and jihadi Salafis, June-December 2012.

³⁸ Crisis Group interview, young jihadi Salafis, Tunis, June-September 2012. Some of these young people "are not dangerous", explained a sociologist. "To become a Salafi is a way of opening the door to paradise. It is also a way of gaining respect from society. Most young jihadi Salafis have a very individualist relationship with politics. They do not like the discipline of organisations. They are more like anarcho-Islamists who have cobbled together a cultural and political vision made up of jihadi images and sounds that they experience vicariously through the internet. They want to live a self-absorbed lifestyle. However, as they are not well-off and cannot therefore do this, they do what they can!" Crisis Group interview, Tunisian sociologist, 3 December 2012. This construction of identity is also found among Salafi women. Monica Marks, a doctoral student who has been studying the question for more than a year says: "I got quite close to a woman who wore a full-face veil and said she was a Salafi. She was very much an individualist and did not belong to any political group. She was very nice and had invented a world rather than forged a political identity. I remember seeing the desktop image on her laptop, which had a jihadi logo on the right (a man mounted on a rearing horse and waving a black flag), and a pink AK-47 machine gun right in the middle!" Crisis Group interview, Tunis, 20 August 2012.

³⁹ Crisis Group interview, young jihadi Salafi, Tunis, September 2012.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, young Salafi imam in a poor district, Tunis, August 2012.

Several An-Nahda militants and leaders also think that some of the violence is organised by businessmen close to the old regime.⁴¹ Some Nahdawis and Salafis blame foreigners or former members of Ben Ali's party, the Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique (RCD), dissolved two years ago,⁴² for the assassination of Chokri Belaïd.⁴³

Although it would be inappropriate to lump together all acts of Salafi violence, it would also be a mistake to ignore them or discount the possibility that their intensity might increase. The attacks against what the Salafis believe to be profane symbols are very real. Moreover several perpetrators gained combat experience in Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia or Iraq during the Ben Ali era.⁴⁴ According to secularist militants, close to 2,000 Tunisians, including jihadis, are currently fighting in Syria on the side of the fundamentalist opposition and could, on their return to Tunisia, swell the ranks of those who have remained at home.⁴⁵ For the moment, An-Nahda seems to be caught in the crossfire between a sometimes violent Salafi challenge and a secular opposition ready to criticise the least mistake.⁴⁶ On one side, the Salafi movement, popular among ordinary people, is pushing it to concede on the question of religious identity. On the other are mostly non-Islamist political activists, mainly members of the educated middle class, who accuse it of taking a lax attitude to Salafi violence and allowing hardline preachers to establish themselves.

In addition to the security dimensions, the spectre of jihadi radicalisation gives Nahdawis a card to play against their secular rivals. The former often use the threat of violence to justify pushing religion to the forefront of society and politics, which they argue will cut the ground from under the feet of radical Islamists.⁴⁷ The latter, by contrast, stress the dangers posed by Salafis; they argue that An-Nahda is playing

⁴¹ Crisis Group interviews, An-Nahda activists, Tunis, Sousse, June-December 2012. A leader of An-Nahda's political bureau alleged that several Salafis arrested during the events in Abdelia in June 2012 were members of the underworld paid by supporters of the old regime to burn public buildings, especially the courts. Crisis Group interview, An-Nahda executive member, Tunis, September 2012.

⁴² Crisis Group interview, An-Nahda militants, 10 February 2013; see also the Salafi Talaba Revolution Facebook page "fr", www.facebook.com/Talaba.Revolution.fr. The RCD was officially dissolved on 9 March 2011.

⁴³ "Ghannouchi affirme que l'assassin de Belaïd n'est pas Tunisien", DirectInfo, 8 February 2013. See Talaba Revolution "fr", op. cit.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, senior special intervention brigades officer, Tunis, August 2012.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, activists of Nida Tounes and the Tunisian Labour Party (Parti des travailleurs tunisiens, PTT), Tunis, December 2012. Nida Tounes is the political party of the former prime minister, Béji Caïd Essebsi. The PTT is the new name, since July 2012, of the Communist Party of Tunisian Workers (Parti communiste des ouvriers de Tunisie, PCOT) led by Hamma Hammami.

⁴⁶ Throughout 2012, countless arguments marred relations between the Islamist party, some of its allies in the Troika, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition parties, civil society groups, and the UGTT. A Nahdawi deputy explained: "The political landscape has not achieved a sufficient degree of consensus to make it possible to govern in a normal way. A lot of people are hoping we will fail and keep on putting spokes in the wheel. If you were to listen to them, you would think we are the cause of all the world's problems". Crisis Group interview, Zyed Lakhdari, An-Nahda deputy, Tunis, 3 September 2012. The opposition generally believes that An-Nahda shows hegemonic inclinations, reproduces the clientelism and nepotism typical of the Ben Ali era and, in particular, lets the Salafi groups Islamise society through both preaching and violence. Two Arab language dailies reflect the polarisation of these points of view, *Al-Fajr*, An-Nahda's paper and *Le Maghreb*. Some people say they only read these two newspapers and, as a professor of history at a Tunis faculty said: "the truth is somewhere in the middle!" Crisis Group interviews, professor of history, Tunis, September 2012.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interviews, An-Nahda activists and supporters, Tunis, Sfax, June-December 2012.

the sorcerer's apprentice to the detriment of the security and freedom of the country's citizens.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Tunisians close to secularist parties and civil society groups, Tunis, June-December 2012.

II. Salafism: An Ambiguous Expression

The definition and analysis of the currents composing Salafism are widely debated by specialists.⁴⁹ Salafism generally refers to the Sunni Muslims who adhere to a literal, hardline and puritan version of Islam and who try to follow the example of their pious ancestors (*salaf al-salih*), the first three generations of Muslims.⁵⁰ Theologically speaking, it is a laudatory expression that applies to purist Sunni Muslims who follow the path traced by their Islamic ancestors. Politically speaking, it tends to apply to contemporary Islamist tendencies that, contrary to most heirs of the Muslim Brotherhood, such as An-Nahda, still hesitate to accept the categories of modern Western political thought, to renounce fundamentalist preaching and to reject violence (war, guerrilla war, terrorism, vigilantism).⁵¹

Most advocate the strict application of Islamic law (Sharia), including corporal punishment, the obligation to wear a veil or niqab (full-face veil), separation of the sexes in public spaces and a ban on alcohol and prostitution. They do not recognise either Western democracy or the universal nature of human rights and sometimes refuse to accept the concept of nation-state.

In Tunisia, Salafis can be divided into two categories: scripturalist (*al-salafiyya al-ilmiiyya*) and jihadi (*al-salafiyya al-jihadiyya*). The former, which is quietest and literalist, is a form of Sunni Islamism that promotes immersion in sacred texts. It hardly differs from Saudi Wahhabism, is generally peaceful and tends to remain close to regimes in power.⁵² Jihadi Salafism is in favour of armed resistance to non-Muslim military and political forces that it believes are oppressing Muslims. According to this current, there are three versions of the armed struggle (minor jihad):⁵³ internal, which targets Muslim regimes considered to be impious; irredentist, which fights to free land under occupation; and finally, global, which is the fight against the West.⁵⁴

However even though these descriptions of scripturalist and jihadi Salafism mean something to the actors, they no longer reflect the same political practices and ideological vision that they did in the 2000s. Since then, scripturalist Salafis have focused on developing associations and have tried to gain political influence. Although jihadis still believe in the armed struggle, they say that Tunisia is a land for preaching and not for jihad. They therefore currently refuse to resort to violence against the Tunisian state even if they continue to support Islamic combatants in other coun-

⁴⁹ Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°37, *Understanding Islamism*, 2 March 2005 and Bernard Rougier (dir.), *Qu'est-ce que le salafisme?* (Paris, 2008).

⁵⁰ See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°124, *Tunisia: Confronting Economic and Social Challenges*, N°131, *Tentative Jihad: Syria's Fundamentalist Opposition*, 12 October 2012.

⁵¹ See Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism", in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (New York, 2009), pp. 244-266; François Burgat, "Salafistes contre Frères Musulmans", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, June 2010. Salafis insist on Muhammad's dogma, words, gestures and attitudes. They are hostile to the cult of saints and are particularly hostile to Shiites. In Tunisia, their cultural practices are different from the great majority of Nahdawis. For example, most Salafis believe that Islam forbids listening to music.

⁵² For one An-Nahda leader, often described as a Salafi by non-Islamists, and for the spokesperson of a radical Islamist party, the Hizb ut-Tahrir, Wahhabism and scripturalist Salafism are one and the same. Crisis Group interviews, Sadok Chourou, An-Nahda leader, Tunis, September 2012; Ridha Belhaj, Hizb ut-Tahrir spokesperson, Sousse, September 2012.

⁵³ Jihad minor is different from jihad major, which is the struggle against oneself and the passions.

⁵⁴ See Crisis Group report, *Understanding Islamism*, op. cit.

tries, such as the Syrian fundamentalist insurgents and the Ansar Al-Din Salafis in Mali, considering themselves members of the same ideological family.⁵⁵ There are about 50,000 Tunisians who adhere to scripturalist or jihadi Salafi beliefs, as well as the accompanying physical and sartorial conventions, though they are not organised politically.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interviews, jihadi Salafis, Tunis, June-December 2012. See Talaba Revolution “fr”, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶ The country’s population is about eleven million. Crisis Group interviews, residents of several regions, members of the security forces, An-Nahda militants, scripturalist and jihadi Salafis, Tunis, Sfax, June-December 2012. Men grow a beard more than seven centimetres long, but no moustache and wear kamis; the women generally wear the niqab, a veil that covers the whole face except for the eyes.

III. The Evolution of Salafism in Tunisia

A. *The Development of Scripturalist and Jihadi Salafism under Ben Ali*

1. The search for identity

In the wake of 11 September 2001, An-Nahda militants were ageing, mostly in prison or exile. They less and less embodied the kind of radicalism that attracted the attention of security forces. New forms of Islamic religiosity and protest gradually were attracting young people, who knew very little about An-Nahda. They were more attracted to Osama bin Laden than to the Ayatollah Khomeini or Hassan al-Turabi.⁵⁷

The Bush administration's declaration of war against terrorism had an enormous impact on Tunisians. Western discourse, perceived by some as anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim, reminded them of that of their own government and therefore provoked an intense questioning of their identity. The government had stymied society in political and religious terms; the imams appointed by the interior ministry, as a Sfax resident said, "did not address the real problems".⁵⁸ At the same time, the country was in the throes of cultural and social changes that potentially could be psychologically destabilising. Many Tunisians felt they had lost their bearings, especially with regard to the division of roles between men and women in the family, respect for elders and the sexual practices of the young.⁵⁹

Many citizens began to turn towards the *fatwas* of preachers – of which large numbers appear on satellite television channels funded by Saudi Arabia – who promoted a hardline, individualist conception of Islam.⁶⁰ They also attentively followed news of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, broadcast continuously by the Qatar's Al Jazeera and the Lebanese Al-Manar. A more austere and paradoxically more modern religious identity,⁶¹ much in vogue among immigrants in Europe and in the Middle East, expressed itself in the form of new dress codes and personal appearance – the use of khamis and beards by men and the hijab (veil) by women.⁶²

Discussion groups, which sometimes coalesced into veritable communities, increased in universities, cafés and mosques in poor neighbourhoods. Some cultivated a puritan, apolitical religious attitude influenced by classic Saudi preachers like Sheikh Ibn Baz and Sheikh Salih Ibn Fawzan al-Fawzan. These "scripturalist" Salafis were generally tolerated by the government.⁶³ Others – the "jihadi Salafis" – devel-

⁵⁷ Hassan al-Turabi was the former leader of the Sudanese Muslim brothers. He was said to be close to Rached Ghannouchi at the end of the 1980s. Crisis Group interviews, An-Nahda activists, Tunis, August 2011.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interview, Sfax region resident, Sfax, September 2012.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interviews, residents of Tunis, Sfax, Sidi Bouzid, Sousse, June 2011.

⁶⁰ The most influential channels in Tunisia were, at that time, the Egyptian channels Nass, Arrahma and El Hikma and the Saudi channels Iqraa, El Khalijiyya, la Mecque Parabolique and Ben Athaymin. Crisis Group interviews, Sfax and Tunis residents, Tunis, November 2012. Also see Mahdi Ben Youssef, Sofien Ben Sgheir and Khair-Eddine Bacha, *Le salafisme en Tunisie, réalité et perspectives d'évolution* (Tunis, 2012).

⁶¹ See Patrick Haenni, *L'islam de marché: l'autre révolution conservatrice* (Paris, 2005).

⁶² Wearing the full-face veil was rare and virtually criminalised.

⁶³ A certain number of Nahdawis and jihadis affirmed that scripturalist Salafis informally collaborated with the security services. Many say that the regime encouraged them in order to counter the jihadis and the *khawanjiyya* – a regime nickname for the Muslim Brotherhood – which inspired An-Nahda. Crisis Group interviews, An-Nahda activists, Salafi jihadis, Tunis, June-November 2012.

oped a violently anti-Western and anti-imperialist stance inspired largely by the same Wahhabi theological references.⁶⁴ The government relentlessly hunted down the latter and went after their distinctive symbols.

2. Terrorism and counter-terrorism under the old regime

In hindsight the extent of the jihadi combatant networks was both over- and underestimated. Human rights defenders saw the dictatorship's allegations of a terrorist threat as manipulative,⁶⁵ an excuse for justifying restrictions on civil liberties. However a new generation of young Islamists that had never known An-Nahda certainly existed. Fascinated by the Chechen, Iraqi and Afghan resistance, they would sometimes turn to Muslim scholars (*shuyukh*) connected to international jihadi networks.

In 2000, an organisation classified as terrorist by the United Nations Security Council, the Groupe combattant tunisien (GCT) – whose first emir was Saif Allah Ben Hassine, known as Abu Ayad, who later became the leader of Ansar Charia after the regime was overthrown⁶⁶ – was created abroad.⁶⁷ It helped organise the assassination in Afghanistan, on the eve of 11 September 2001, of Sheikh Massoud, a key figure in the Afghan resistance against the Soviet Union in the 1980s.⁶⁸ Networks to transport jihadis to Iraq, via Syria, were organised in the south of the country, for example at Ben Guerdane, on the Libyan border.⁶⁹ In addition dozens of Tunisians recruited in Western Europe mosques – notably in Milan, at the Fila Jnar mosque and at Islamic culture centre – fought with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ These Salafis were also influenced by non-Wahhabi ideas, for example, those of the Muslim Brotherhood theoretician, Sayd Qutb.

⁶⁵ Some lawyers who defended young Salafis imprisoned by the Ben Ali regime believed that jihadi Salafism was above all the creation of a regime seeking to impart a high degree of credence to the terrorist threat in order to justify restrictions on civil liberties. According to this version of events, the regime allowed and even encouraged the small-scale development of the phenomenon. According to one lawyer: "The logistics of going to Iraq are not easy. The political police could have stopped them going if it had really wanted to. Each case involved between thirteen and fifteen individuals. The evidence mentioned the first names. Lawyers asked the examining magistrates where the people in question were being held and suggested that the magistrates had in fact recruited these people, but they denied it". Crisis Group interview, lawyer, September 2012. A Nahdawi lawyer noted: "I have defended some of them. I am certain that the Salafis are just a creation of the anti-terrorism law. Until 2004, I hadn't met any, then suddenly, I was taken by surprise by their presence and their extremist language in comparison to the tone adopted in the mosques. The regime had a lot of agents-provocateurs, while the political police infiltrated working-class communities, adopted a jihadi discourse and informed on anyone who was receptive". Crisis Group interview, lawyer, An-Nahda militant, Tunis, September 2012.

⁶⁶ Abou Ayadh, whose real name is Seifallah Ben Hassine, is the leader of Ansar Sharia, which represents part of the jihadi Salafi movement. He is reported to have fought in Afghanistan and to be close to Abou Qatada, an ideologue of the al-Qaeda movement. Abou Ayadh was arrested in 2003 in Turkey and extradited to Tunisia. Sentenced to 43 years in prison, he was released under the terms of the amnesty for political prisoners after Ben Ali's fall.

⁶⁷ See United Nations Security Council 1390, 16 January 2002. The founders include Ben Mohamed Tahar al-Nasri alias Abou Doujana, a former member of the Front islamique tunisien (FIT), Tarak al-Maaroufi, a Brussels resident of Tunisian origin, and Amor Sliti, a close associate of Sheikh Abou Katada, ideologue close to al-Qaeda.

⁶⁸ Tarak al-Maaroufi, member of the GCT, recruited Dahman Abdelsatar and Bouraoui El Waer in Brussels, the two perpetrators of the suicide attack on Sheikh Massoud.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, former head of the anti-terrorism department, Tunis, October 2012.

⁷⁰ They were trained by Samid Essid, who was to take charge of organising Ansar Sharia's preaching and charitable work after Ben Ali's fall. A reception cell was operational in Jalalabad in Afghani-

The 11 April 2012 terrorist attack on the Ghriba synagogue⁷¹ brought the regime fully into the war on terrorism. The regime enacted the law 2003-75 of 10 December 2003, also known as the “anti-terrorism law” – in concert with international, regional and bilateral conventions. The government’s anti-terrorism policy indiscriminately targeted many young people without ending the terrorist threat, which became serious in 2006.⁷²

Close to 2,000 people were imprisoned⁷³ on various charges that ranged from accessing jihadi websites to successful or aborted attempts to join the Iraqi and Afghan resistance.⁷⁴ According to one lawyer working on these issues at the time, “most of them had never even heard of Salafism, Wahhabism or Jihadism! They didn’t even know why they had been arrested!”⁷⁵ Despite the massive number incarcerated, a violent shoot-out in January 2007 took place at Soliman, to the south east of Tunis, between an Islamist group and the security forces.⁷⁶ It revealed the weakness of the security apparatus, which hitherto had a spotless reputation.⁷⁷

stan. It was led by Abou Doujana and Adel Ben Ahmed Ibrahim. The latter, known as Abou Bilal, was close to Osama bin Laden. Also see Mahdi Ben Youssef, Sofien Ben Sgheir and Khair-Eddine Bacha, *op. cit.*

⁷¹ This suicide bomb attack, in front of an important pilgrimage site, killed 21 people and was carried out by a Tunisian from Ben Guerdane, on the border with Libya. Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility. It was the biggest such attack in Tunisia’s history. Before that, in 1986, there were terrorist attacks against the Sousse and Monastir hotels, injuring several people. Responsibility for those attacks was claimed by Jihad islamique, a small dissident group of the Mouvement de la tendance islamique (MTI). That same year the Front islamique tunisien (FIT), close to the Algerian Front islamique du salut (FIS) and some members of the MTI, was formed and proclaimed an armed struggle. It was reportedly involved in these attacks. Some of its members were to become leaders of the Front de la réforme (Jabat al-Islah), a political party legalised in 2012. The MTI never really fulfilled its declaration, except for burning down the offices of Bab Souika’s Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique (RCD) in the early 1990s. Crisis Group interviews, An-Nahda militants, Tunis, September 2012 and former head of the anti-terrorism department, Tunis, December 2012.

⁷² Crisis Group interview, former head of the anti-terrorism department, Tunis, December 2012.

⁷³ See “La torture en Tunisie et ‘la loi anti-terroriste’ du 10 December 2003. Faits et témoignages afin que cesse l’impunité”, Association de lutte contre la torture en Tunisie (ALTT) and Comité pour le respect des libertés et des droits de l’homme en Tunisie (CRLDHT), 10 July 2008. According to young Salafis and human rights defenders, several thousand people were locked up or tortured at police stations. Crisis Group interviews, Nahdawis, Salafis, human rights defenders, Tunis, Sfax, June-December 2012. Also 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.

⁷⁴ According to one resident of Tunis jailed under this law for uninstalling computer spyware in his cybercafé, it was in prison that many young people really discovered the thinking and networks of global jihad, after contact with the *shuyukh* and combatants returning from the Middle East. Crisis Group interview, Tunis resident imprisoned 2007-2009, Tunis, November 2012.

⁷⁵ Crisis Group interview, lawyer, member of an association defending political prisoners, Tunis, September 2012.

⁷⁶ In April 2006, about 20 Tunisians led by a former member of the National Guard recruited in Milan by the Algerian Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat (GSPC) infiltrated Tunisia from Nigeria through the mountainous region of Djebel Chambi. About fifteen young people from Sousse, dreaming of jihad but unable to join the Iraqi resistance, joined him. They stationed themselves in the Ain Tbornog hills in the Grombalia region a few hours’ march away from the tourist areas they intended to target. Thousands of security agents were positioned around the hotels and the region’s hilly areas. The hunt for the group lasted ten days and ended on 3 January 2007 with a shoot-out at Soliman, south east of Tunis. Several members of the group and one member of the security forces were killed. After trial, two individuals were condemned to death and 28 were given prison sentences of between five years and life. They were released one month after Ben Ali’s fall.

B. *The Salafis and the Shock of the Uprising*

1. General amnesty for Salafis

Although the Salafis sat out the December 2010-January 2011 uprising, the Islamist movement as a whole was shocked by developments. The moderate Islamists of An-Nahda came to power. The scripturalist Salafis, who had been rather discreet and loyal under Ben Ali, now began to vigorously promote their hardline ideas through their associations, which put pressure on Ghannouchi's party. The jihadi Salafis, still captivated by Osama bin Laden, nevertheless renounced jihad and violence to concentrate on preaching. Finally, Islamist political parties to the right of An-Nahda and at the confluence of all these networks joined in the political game through legal strategies.

By the time two weeks had passed since Ben Ali's fall, one phenomenon had ceased to attract media attention:⁷⁸ the government released all imprisoned under the 2003 anti-terrorism law. According to a senior officer in the Brigade d'intervention spéciale, "1,200 Salafis, including 300 who fought in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen and Somalia, left prison".⁷⁹ At the same time, many scripturalist and jihadi Salafi *shuyukh*, mostly imams at mosques in Western Europe, returned to the country. They began to frequent mosques and helped the faithful to chase out religious leaders appointed by the old regime.⁸⁰

2. The new scripturalist Salafis as a lobby

Scripturalist Salafis made the most of the new context. Under the former regime, most had been content to conduct extremely discreet proselytising within a closed, quietist community. A scripturalist Salafi explained, "the revolution broke down the wall of fear. Now we have to conceptualise a new kind of thinking for a new era".⁸¹

See "Comment les salafistes ont été neutralisés", *Jeune Afrique*, 7 January 2008; Crisis Group interview, former head of the anti-terrorism department, Tunis, November 2012.

⁷⁷ Speaking about these events, an officer in an elite brigades unit said: "thousands of armed agents were mobilised for more than ten days against five or six Kalashnikovs! There was something not quite right about this. Contrary to what the regime was saying, the security forces were not really prepared for this type of armed conflict". Crisis Group interview, elite brigades officer, Tunis, July 2012.

⁷⁸ During the first three months of the transition, most analysts noted the absence of radical Islamism from the uprising and believed that the movement had run out of steam. Talk of the Salafi danger was reminiscent of Ben Ali's discourse, although it did not get much coverage in the media. Supporters of the old regime used social networks to circulate sensationalist videos warning of the danger, such as a short amateur film showing a street march in Tunis on 15 January 2011 organised by Hizb ut-Tahrir, a radical pan-Islamist party. However only the most secular fringe of organisations, political groups and observers were alert to the first manifestations of violence: an attack on a cultural centre in the medina of Tunis and an attempt to close brothels in the medinas of Tunis, Sfax and Kairouan in February 2011. Many spoke of "manipulation by former RCDists". See Crisis Group Report, *Popular Protests in North Africa and the Middle East (IV): Tunisia's Way*, op. cit.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, senior special intervention brigades officer, Tunis, August 2012. This wave of releases was part of a general amnesty for political prisoners announced on 20 January 2011 and officially promulgated on 19 February under pressure from human rights activists, including a certain number of Nahdawis. The second wave of releases included the 30 jihadis convicted in the Soliman shoot-out. Crisis Group interview, An-Nahda regional official in Sousse, Sousse, 7 October 2012.

⁸⁰ Many of them fled. Crisis Group interview, imam from a mosque in a working-class district, Tunis, November 2012.

⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, scripturalist Salafi, Tunis, August 2012.

Their most prominent figure, Béchir Ben Hassen, came to behave like a spokesperson for a pressure group.⁸² Received by the president in September 2012, he suggested making Friday, the day of public prayer, a day off.⁸³ The justice ministry recently mandate him to educate prisoners about religion. He also declared that according to Islam, the general strike organised by the UGTT on 12 December 2012 was illegal.⁸⁴

The scripturalist Salafis also campaigned for the inclusion of a reference to Sharia in the constitution,⁸⁵ a cause that was helped by the involvement of Nahdawi preachers such as Sadok Chourou and Habib Ellouz. Particularly well represented in mosques and very influential in the Islamic associations that emerged after the uprising, they multiplied and intensified their activities throughout the country.⁸⁶ It seems that they formed *Nur al-Bayyan* (here meaning *The Truth*) a network of close to 200 Islamic nursery schools where niqab-clad women, without legal permission to teach, gave courses in religious education to young children. Wearing the niqab was obligatory for girls and the sexes were separated.⁸⁷ The scripturalist Salafis were at the heart of the rivalry between Islamists for control of the traditional Zitouna education system.⁸⁸ It seems they were successful in positioning themselves at the centre of the new religious space that opened up after Ben Ali's fall.

⁸² Béchir Ben Hassen lived in exile in France for several years where he was imam at Noisy-le-Grand in the Paris region. He was educated at Oum al-Koura University in Saudi Arabia.

⁸³ "Tunisie: Le prédicateur salafiste Bechir Ben Hassen veut imposer Vendredi un jour de repos hebdomadaire", Tunisie numérique (tunisienumerique.com), 26 September 2012.

⁸⁴ "Tunisie – Un prédicateur salafiste montrera le "droit" chemin aux prisonniers", Tunisie numérique, 23 November 2012; "Tunisie – Accord "crucial" conclu par le gouvernement", Tunisie numérique, 6 December 2012; "Le cheikh Ben Hassen déclare la grève 'haram'", Mag14 (mag14.com), 5 December 2012. The UGTT executive cancelled this general strike on 12 December. The announcement marked the culmination of sharp tension between the UGTT and An-Nahda, the two main mass organisations in the country.

⁸⁵ To this end, they circulated a petition to NCA deputies in March 2012. Crisis Group interview, An-Nahda militant, Tunis, 28 March 2012.

⁸⁶ There are more than 150 of them. The four most important (the Association tunisienne des sciences religieuses, the Ligue des scientifiques et des prédicateurs, the Association tunisienne des imams des mosquées and the Ligue des associations coraniques) formed a network of associations (the Front tunisien des associations islamiques) in the wake of the demonstrations calling for Sharia to be included in the constitution in March 2012. The front is currently led by Sheikh Mokhtar Jebali, who is close to scripturalist Salafism and a graduate of the University of Tunis Grand Mosque. Some have worked closely with prominent Saudi personalities and institutions. This cooperation reportedly takes place within the framework of the "Monassaha" (The Council) program promoted by Emir Neif Ben Abdelaziz, the former Saudi interior minister. These associations also operate under the patronage of associations in the Wahhabi kingdom such as *Tarahamou* (Let Us Be Merciful). See Mahdi Ben Youssef, Sofien Ben Sgheïr, Khair-Eddine Bacha, op. cit.

⁸⁷ See "Tunisie. Les jardins d'enfants gérés par des associations religieuses se multiplient hors de tout cadre légal", Kapitalis (kapitalis.com), 24 September 2012; "Une prolifération inquiétante", *La Presse*, 17 January 2013; Crisis Group interview, activist of the Association tunisienne des femmes démocrates, Tunis, 2 December 2012.

⁸⁸ This is the traditional education system based at Zitouna University (*Az-zaytûna*) at Tunis's grand mosque, known by the same name. This is the oldest Arab and Islamic University. It was founded in 116 A.H., which corresponds to 734 CE of the Gregorian calendar. It provided secondary and higher education courses until 1958. In general terms, the teachers fulfilled the function of *shuyukh*. Teaching resumed at the start of Ben Ali's presidency in 1987 but stopped again in 1990. On 12 May 2012, teaching officially began again but the struggle for control between the various Islamic tendencies held back its development. Houcine Laabidi, head imam of the Tunis Grand Mosque, distinguished himself by fiery preaching and a hardline discourse.

3. The new jihadi Salafis: violence and putting down local roots

Like the scripturalist Salafis, the jihadis adapted their theory and practice to the post-Ben Ali era. While their networks recruited for the Middle East – their main destination henceforth were Syria via Libya and Turkey⁸⁹ – almost this entire current unanimously believes that jihad should not be conducted in Tunisia. On the contrary it is a land of preaching, where Salafis should put down roots peacefully.

In practical terms, the guidelines issued by the country's most influential *shuyukh* advocated non-violent preaching. The leader of Ansar Charia, the jihadi Salafi group, said on national radio and videos disseminated via social networks that jihadis should remain calm and continue peaceful preaching. He said that violence is a trap, the result of manipulation and provocation, in which jihadi Salafis fall because they lack structure and discipline.⁹⁰

This point of view seems to accord with the principal doctrinal evolution of international jihadi theoreticians, some of whom have influenced al-Qaeda.⁹¹ Since the mid-2000s, an entire body of online literature and jihadi websites, such as Ansar al-Moujaidine, has tried to critically assess the strategy of global jihad; with the "Arab Spring", the reassessment accelerated. It divided Muslim countries into "lands of jihad" and "lands of stewardship".⁹² Where tyrannical regimes still hold power (lands of jihad), it is necessary to fight them. Where they have been overthrown, as in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya (lands of stewardship), the situation differs.

According to this understanding of the last several years, the fall of dictatorships weakened states, which developed lawless zones that tend towards autonomous tribal administration;⁹³ jihadi Salafis should occupy these spaces, in which they should promote Islamic law. This will enable them to prepare physically and psychologically for the chaos that is spreading at the planetary level and lead the fight to reconstruct the Islamic nation.⁹⁴ This eschatological, even millenarian vision characterises the

⁸⁹ Crisis Group interviews, residents of Médenine and Ben Guerdane, Médenine, June 2012 and Tunisian lawyer, Tunis, September 2012.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, jihadi Salafi, Tunis, September 2012; Ridha Belhaj, Hizb ut-Tahrir spokesperson, Sousse, September 2012; "Abou Iyed: 'Ansar Al Chariaa n'a pas appelé ses adhérents à manifester, ce vendredi'", Express FM, 2 November 2012. In a sermon preached at Al-Fath Mosque in the centre of Tunis after the attack on the American Embassy, Abou Ayadh said that Ansar Sharia is indebted to the Tunisian people; that he did not intend to allow outbreaks of violence to continue unopposed; and that he intended to continue to deploy his preaching talents in poor areas. See Talaba Revolution "fr", op. cit.

⁹¹ The most well-known by young Tunisians are Abu Qatada al-Filistini, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Mohammad al-Makdasi, Abou al-Mundhir al-Shinqiti and Hani Mohammed Yusuf al-Siba'i. Crisis Group interviews, jihadi Salafis, Tunis, June-September 2012.

⁹² Aaron Y. Zelin, an American expert on jihadism says that the distinction between land of preaching and land of jihad made by Ansar Sharia in Tunisia and Libya stems firstly from that made by Abou al-Nour al-Makdassi in 2004 between *qital al-nikayya* (fight to harm the enemy) and *qital al-tamkin* (fight to consolidate your own strength). See Aaron Y. Zelin, "Maqdisi's Disciples in Libya and Tunisia", *Foreign Policy*, 14 November 2012. Also see, Abou Khaled al-Adam, *Kitab At-tamqin* (unknown, 2011).

⁹³ See Abou Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, www.wcfia.harvard.edu/olin/images/Management%20of%20Savagery%20-%2005-23-2006.pdf; Abou Khaled al-Adam, *Le monde aux portes du chaos* (Dar al-Fajr lil Ahlam, 2011).

⁹⁴ Abou Khaled al-Adam said, "In Arab countries, especially in countries where revolutions were part of a chain reaction, the revolution could not be reversed. Because they were freed from the dictator's yoke, these countries are on course to resume primitive forms of Arab life that were present before the modern state was established. Let all Arab countries be guided towards constructive cha-

teachings of Tunisian jihadi *shuyukh*, notably Khatib Idrissi,⁹⁵ who exercises substantial ideological influence:

The union between Muslims and application of the divine law necessarily will take place at the level of the Islamic nation (*umma*). There is no possibility of returning to divided and local states. The Prophet said that several regimes would succeed each other after his death (the caliphate, a dynastic regime based on inheritance and a tyrannical regime) and that God would bring each of them to an end in turn. With the Tunisian revolution, God has begun to end the tyrannical regime. The next regime will be a new caliphate where we will at last live in accordance with the rules decreed by our Prophet. We currently are in an intermediate phase. The countries where regimes have fallen never will regain stability. Chaos (*faouudha*) will persist until the people awaken and the remaining regimes disappear. The Mehdi (Messiah) expected in the Arab countries will unite all Muslims.⁹⁶

A close associate of Abou Ayadh said that the most important short-term objective therefore consists of taking advantage of the weaknesses of the state to preach and put down roots.⁹⁷ According to a member of the security forces, the jihadis use religious preaching in order to discredit all institutions:

They say, “Look, nothing works, it is because people are not following the Prophet’s example”. They want to push people into ignoring the elections and political parties so that they can call for what Salafis present as the final solution: the strict application of Islamic law.⁹⁸

This effort to implant themselves takes several forms and, in the final analysis, it seems that jihadi Salafis have been successful in carving out a place for themselves in the urban economy of poor districts and villages throughout the country. In the wake of the regime’s fall, jihadis established small groups, of between three and twenty individuals, that did not coordinate among themselves. They elected their own emirs, who serve a kind of sheikh responsible for supervising and recruiting followers.⁹⁹ Some of these Muslim leaders are not trained scholars, though they have mastered elements of the science of the *hadiths* (prophetic stories or sayings) and customs from the internet forums of the international jihadi community.

os. ... The Arab revolutions herald a period of a power vacuum that prefigures generalised chaos and that will reestablish the reign of the tribes in the Arab region. This will completely shatter the world order established before the revolution. This could be a major factor in destabilising the Western economy. Advice to the jihadi elite: Keep your weapons. Prepare to do battle with the internal and external enemies. Prepare for the institution of the caliphate. Prepare to implement suitable strategies to fill the power vacuum and administer the areas outside state control that will appear after the collapse of the regimes in place”. Ibid.

⁹⁵ Khatib Idrissi is from Sidi Ali Ben Aoun in the governorate of Sidi Bouzid. He is a descendant of the saint who gave his name to the village where he was born. He is one of the “people of al-Beit”, descended from Idriss, Muhammad’s dynasty. He studied and lived in Saudi Arabia 1985-1994. He was reportedly arrested and placed under house arrest under the old regime. “Salafistes – Qui sont les leaders”, lepetitjournal.com, 17 March 2012.

⁹⁶ Crisis Group interview, Khatib Idrissi, Sidi Ali Ben Aoun, 12 September 2012.

⁹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Tunis, November 2012.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Tunis, November 2012.

⁹⁹ Crisis Group interview, jihadi Salafi close to Ansar Sharia, Tunis, August 2012.

More often, they are former prisoners or exiles who benefit from an aura of martyrdom and resistance and understand the imagery and codes of jihadism. They have sometimes been involved in *qital* (combat) abroad, which is especially prestigious in the subculture of peri-urban areas.¹⁰⁰ The links between *shuyukh* are strengthened at conferences (*muhadarat*) held at places of worship, which are often historic strongholds of the movement.¹⁰¹ National figures, appreciated for their religious knowledge or military accomplishment, such as Khatib Idrissi and Abou Ayadh, quickly emerge.

A few tens of thousands of followers have adopted jihadi dress and style, though they live their lives in a rather individualist way even though they sometimes participate for specific collective actions. Some refuse to organise for doctrinal reasons, since “Islam is unique”,¹⁰² and because belonging to a specific organisation divides Muslims, a position defended until recently by Khatib Idrissi. Others try to establish a group – as advocated by Abou Ayadh – and have begun to unite under the banner of Ansar Charia since its founding congress at Soukra, just outside Tunis, in April 2011.

Ansar Charia began by creating an organisational structure and carrying out charitable activities.¹⁰³ Although its leaders,¹⁰⁴ before Ben Ali’s fall, supported the strategy of global jihad advocated by al-Qaeda at the beginning of the 2000s,¹⁰⁵ the group since seems to have adopted more pragmatic positions. Some of its representatives issued national political and economic proposals that resemble the program of a political party operating within a legal, institutional framework.

At its second congress in Kairouan, on 20 May 2012,¹⁰⁶ Abou Ayadh called for Islamic trade unionism, legitimate (*halal*) tourism, and reform of the financial system

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group interview, police superintendent, Ettadhamen, Tunis, September 2012. Also see Patrick Haenni, *op. cit.*

¹⁰¹ In Tunisia, this is the case at Mosque of the Campus, al-Fath Mosque and Ain Khadra Mosque.

¹⁰² Crisis Group interview, Khatib Idrissi, Sidi Ali Ben Aoun, 12 September 2012.

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interview, jihadi Salafi, Tunis, September 2012. Its preaching tents can be seen in the country’s most remote areas. Ansar Sharia made a special effort to help victims of the floods in the north west during the winter of 2011-2012. An imam in a working-class district said: “the Salafis give money to children in the hospital, to widows and orphans. They organise marriages, help with pilgrimages, give money to the poor during Ramadan and the secularists call them terrorists!” Crisis Group interview, imam, Tunis, July 2012.

¹⁰⁴ Abou Ayadh is the head of the organisation; Hassen Brik, a former jihadi fighter in the Middle East, is responsible for preaching; and Sami Essid is responsible for coordinating charitable work. The latter led the jihadi cell known as Milan at the beginning of the 2000s. Crisis Group interviews, Fabbio Merone, Gerda Henkel Foundation analyst, Tunis, 28 November 2012; jihadi Salafis, October 2012.

¹⁰⁵ The strategy of global jihad consists of attacking the distant enemy (the West) instead of the enemy close at hand (the dictatorial and impious regime). See Crisis Group Report, *Understanding Islamism*, *op. cit.* This vision seemed to be shared by jihadis in the prisons. A young man charged with offences under the anti-terrorism act and imprisoned for two years explained: “Tunisians returning from the jihad in Iraq via Syria explained to me in prison that there was a distant enemy, the West, and the nearby enemy, Ben Ali. They said that if we do something in Tunisia, public opinion will be against us but if we do something against the West, a large proportion of the public will be with us. Crisis Group interview, young man imprisoned 2005-2007, Tunis, October 2012.

¹⁰⁶ This Congress, attended by more than 5,000 people, attracted the attention of Tunisians and foreign media to the jihadi Salafi phenomenon. Audiovisual recordings of this meeting were often used in a wide range of sensational reports, mainly French, to emphasise the Salafi danger. They show demonstrations of an Islamic martial art, the *Zamqatal*, and delegates singing together, “Obama, Obama, we are all Osamas!”. See “Salafistes contre touristes”, video report, 66 minutes, M6, 16 September 2012 and “Tunisie: la menace salafiste”, video report by the program Envoyé spécial, France 2, 17 January 2013.

as well as of health and education.¹⁰⁷ An analyst who follows this group closely said, “Ansar Charia is an attempt to institutionalise the jihadi movement. Abou Ayadh is creating a genuine, hierarchical, semi-official organisation that has offices and local committees”.¹⁰⁸

The manifestation of this trend towards institutionalisation does not manifest itself only in Abou Ayadh’s group. In November 2012, under the influence of Khatib Idrissi, a council of five shuyukh (*Majlis al-Shuyukh*) was created.¹⁰⁹ This decision, ran counter to his former position, which rejected organisation of any kind;¹¹⁰ the switch allegedly came in wake of the arrests that followed the 14 September attack on the American embassy. Soon after the council was formed at the end of October, it met with young jihadis in the working-class neighbourhood of Douar Hicher, where two nights of clashes with security forces recently had taken place. The council sought to assume leadership of these developments in order to reorient the violent behaviour of young recruits toward preaching. The council also met the president of the republic at his palace in Carthage.¹¹¹

More generally, some jihadi Salafis implanted themselves at the local level, in the economic and social spheres. Firstly, they tried to compensate for poor public services in certain neglected areas. Khatib Idrissi observed:

At the moment, you can see that there is an absence of security forces, and despite this, we have no security problems. What you call “Salafism” is what secures the roads, public buildings and hospitals, who clean the streets, who secure the souks, etc.¹¹²

In the western suburbs of Tunis, in Ettadhamen, several Salafis “clean the streets and repair the damage they sometimes cause during clashes with the police. Some of them even improvise as traffic police”.¹¹³ In places like Menzel Bourguiba, in the north of the country, jihadi Salafis play an essential role in local life.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ See Wafa Sdiri, “Vidéo: La nouvelle Tunisie aux yeux d’Abou Iyadh, leader des salafistes jihadistes”, Tunisie numérique (tunisienumerique.com), 21 May 2012. Other members of Ansar Sharia hold similar ideas but refuse to discuss legislative questions on the grounds that they fall within the domain of the divine. Crisis Group interviews, Ansar Sharia members, Tunis, September-December 2012.

¹⁰⁸ Crisis Group interview, Fabbio Merone, Gerda Henkel Foundation analyst, Tunis, 28 November 2012.

¹⁰⁹ The members of the council are Abou Abdallah Tounsi, a jihadi who is reportedly close to Khatib Idrissi; Khamis al-Majri, a former Nahdawi who defends the centrality of preaching to the movement’s identity and who became resentful towards Rached Ghannouchi’s party; Mohamed Manif, a Salafi from Kairouan, son of a Zitounian sheikh; Mohamed Abou Baker, a former Nahdawi; and Abou Sahib, a jihadi reportedly close to Abou Ayadh. Crisis Group interviews, journalist, Fabbio Merone, jihadi Salafis, former An-Nahda militant, Tunis, Sfax, June-December 2012.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Khatib Idrissi, Sidi Ali Ben Aoun, 12 September 2012.

¹¹¹ This initiative was criticised by some supporters on their Facebook pages. See Talaba Revolution “fr”, op. cit.

¹¹² Crisis Group interview, Khatib Idrissi, Sidi Ali Ben Aoun, 12 September 2012. More recently, on 9 February 2013, at the funeral of Chokri Belaïd, much looting, especially of small supermarkets, took place in Sfax, and Salafis – armed with clubs and long knives – patrolled late into the night in the town centre of Sfax. They drove around in rented cars and 4X4 pick-ups, calling on passers-by to return home and offering to ensure they arrived safely. They ended the looting. Crisis Group interviews, Sfax residents, Tunis, 9 February 2013.

¹¹³ Crisis Group interview, bus driver, Tunis, September 2012.

¹¹⁴ Under the protectorate, colonial families employed at the Bizerte military base lived in Menzel Bourguiba (formerly Ferryville), located to the south west of Lake Bizerte. This was also a holiday

Some, notably unemployed graduates, mediate between residents of working-class areas. They resolve small administrative problems, family disputes and problems between neighbours and provide educational support.¹¹⁵ They sometimes play a role in the informal and underground economy of disadvantaged villages and urban areas that have become more important since the fall of the former regime.¹¹⁶ Many jihadis sell fruits and vegetables, as well as retail goods imported from Asia, out of informal stalls.¹¹⁷

Young criminals who become jihadi Salafis constitute an interesting phenomenon. In the first few months after Ben Ali's fall, when the police had been defeated in the uprising, a large number of young criminals (some of whom moved among circles of police informers, drug and alcohol traffickers, and traders in the informal economy), began to grow beards.¹¹⁸ At the same time, Salafis released from prison or returning from exile made their way back home to the poor areas where they were born.¹¹⁹ According to many living in poor districts and officers in the security forces, a massive number of these young people across the country became Salafis.¹²⁰ An officer in the Special Intervention Brigade said:

Less than one month after Ben Ali's fall, the jihadi Salafis were infiltrated by gangsters and small-time informers from the ex-ruling party. They initially became Salafis to protect themselves from the vengeance of local residents tempted to carry out witch-hunts against those linked to the old regime. A year later in a country

resort much appreciated by the Tunisian, French and Italian bourgeoisie. After independence, Menzel Bourguiba became a prosperous industrial area. Many factories later closed and the unemployment rate soared. In the town centre, not far from the old French town, Place Stuttgart forms a garden of about one hectare. In this space, a cafe opened in 2012. It has around 300 tables and chairs for families. The cafe is run by an old drug trafficker who converted to jihadi Salafism under Ben Ali. He employs about 25 staff even though, according to a waiter, "twelve would be enough to do the work, the other thirteen are employed out of social concerns". Crisis Group interview, café waiter, Menzel Bourguiba, August 2012. Staff (waiters and guards) wear *kamis* and have beards. Many Salafis sit on the chairs, dressed in the same way. In accordance with Salafi custom, only religious chants without music come out of the speakers around the café. However, men and women mix and women without veils and women wearing the niqab mix freely. Crisis Group observations, Menzel Bourguiba, August 2012.

¹¹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, jihadi Salafis, residents of working-class neighbourhoods, Tunis, Menzel Bourguiba, August-September 2012.

¹¹⁶ See Mohamed Farouk, "Tunisie - Conférence de l'UTICA sur le secteur informel: 'Un cancer métastasé'", Web Manager Center (webmanagercenter.com), 17 December 2012. The informal sector of the economy generally includes small production units and the sale of goods and services regulated by personal relations rather than by contract. The so-called underworld economy (smuggling, trafficking, illegal and semi-illegal activities) are also part of it. The informal sector accounts for more than 40 per cent of the economy. The gradual transition from an informal economy to a formal economy is a major economic and social challenge. See Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°124, *Tunisia: Confronting Economic and Social Challenges*, op. cit.

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group observations, Sidi Bouzid region, September 2012; Crisis Group interviews, residents of working-class neighbourhoods in Tunis, Tunis, September 2012.

¹¹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, residents of working-class neighbourhoods and members of the security forces, Tunis, September-December 2012.

¹¹⁹ They also began to develop preaching and charitable activities throughout the country, spending time, in particular, at refugee camps on the border with Libya.

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interviews, jihadi Salafis, residents from around the country, members of the security forces, Tunis, Sfax, June-December 2012.

practically without security, every rascal had become a Salafi. If I were a rascal, I would have done the same thing. Wearing a beard was a passport to impunity.¹²¹

Moreover in some places individuals claiming to be jihadi Salafis, often described as “false Salafis” by certain *shuyukh*,¹²² began to control activities previously reserved for the underworld.¹²³ Examples include the alcohol racket; cannabis dealing, especially in the centre-west, on the border with Algeria; and to a lesser extent, the rapidly expanding smuggling of construction steel, Chinese manufactured products and sometimes petrol and currencies in Algeria, Libya and Tunisia.¹²⁴

Although the scripturalist Salafis are now key actors in Islamic associations, leaders of the jihadi Salafi movement seem to be, on the one hand, moving towards channeling violence and, on the other, gaining economic and social influence in certain poor, marginalised, towns. This does not contradict either their short or long-term vision. Ansar Charia offers political and economic proposals for the country’s institutions (tourism, trade unionism, finance, health, education) and regularly repudiates violence on national soil but, at the international level, supports the same violent Islamic, anti-establishment project as the jihadis did in the 2000s.

In the wake of Chokri Belaïd’s assassination, certain jihadi Salafis affirmed on Facebook that foreigners and not Muslims were responsible for his murder. However they did not condemn the act and emphasised that the extreme left militant was a heathen.¹²⁵ Others chose not to comment on the assassination, focusing as usual on international jihadism.¹²⁶ Abou Ayadh issued a communiqué via social networks calling on An-Nahda to strengthen its links with other Islamist currents and to work together against members of the so-called secular opposition, which, it holds, are vassals of the West.¹²⁷

4. Legalisation of Islamist parties to the right of An-Nahda

Some new parties to the right of An-Nahda, which the media generally describe as Salafi, have joined the official political scene, confirming the existence of a process of political integration. There are four of them, which sit at the confluence of scripturalist, jihadi and Nahdawi networks.

The first is a relatively unknown micro-party, Rahma, led by Said Jaziri, a well-known, former An-Nahda militant. Legalised on 30 July 2012, the party favours applying Sharia and focuses on employment, health, housing and education.¹²⁸ The second, Asala, was legalised in March 2012, after the previous government twice refused to do so. It is led by Mouldi Ali, a doctor in international law whom the former

¹²¹ Crisis Group interview, special intervention brigade officer, September 2012.

¹²² Crisis Group interview, young jihadi Salafis, Tunis, October 2012.

¹²³ They are present in most regions of the country, including the mining area. However, they seem to be weaker in the north west except in Jendouba, where they are very powerful. Crisis Group interviews, jihadi Salafis, residents from around country, Tunis, Sfax, Sousse, Sidi Bouzid, June-December 2012.

¹²⁴ Crisis Group observations, Sidi Bouzid region, September 2012; Crisis Group interviews, residents of working-class neighbourhoods in Tunis and its southern suburbs, members of the security forces, director at the social affairs ministry, Tunis, June-December 2012.

¹²⁵ Some of them imply that he deserved to die. See, for example, Talaba Revolution “fr”, op. cit.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ See “Assassinat de Chokri Belaïd: Ansar Chariaa pousse Ennahdha à aller de l’avant !”, Webdo (webdo.tn), 7 February 2013.

¹²⁸ “Un nouveau parti appelant à appliquer la charia autorisé”, Radio Kalima Tunisie.

regime convicted in absentia and sentenced to 44 years in prison for terrorism. It is said to be close to the Salafi Nour party in Egypt. It is very critical of An-Nahda and seems to be particularly inclined towards socially inflected religious preaching.¹²⁹

The third party, which is more influential, was legalised in May 2012. Its politics seem to be driven by the same spirit that led An-Nahda to moderate its positions 30 years ago. It is the Front de la réforme (Jabhat al-Islah), heir to the political legacy of the Front islamique Tunisie (FIT), a political group that preached armed struggle at the end of the 1980s. Its president, Mohamed Khouja, described the genesis of the new party:

After the revolution, on 31 January 2011, we organised a big meeting with the brothers liberated from prison following a general amnesty. We were jihadis and supporters of the armed struggle. But we changed our position during this meeting. As the dictatorship had fallen and civil liberties were restored, we decided that we would participate in the country's social, intellectual and political life. We therefore decided to create a party and apply for official registration. The previous government twice rejected our application but we were legalised in May 2012.¹³⁰

The Front de la réforme attracts Nahdawis disappointed with what they see as the the insufficiently Islamic political views of their leaders, especially now that the latter have said they have no intention of amending article 1 of the future constitution to include a reference to Sharia. The party also attracts support from scripturalist and jihadi Salafis.¹³¹ Its president hinted that he agreed with most of the positions of the Mouvement de la tendance islamique (MTI), An-Nahda's old name in the 1980s. He also insisted on the need to renounce armed struggle, the *qital* (combat), which he dissociated from jihad, which can take on different non-violent forms such as the pursuit of political reform. This party considers itself to be Salafi in the sense that it follows the path of the ancestors of Islam. It calls for an Islamic democracy and the constitutionalisation of Sharia. It is also involved in the struggle for control of the Zitouna Mosque.

¹²⁹ Mouldi Ali had joined Fatah combatants in Palestine and participated in the jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan. He spent several decades in Paris where he became president of a Muslim association with some 100,000 members, the Union des musulmans de France. Crisis Group interview, Mouldi Ali, Tunis, August 2012.

¹³⁰ Before its legalisation, the party ran candidates in some constituencies for the National Constituent Assembly under the name of al-Aml wa al-Islah (Work and Reform) but did not win any seats. Crisis Group interview, Mohamed Khouja, President of Front de la réforme, Tunis, August 2012.

¹³¹ See Isabelle Mandraud, "Ennahda renonce à inscrire la charia dans la Constitution", *Le Monde*, 27 March 2012. *Shuyukh* like Kamel Marzouki, Béchir Ben Hassen, Hassin Shaouat and Hatem Bou Soma are close to it. Crisis Group interview, Mohamed Khouja, Tunis, August 2012. Also see Fabio Merone and Francesco Cavatorta, "Salafist mouvance and sheikh-ism in the Tunisian democratic transition", *Working Papers in International Studies*, no. 7 (2012). A young jihadi Salafi described members of the Parti de la réforme as "An-Nahda *shuyukh*". Crisis Group interview, jihadi Salafi, Tunis, September 2012. The party tried to organise discussions with young jihadis in order to indirectly convince them to moderate their position. Mohamed Khouja explained: "To convince the young Salafis, we have to talk to them and especially to listen. When they want to impose their point of view, we have to explain that they are wrong and focus on eliminating their fears. They have a bad understanding of Islam, in the sense that they want to apply it immediately and comprehensively. We explain to them that this point of view gives a bad image to our religion. Some of them talk about jihad, but jihad against whom? They want to do it in other countries, why not. However, we explain to them that we need them here to help carry out the necessary reforms".

Finally, the most well-known of the four parties, especially among the general public, is Hizb ut-Tahrir (The Liberation Party). Strictly speaking the term Salafi does not truly describe it; it is rather a pan-Islamist party, started by Muslim Brotherhood dissidents in the early 1950s, with a clear ideological platform that calls for the restoration of the caliphate and policies based on Islamic legislation.¹³² It has been active in Tunisia since the 1980s, when it operated as a small group under the former regime. It has a strong base in some poor areas, especially in the peri-urban belt around the capital, such as the Ettadhamen district. Young jihadi Salafis are attracted to its intransigent and anti-establishment positions. One of them called it “the only political party that defends the true Islam and fights 100 per cent for its implementation”.¹³³

Although Hizb ut-Tahrir does not recognise the principles of the nation-state and democracy, it submitted to the prime minister a request for legal status, which was rejected several times before An-Nahda assumed leadership of the Troika. It was finally legalised on 17 July 2012 following pressure on Ghannouchi’s party.¹³⁴ The Hizb ut-Tahrir distances itself from both An-Nahda and Salafi currents, which, according to its spokesperson, are either too close to Saudi Arabia, as in the case of the scripturalist Salafis,¹³⁵ or too disorganised or inclined to violence, like the jihadi Salafis.¹³⁶

¹³² It has a presence in the Arab world, Europe and Central Asia.

¹³³ Crisis Group interview, jihadi Salafi, Tunis, November 2012. Also see Mahdi Ben Youssef, Sofien Ben Sghèir, Khair-Eddine Bacha, op. cit. Its spokesperson claims the party actively participated in the December 2010-January 2011 uprising. “During the revolution, Hizb ut-Tahrir was the only party to have any kind of profile. Our young people participated directly and actively in the uprising, at Sidi Bouzid, at Monastir and at Sousse. My son’s friends were well organised. They even held meetings at my house. During the revolution, our young people in Ettadhamen [a poor neighbourhood] broke the symbolic barrier between the peri-urban areas and Tunis city centre. They were able to go as far as Bab Souika and Hafsia, they prayed in the streets. We had a martyr, Mohamed Ali. We were the first to declare that the political reforms announced by Ben Ali on the eve of his departure would not be implemented. We were the first to call for civil disobedience, which was a difficult idea for many people”. Crisis Group interview, Ridha Belhaj, Sousse, September 2012.

¹³⁴ Ridha Belhaj added: “When a party applies to the prime minister for authorisation, it achieves legal status automatically if it does not receive either a positive or negative reply within three months. Just before this deadline, we received an ambiguously-worded letter that implied rejection. At that moment, public opinion was completely against An-Nahda. Tunisians said, ‘How can a governing party that claims to be Islamic refuse to issue a certificate to Hizb ut-Tahrir!’ The Nahdawis entered into a kind of internal struggle. They found themselves in an embarrassing position. After all was said and done, they could not refuse. But we had to drag it out of them”. Crisis Group interview, Ridha Belhaj, Sousse, September 2012.

¹³⁵ “Scripturalist Salafism is Saudi Wahhabism. It is an attempt to destroy the revolution. Until 14 January 2011, Salafis like Béchir Ben Hassen thought that the revolution would bring discord (*fitna*) and that Ben Ali held power legitimately. They now propose an Islamic approach that does not pay much attention to people’s concerns and that has little to do with political, economic and social issues. They want to focus on secondary problems and allow themselves the liberty of treating people like unbelievers. Saudi Arabia does not want the revolution to reach the Arabian Peninsula. They want to divert the Islamic resurgence towards strictly individual forms of religiosity. And when people talk about really important political problems, they tell us they are not interested in politics, even though they are indirectly practising politics themselves”. Ibid.

¹³⁶ “The jihadi Salafis form a heterogeneous group. They are not very well organised and therefore sometimes lapse into violence. We have contacted them and explained that they are mistaken and that violence is a bad strategy. Each time, they assure us that the violence is spontaneous and ill-considered and that it does not reflect movement’s policy. We tell them, ‘Pay attention because there are forces that want you to make a fatal mistake, by carrying out a terrorist or similar act. That

In sum, the fragmented landscape of Tunisian Salafism and Islamism can be seen from various perspectives. Although An-Nahda is still dominant, scripturalist Salafis promulgate a hardline conception of religion through their Islamic associations. Two small parties, Rahma and Asala, combine Salafism with social concerns. A third and bigger Islamic party, the Front de la réforme, which is close to An-Nahda, is politically to the right. As for Hizb ut-Tahrir, it is a radical Islamist party with a clear ideological platform rejecting democracy but which nevertheless occupies a place on the political chessboard. Finally, Ansar Charia, a jihadi Salafi movement whose source of authority are closely aligned with international Jihadism, is firmly anchored in poor areas; it is trying to convince the public of its new peaceful vocation, at least in Tunisia.

This new context presents as many dangers as it does opportunities. The dynamics of integration into political and associative activities eventually may lead radical Islamists toward pragmatism. Many An-Nahda militants seem to be convinced of this future. However the party itself includes activists that share a radical Islamic vision. And their relations with the Salafis sometimes seem to be based on collusion and complicity, which is a cause for concern for many non-Islamists.

IV. An-Nahda and Salafi preaching

A. *An-Nahda's Uncertain Identity*

With An-Nahda never having experienced democracy previously, the current polarisation could tempt it down a non-democratic path. Moreover its Islamist identity remains uncertain. At the beginning of the 1970s, it was a small group of young apolitical preachers known as the Groupe islamique (*Jamaa Islamiyya*).¹³⁷ This movement became a genuine organisation in mid-1979, when it took the name of Mouvement de la tendance islamique (MTI). It declared that it wanted to revive Islam in Tunisia, give people the right to govern themselves, establish social justice based on Islamic principles and contribute to the renaissance of the Arab and Muslim world. It recognised democracy and political pluralism.¹³⁸

Unlike classical political parties, it is Islamist: it has explicit religious objectives and engages actively in preaching. It is therefore both a “party” and “movement”, as are other movements inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood. The party aims to govern in a way that translates Western political thought into Islamic language, or in brief, Islamisation from above. The movement also focuses on preaching and tries to convince Tunisians that Islam is a well-founded social project, or in other terms, Islamisation from below.

Between 1991 and 1994, the regime eradicated the party – which by that point had adopted the name Hizb al-Harakat an-Nahda (Party of the Renaissance Movement) – at least within the country's borders. With activists and supporters forced into exile, the party leadership was transferred to London and Paris. An-Nahda spent a dozen years in the wilderness.¹³⁹ From the mid-2000s until the eve of Ben Ali's fall, it was torn between pursuing, on the one hand, national reconciliation and an understanding with the regime and, on the other, an intransigent stance that precluded any kind of negotiation with the dictatorship.¹⁴⁰

An-Nahda, which was very weak during the uprising, played only a minor role in it.¹⁴¹ Officially legalised on 1 March 2011, it emerged from twenty years of lethargy.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ It aimed to return to the sources of Islam using a Salafi approach. It focused its activities on spiritual education, apprenticeship in piety (*taqwa*), faith in God (*tawakkul*), collective work (*jihad*) community work (*ukhuwah*) and ascetism (*zudh*). See Azzam S. Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi – A Democrat within Islam* (London, 2001).

¹³⁸ Hamdi Mohamed el-Hachmi, *The Politicisation of Islam: A Case Study of Tunisia* (Colorado, 2000); Mohammed Harbi, *L'islamisme dans tous ses états* (Paris, 1991).

¹³⁹ During this period, it concentrated on defending political prisoners and suffered many internal quarrels. Members disputed the authority of its historical leader, Rached Ghannouchi. At the beginning of the 2000s, it contacted other opposition parties to discuss the regime's policies: the ex-Parti démocrate et progressiste (PDP) led by Nejjib Chebbi, Ettakatol led by Mustapha Ben Jaafar, the Congrès pour la République (CPR) led by Moncef Marzouki and the ex-Parti communiste des ouvriers de Tunisie (PCOT) led by Hama Hammami. Crisis Group interviews, An-Nahda activists, Tunis, December 2012. The PDP merged with other centrist and liberal groups at the beginning of 2012 and is now the main component of the Parti républicain (al-Joumhourî).

¹⁴⁰ See the final statement of the An-Nahda movement's XVIII Congress, 2008. Crisis Group interviews, An-Nahda activists, Tunis, Sousse, June 2011-December 2012.

¹⁴¹ See the Crisis Group Report, *Popular Protests in North Africa and the Middle East (IV): Tunisia's Way*, op. cit.

¹⁴² The 53 members composing its leadership bodies were the same as they were at the beginning of the 1990s. The party seemed to be fragile and weakened by years of repression and its almost com-

During the first phase of the transition – which ended with the elections of 23 October 2011, in which it won 89 of the of the 217 available seats¹⁴³ – most secular parties accused it of concealing an extremist theocratic agenda. Although it supported parity between men and women in electoral lists, presented a democratic electoral program and circulated a statement stipulating that the movement would not pursue politic activity in mosques,¹⁴⁴ it still seemed to be as Islamist as it had been in the 1980s.

On amateur videos with mobile phones and accessible on the internet, the Nahdawis declared, for example, that “the Quran is our only constitution” and described electors who did not intend to vote for them as heathens.¹⁴⁵ During the electoral campaign, several hardline scripturalist Salafi *shuyukh* called on the people to vote for An-Nahda.¹⁴⁶ Hundreds of Facebook group discussions started by the Nahdawis broke down barriers between Islamist currents by uniting young people around an anti-American vision; plots hatched by foreign secret services, the extreme left and supporters of the old regime; and a defence of Islam against secularists and Freemasons.¹⁴⁷

After its clear electoral victory, An-Nahda took firm control, appointed its men to the key ministries and formed a limited coalition government, known as the Troika, which was composed of An-Nahda, the CPR (Congrès pour la République) and FDTL (Front démocratique pour le travail et les libertés). But more than a year later, Ghannouchi’s party has found it difficult to settle into the country’s new, more open and pluralist, political climate.¹⁴⁸

plete absence from the country. No young activists had joined the leadership and only a few leading members were in charge of communication. Crisis Group observations, February-August 2011.

¹⁴³ The second largest political party, the Congrès pour la République (CPR) only won 29 seats.

¹⁴⁴ This note was distributed in March 2011. Crisis Group interview, lawyer, Tunis, August 2012. Its 365-point electoral program prioritised “the establishment of a democratic government based on the principles of citizenship, civil liberties, dignity, the primacy of the constitution, respect for the law and, in more general terms, all that is required for good governance”. The two other priority commitments were the “implementation of a socio-economic plan to create employment, guarantee the right to dignity, promote balanced regional development and encourage investment” and “the construction of a modern, harmonious, solidarity-based society rooted in its identity and open towards its environment”. See “Pour une Tunisie de la liberté, de la justice et du développement”, programme of the An-Nahda movement, summary, www.365p.info/livre/copie_fr.pdf.

¹⁴⁵ The controversial videos are accessible on an anti-Islamist website (www.ennahdha-info.com). In addition, activists making house-to-house visits went so far as to promise people that they would no longer have to pay their water and electricity bills if they voted An-Nahda into power. The party also emphasised the Islamic identity of its candidates as a guarantee of its moral rectitude. The pro-An-Nahda often used the formula “those who fear of God cannot be corrupted”. They sometimes presented Islam as a global social project capable of vanquishing all evil. Crisis Group interviews, residents of the governorates of Tunis, Sfax, Sidi Bouzid, July-September 2011.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ It was only at the time of the events in Abdelia in mid-June 2012, when the editors of its Facebook pages appealed for calm, that an anti-An-Nahda jihadi Salafi rhetoric began to appear on the internet and digitally divide the two currents. Crisis Group interview, young blogger, Tunis, 4 December 2012.

¹⁴⁸ A jurist explained it in this way: “The consensual democracy promoted by the regime of Ben Ali, the overthrown president, implied that the opposition should act responsibly – that it shouldn’t criticise the government in order to avoid provoking discord and disrupting the national unity necessary for the country to face the challenges before it. The national unity maintained by the dictatorship gave way to a democratic field of battle in which those in government were increasingly called on to be accountable to the population and in which the various forces fought bitterly to promote their ideas. An-Nahda was not used to this. It wanted everybody to agree with it. It’s for

The ideological tensions that permeate the party came to the fore during constitutional debates. On several occasions, its deputies proposed ambiguous legal formulas, for example, regarding the roles of men and women in the family and the criminalisation of attacks on religion, before backpedalling.¹⁴⁹ For the moment, the preamble of the draft constitution makes no reference to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. More generally, the first outline of the constitution tried to combine a heterogeneous range of ideas but did not really succeed in integrating them. According to one law professor, the outline was somewhat incoherent since it was “saturated with Islamic references and sprinkled with references to international standards”.¹⁵⁰

An-Nahda has not managed to reassure secular parts of society. On 10 October 2012, a video showing a discussion between Ghannouchi, the party president, and a group of Salafis appeared on the internet and provoked an outcry among non-Islamists. Ghannouchi addressed the Salafis using the personal pronoun “we”. He explained that they should be patient, that the government is “ours”, that care should be taken with the secular elite that controls the army, the police and part of the administration and that it would be useful to strengthen “our” associations and educational services by establishing “ourselves” across the nation.¹⁵¹ The next day, 75 opposition deputies out of a total of 217 members of parliament signed a petition calling for the dissolution of An-Nahda on the grounds that it did not believe in democracy and was involved in “a plot against the civic nature of the state”.¹⁵²

It seems more accurate to say that An-Nahda considers the various Islamist currents, including the most intransigent Salafis, as a family that, in the words of one Nahdawi, upholds “the right to be different and the duty to unite”.¹⁵³ The party is trying to avoid alienating those who identify more with Salafi preachers than with Nahdawis who speak in more political tones. This is all the more necessary because of the party’s serious internal conflicts.

The party faces a significant discrepancy between its leaders’ very consensual political positions – which are regularly communicated through the media, especially the foreign media – and the profound convictions of its activist base. More than two decades after its establishment, the ideological developments within its leadership have never truly been clarified. Certain members still hold the MTT’s former positions and sometimes circulate documents from an earlier moment in their movement’s history.¹⁵⁴

this reason, among others, that it constantly harasses the press and the opposition and labels their diatribes as irresponsible”. Crisis Group interview, jurist, Tunis, 24 October 2012.

¹⁴⁹ “Tunisie: manifestations pour défendre l’égalité homme-femme”, *L’Express*, 14 August 2012 and “Préambule de la constitution: absence de garanties sur les libertés au profit de la protection du sacré”, Nawaat (nawaat.org), 23 October 2012.

¹⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, professor of law, Tunis, December 2012. The new outline of the constitution was posted online on 14 December and is available in Arabic at www.anc.tn/site/main/AR/docs/divers/projet_constitution.pdf.

¹⁵¹ “Tunisie – Politique: Rached Ghannouchi mis à nu”, Web Manager Center (webmanagercenter.com), 10 October 2012.

¹⁵² “Tunisie: des députés réclament la dissolution du parti islamiste au pouvoir”, *Le Monde*, 12 October 2012.

¹⁵³ Crisis Group interview, An-Nahda activist, Tunis, August 2012.

¹⁵⁴ These included, for example, a booklet by Ghannouchi dating from 1986, entitled “La vision idéologique et la méthode fondamentaliste du MTT” [“The MTT’s ideological vision and fundamentalist method”]. Crisis Group interviews, Alya Allani, expert on Islamism, An-Nahda activist, Tunis,

Years of exile, prison and police surveillance also have created political differences. Activists have been “cut off from each other for close to twenty years”.¹⁵⁵ Leaders exiled in London, who had been more active on the international Islamic scene, think more in terms of the Arab and Muslim world as a whole rather than on the national level. The Paris Nahdawis, who have experience with French cosmopolitanism, maintain contact with former members of the Tunisian extreme left who are working to defend human and immigrants’ rights, seem more open to secular circles, and are more influenced by French culture.¹⁵⁶

By contrast, the activists who spent long years in Ben Ali’s jails have cultivated a more hardline Islamic identity and harbour a desire for “revenge”.¹⁵⁷ They believe that “time has been stolen from them”¹⁵⁸ and often take positions opposed to those of their leaders, especially concerning religious questions.¹⁵⁹ Finally, others have been active in Tunisia, in professional associations, such as the bar association or in organisations supporting political prisoners. Their contribution to the defence of freedom and democracy has left its mark on them.¹⁶⁰

Another source of division is that some activists, convinced that they have been excluded from positions of power in the party or government, have adopted an aggressive stance. Mainly young, their sense of rejection has led them to take hardline positions. They want to see the adoption of a law banning members of the former regime from standing for office, a more concerted anti-corruption campaign, and a media ban on members of the former ruling party, the RCD.¹⁶¹

In the broadest strokes, Ghannouchi’s party seems to be divided between two currents: religious preachers and pragmatic politicians. As Sadok Chourou, a leading preacher, explained:

Like any organisation, An-Nahda is composed of several currents. The first sees An-Nahda as a political party at the service of society with a politics of democratic governance. The second sees An-Nahda as a movement that has a global, cultural, educational and political Islamic mission based on preaching: a complete Islamic project that cannot be reduced to its political component.¹⁶²

September-November 2012. In addition, some activists who withdrew from all political activity rejoined the movement and reinforced its ranks after the revolution. According to a source close to the party, they brought with them an “archaic Muslim Brotherhood mentality”. Crisis Group interview, activists working in groups close to An-Nahda, Tunis, June 2012.

¹⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, Nourredine Arbaoui, Tunis, December 2012.

¹⁵⁶ Crisis Group interviews, An-Nahda activists, Tunis, September 2011-December 2012.

¹⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, Nabil Labassi, lawyer close to the movement, Tunis, July 2012.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ According to one An-Nahda member, this is a pretext used to push the leaders into taking concrete decisions regarding transitional justice, thereby opening the way for compensation to be paid to former political prisoners, including the leaders themselves. Crisis Group interview, An-Nahda activist, 20 October 2012.

¹⁶⁰ In 2005, An-Nahda activists reached agreement with the ex-PDP and the former PCOT on a minimal agenda in defence of civil liberties, human rights and democracy. These political groups created an informal network of human rights activists, called the 18 October Committee. See Crisis Group Report, *Popular Protests in North Africa and the Middle East (IV): Tunisia’s Way*, op. cit.

¹⁶¹ This was the essence of the *Ekbess* (Get a grip!) campaign organised by young members of An-Nahda during the summer of 2012. Crisis Group observations, demonstration in government square in Tunis as part of the *Ekbess* campaign, 7 September 2012.

¹⁶² Crisis Group interview, Sadok Chourou, September 2012.

In this sense, An-Nahda faces a dilemma: if it becomes more of a preaching and religious organisation, it will alarm non-Islamists. If it conducts itself in a more political and pragmatic way, it will alienate many of its members and push them towards the Salafis and parties to its right.

The consequences of the latter trouble An-Nahda's activists.¹⁶³ The responsibilities of governing have distanced some party leaders from the base, which sometimes expresses resentment in the form of intransigent Islamist discourse. Historic leaders who occupy positions in the government and administration have been accused of elevating the Tunisian state above Islam, of prioritising a political and administrative logic over religious objectives and even displaying signs of clientelism and nepotism.¹⁶⁴

In the same way, An-Nahda's relative disinterest in preaching, cultural activities and work in Islamic associations provokes resentment among preachers.¹⁶⁵ Nahdawi preachers, who are more conservative, have found themselves attracted for this reason attracted to scripturalist Salafism, although their discourse has become practically the same.

In this context, the organisation has every interest in maintaining an ambiguous relationship with the Salafi *shuyukh* who are disposed to cooperate with it. This allows it to conserve the electoral support it has built up thanks to these religious preachers and ward off the risk of a split between its religious and political inclinations.¹⁶⁶

B. *An Integration Strategy*

According to many Nahdawis, the party is pursuing a strategy of persuasion vis-à-vis the Salafi movement and is prioritising attempts to integrate and moderate preach-

¹⁶³ According to one activist, this is especially apparent in the field of activist training: "Training used to cover religious and moral questions, Islamic values, Muslim jurisprudence. Now, it is about how to become a political leader and manage conflict within an organisation!" Crisis Group interview, An-Nahda militant, Tunis, 17 November 2012.

¹⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, current and former An-Nahda activists, Tunis, November 2012.

¹⁶⁵ As one of them said: "In the 1980s, in the MTI and then in An-Nahda, we talked about culture, but in fact, we preached to spread Islam. We had a lot of activities. But now there is not much going on. It is regrettable. I have not seen the party provide any real religious training. It no longer trains new preachers. Activists are very resentful about this". Crisis Group interview, An-Nahda activist, Tunis, 18 November 2012.

¹⁶⁶ A split could be caused by disagreements between the more political tendency, which includes the head of the government, Hamadi Jebali (who called for the formation of a technocratic government after Chokri Belaïd's assassination) and the preaching tendency, which includes Rached Ghannouchi. Crisis Group interviews, opposition deputies, Tunis, 9 February 2013. Also see "Tunisie: Ennahdha refuse le 'gouvernement de technocrates' annoncé par Hamadi Jebali", *Jeune Afrique*, 7 February 2013. Other possible reasons for a split have been mentioned. One An-Nahda activist said several months before the assassination of Chokri Belaïd that if the party set out clear limits to Salafi preaching, the preaching tendency would probably leave to form a new political party with the scripturalist Salafis and even with elements of the more radical Islamist group to which it feels closer, the Front de la réforme. Crisis Group interview, An-Nahda activist, Tunis, October 2012. Until now, An-Nahda has allowed the various currents to develop within the party in order to avoid a split. Only one split has taken place in 40 years, at the beginning of the 1980s: intellectuals – close to the Tunisian bourgeoisie and more influenced by the ideas of the Iranian revolution than the Muslim Brotherhood – created a group of progressive Islamists called 15/21 after its press organ. Crisis Group interviews, An-Nahda activists and ex-activists, Tunis, June-December 2012. The possibility of creating an Islamic front grouping Nahdawis and Salafis also has been put forward by secularist party activists and others who are close to the Islamist movement. Crisis Group interviews, secularist party activists and activists close to An-Nahda, Tunis, February 2013.

ers “who do not break the law by resorting to acts of physical violence”.¹⁶⁷ Its first gesture in this direction was legal recognition of political parties to its right. A young Nahdawi official, responsible for relations with the political parties, explained:

We have encouraged them to request legalisation. The simple fact that they request authorisation from the prime minister implies that they see the law as a positive thing. They will eventually accept the rules of the game. Their radical projects will be thwarted. They put forward political programs that are contrary to the reality of Tunisians today. Political integration will dilute their radical discourse.¹⁶⁸

For many An-Nahda activists, Salafi radicalism constitutes stems from the old regime’s marginalisation of political Islam and therefore is reversible. In this view, Tunisians took advantage of Ben Ali’s fall by “letting off steam”,¹⁶⁹ affirming a hardline Islamist identity and adopting an aggressive attitude towards parties that still “wanted to provoke Muslims”.¹⁷⁰ An-Nahda believes this dynamic will pass. A regional party official said: “An-Nahda is under no threat from the Salafis. With time, they will change their mentality. They will stop believing that they have a monopoly on the truth. If they survive, there will be only a very small number of extremists”.¹⁷¹

Such an analysis supposes that the attitude of ordinary people to religion does not match the tenets of the doctrine preached so insistently by the Salafis. The inevitable price they will pay for their austere and radical style will be their own isolation; in order to avoid marginalisation, they will have to adjust. Permitting them to express themselves and participate in public life would be the best way to demonstrate the weak purchase their ideas have on the public and hasten a change in their position. The same regional official added:

When I discuss things with them, I keep telling them to form political parties, set up television channels and publish newspapers. Give your opinion. If it is useful to people, that is what democracy is all about! We don’t have a problem with that. But if your opinion does not meet with any support, and I am convinced that is the case, you will have to change your mentality if you want to be more effective.¹⁷²

According to two young An-Nahda officials who at university maintain close contact with Salafis, including those considered jihadi, the realities of political competition already are leading to moderation. A good example of this was the so-called Manouba affair (November 2011-April 2012), a long-running Salafi protest movement against the law banning the niqab in the universities. One of the young officials explained:

Many Salafis have changed their point of view radically since the Manouba affair. They came into contact with the student unions, the Union générale tunisienne des étudiants (UGTE) and the Union générale des étudiants tunisiens (UGET). They organised press briefings and hunger strikes. They discussed the issue with the professors and the dean. Their doctrine would normally have forbidden them

¹⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, Said Ferjani, An-Nahda spokesperson, Tunis, 12 June 2012.

¹⁶⁸ Crisis Group interview, Nahdawi representative, Tunis, September 2012.

¹⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, An-Nahda regional head, Sousse, August 2012.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. This was especially the case at the time of the broadcasting of Persépolis in October 2011.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Crisis Group interview, An-Nahda regional official in Sousse, Sousse, November 2012.

to do all this. Now they are even talking about creating a new Salafi trade union current.¹⁷³

The other added:

I heard the Salafis who led the Manouba sit-in do a critical analysis of themselves. They concluded that they had been too radical. When one of them removed the Tunisian flag from the faculty roof and replaced it with the black Salafi flag, that created enormous controversy. Tunisians are great nationalists and did not agree with this move, they thought it was a bad thing to do. The Salafis felt isolated. They understood that the public was not sympathetic. In fact, they had to face reality for the first time. During the sit-in at the faculty, many of them were dumbstruck to see young women without veils bringing them food while women wearing veils attacked them. They eventually will appreciate that things are not so clear-cut in the real world. But first they have to go through this phase of excess and radicalism, which has not yet run its course.¹⁷⁴

An-Nahda has another, more tactical objective: by letting the Salafis express themselves, the party is ensuring that it is not outflanked on the right. A party activist underlined the fact that Salafis “cannot criticise the party or accuse it of censoring the Muslim voice”.¹⁷⁵ Nahdawi politicians and Salafi preachers have held formal and informal meetings; in public debates as well as television and radio broadcasts, they discuss all manner of topics with the intellectuals, civil society activists, and Islamist and secular actors who make up Tunisia’s political scene.¹⁷⁶ Finally in many rural and peri-urban areas, local An-Nahda activists sometimes help to organise meetings at which entire families listen to sermons by preachers from the Gulf.¹⁷⁷

Dismissing concerns that this approach will pave the way for radical Islamists, an old Nahdawi close to the presidency argued that most who speak in extreme tones just want a place in the system; if they get it, they will moderate their views. He explained:

Most preachers who say that unbelievers should be killed and corporal punishment applied in accordance with Islamic law exaggerate in order to distinguish themselves from other Islamic currents. They are sensationalists. But they know perfectly well that people only listen with one ear. All they really want is a position in a religious institution or recognition of their wisdom. They are religious populists. That still works because people are still suffering the shock of Ben Ali’s anti-Islamic policies. It won’t be long before that just won’t work anymore.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Crisis Group interview, Oussama Ben Salem, Tunis, July 2012.

¹⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, Hichem Laraidh, Tunis, July 2012.

¹⁷⁵ Crisis Group interview, An-Nahda activist, Sousse, August 2012.

¹⁷⁶ TV programme “21 heures”, Attounissia TV, 5 November 2012.

¹⁷⁷ Crisis Group observations, Mohamedmedia [Tunis suburb], June 2012. This kind of meeting is common. For example, at the end of June 2012, at a small venue in a working-class suburb in Sfax, a two-day gathering of mainly scripturalist Salafis – complete with an equestrian event, Saudi guests and makeshift on-site accommodation – was addressed through a loudspeaker by the leader of the local An-Nahda cell. According to residents, the An-Nahda leader also contributed to the costs of the event. Crisis Group observations, village in the Sfax suburbs, 22-24 June 2012; Crisis Group interview, resident of the village, Tunis, 23 June 2012.

¹⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, former An-Nahda activist, Tunis, December 2012.

An-Nahda thinks it is particularly well-placed to conduct a dialogue with the Salafis because it can do so on their own turf: Islamic sources.¹⁷⁹ Nahdawi preachers like Sadok Chourou – who some non-Islamists describe as “radical” and “Salafi”¹⁸⁰ – play important roles as mediators. In the words of one Nahdawi official:

Within the [An-Nahda] movement, preachers like Sadok Chourou have conceptualised notions of human rights on the basis of Islamic sources. They have concluded that there is no contradiction between Islam and democracy. They want these interpretations to be rigorously based on the sacred text. There is a difference in perspective between us. I am more political and I start with the ends, that is, from democracy and human rights. They start from the Quran. Thanks to this approach, they are able to influence other Islamic entities, like the Salafis, who hold tightly to exegesis. They can dialogue with them, challenge their reasoning and lead them along the path to democratisation and moderation.¹⁸¹

Some An-Nahda activists believe that most of the Salafi’s virulent talk should not be taken literally. They say that Tunisian society is sufficiently moderate, in religious terms, to slowly “digest” the extremists in the tolerant melting pot of Tunisian Malekite Islamism.¹⁸²

C. *The Wahhabisation of Places of Learning*

Gambling on the integration of peaceful preachers is not without risk. Many in the educated middle class, notably officials and liberal-minded professionals in Tunis or the Sahel, fear that An-Nahda’s dialogue with the Salafis forms part of a strategy for the gradual Islamisation of society, as Ghannouchi’s controversial video seemed to show. A supporter of a secular party expressed his concerns:

In a few years, we will be living in a theocracy comparable to Saudi Arabia. The richness of our culture and the diversity of our way of life are in danger. An-Nahda has let the Salafis take control of the mosques and religious associations.¹⁸³

The tensions within An-Nahda, its ambiguous Islamic identity and the rapidly changing religious scene feed these fears. Many Islamic cultural associations seem to be dominated by the scripturalist Salafis; at the same time, mosques – places of both worship and of dissemination of religious knowledge – have resisted the efforts of the new religious affairs minister, Nourredine Khademi, to control them, despite his being a former religious leader at the Salafist stronghold of al-Fath mosque in Tunis city centre, a Salafi stronghold. Though he apparently succeeded in installing 500 new preachers holding qualifications recognised by the ministry early in the summer

¹⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, young An-Nahda leader, Tunis, September 2012.

¹⁸⁰ Crisis Group interview, Tunis residents, Tunis, October 2012.

¹⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, Nahdawi official, Tunis, August 2012. From this point of view, Sadok Chourou is a Salafi. He says he wants “to resolve real problems on the basis of Islamic sources”. He is about to publish a detailed study of the Quran he wrote in prison. Crisis Group interview, Sadok Chourou, September 2012.

¹⁸² Crisis Group interview, local An-Nahda official, Tunis, October 2012. The Malekite ritual, which is dominant in North Africa, has integrated the region’s cultural characteristics. It has an open attitude to other rituals and religions and opposes the excommunication of Muslims (*takfir*) who have sinned or suffered temptation. Crisis Group interview, expert on Islam, Tunis, November 2012.

¹⁸³ Crisis Group interview, opposition party activist, Tunis, December 2012.

of 2012, an imam in a working-class district commented, “it was mainly Jihadi Salafis who were displaced in favour of scripturalist Salafis and very conservative preachers who are close to An-Nahda”.¹⁸⁴

Even though the number of mosques controlled by the Salafis seems to have decreased in the last six months,¹⁸⁵ they remain in control of 400 of the country’s 6000 mosques.¹⁸⁶ Moreover during Friday prayers, many imams, even as they respect Malekite rituals, evince a Wahhabi inclination in how they evoke the words, gestures and attitudes of the Prophet.¹⁸⁷ In addition, religious lessons adjacent to the places of worship sometimes adhere to a rigid and conservative interpretation of Islam. A young student enrolled in a theology course for women at a mosque in Menzel Bourguiba, in the north of the country, said: “I went to lessons at the mosque. The first thing they told me was that democracy is illegal (*kafir*)”.¹⁸⁸

Moreover the haste with which teaching at the Zitouna mosque was resumed is indicative of the anarchic metamorphosis of the Tunisian religious scene, which has helped feed fears among entire sectors of the population, including Muslims who pray five times a day.¹⁸⁹ The Tunisian Islamist movement has long demanded the resumption of courses at Zitouna, Tunis’s grand mosque.¹⁹⁰ In the current context, education at the site has been caught up in a power struggle among ultraconservative Malekite *shuyukh*, scripturalist Salafis and jihadis, Nahdawi politicians and preach-

¹⁸⁴ Crisis Group interview, imam at a mosque in a working-class district, *ibid.* Also see “Tunisia: Battles over pulpits and a revolution’s legacy”, *The New York Times*, 12 November 2012.

¹⁸⁵ Crisis Group interviews, worshippers at mosques in Tunis, Tunis, January 2013.

¹⁸⁶ “‘Vigilance’ pour traquer l’incitation à la violence dans les mosquées”, *Tunisie Focus* (*tunisiefocus.com*), 23 December 2012.

¹⁸⁷ Crisis Group interviews, worshippers at Tunis mosques, Tunis, January 2013. According to one interviewee, the Salafi imams generally follow the Malekite ritual, for example, with regard to the number of calls to prayer in the morning and the initial prayer on entering the place of worship. However, several imams, notably the jihadi Salafis, follow their own rituals and oppose the Malekite rituals, which they describe as illegal – for example, celebrating Muhammad’s birth. Crisis Group interview, Tunis mosque worshipper, Tunis, 17 January 2013. As one worshipper said: “Most of Ben Ali’s imams disappeared after the revolution. New ones arrived but they were all kicked out. I saw worshippers saying to them, why don’t you talk about the Prophet’s deeds at Friday prayers? You are therefore not Salafi, you don’t belong here!” Crisis Group interview, imam at a mosque in a working-class district, Tunis, January 2013.

¹⁸⁸ Crisis Group interview, young student, Menzel Bourguiba, August 2012.

¹⁸⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Tunis residents and practising Muslims, Tunis, November 2012. In 1958, Habib Bourguiba integrated this pluri-secular teaching, similar to that at Al-Azhar in Cairo, into modern university theological courses and closed the rooms at the Grand Mosque where it was provided. On 19 March, an association of former pupils at the mosque, including lawyers belonging to Hizb ut-Tahrir, obtained legal permission to remove the seals affixed to the school buildings in 1958. Crisis Group interview, Ridha Belhaj, Sousse, September 2012. On 12 May, independently of any legal framework, the president of An-Nahda and the religious affairs, national education and higher education and scripturalist research ministers, accompanied by the Grand Mosque’s senior imam, made a written commitment to aiding Zitounian teaching to “rediscover its scripturalist and cultural mission, which emanates essentially from the Friday Imamate and should be completely independent”. Crisis Group interview, imam of the Zitouna Grand Mosque and member of the *mashiyakha* (Zitouna scripturalist commission), Tunis, September 2012.

¹⁹⁰ During 1970-1980, the Islamist movement denounced the president of the republic for banning education at the Zitouna Grand Mosque. Crisis Group interviews, An-Nahda militants, Tunis, Sfax, Sousse, June 2011-December 2012.

ers, Front de la réforme activists and Hizb ut-Tahrir radical Islamists.¹⁹¹ For the moment, the tide is against Nahdawi politicians.

A scholarly commission of the Zitouna (*mashiyakha*) has opened branches of the mosque,¹⁹² which provide free education, throughout the country. Zitouna's imam said, "a lot of people go there to learn about Islamic morality and history";¹⁹³ commission members are aiming to reestablish primary, secondary and higher courses that will serve as models for reforming the national education system. At the moment however, the Zitouna network is composed of very conservative, hardline *shuyukh*. Its leader, Houcine Laabidi, distinguished himself in a sermon during the riots that erupted at Abdelia in June 2012 when he declared that according to Sharia, "unbelieving" artists should be killed and "their blood spilled".¹⁹⁴ The imams on the commission have also advocated the resumption of teaching Arab medicine and reject Western medicine, which has provoked an outcry among doctors.¹⁹⁵ According to one member of the *mashiyakha*:

The Tunisian education system is fragile. The role of Zitounian teaching is to fill the void left by the official education system when it comes to morals, faith and personal development. Zitouna's motto is "Islam is the law of the great existence and Sharia is the ideal approach for humanity". It is therefore necessary to rewrite history, geography and even the humanities. It is a grandiose project, for the state is religion and religion is the state. Religion needs politics and politics needs religion.¹⁹⁶

To date, there has been neither a clear delimitation of the legal status of Zitouna nor the publication of a code of ethics – for example a Bill of Rights, following the example of the Al-Azhar in Cairo.¹⁹⁷ In its absence, the competent authorities, in the form of two An-Nahda ministers, are maintaining ambiguity about the possible reform of the modern educational system that would end up reducing the secular materials taught in schools.

¹⁹¹ "Qui contrôle la Zitouna?", *La Presse*, 8 May 2012.

¹⁹² The mosque's second imam, who leads prayer with the exception of Friday, said: "We have opened them at Sousse, Sfax, Kef, Gabès, Tataouine, Medenine, Kebili, Nafta, Tozeur, Metlaoui, Gafsa, Bizerte and are trying to open others at Béja, Jendouba, Menzel Temime, Kairouan, Mehdiya, Msecon, Kasserine, Tala, Feriana and Sidi Bouzid". Crisis Group interview, imam of the Zitouna Mosque, member of the *mashiyakha*, Tunis, September 2012.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ "L'Imam de la mosquée Zitouna appelle à verser le sang des artistes d'El Ebdilia", www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZLLz3VRX9s. The riots that erupted from 12-15 June 2012 followed an attack on an painting exhibition, which included works of art judged to be blasphemous, in the northern suburbs of Tunis. Security forces clashses with numerous jihadi Salafis, some of whom were galvanised by a message from Ayman al-Zawahiri, head of al-Qaeda, disseminated on 10 June, which violently attacked An-Nahda and called on citizens to defend Sharia.

¹⁹⁵ "Qui contrôle la Zitouna?", *op. cit.*

¹⁹⁶ Crisis Group interview, imam of the Zitouna Grand Mosque, member of the *mashiyakha*, Tunis, September 2012.

¹⁹⁷ See "Al-Azhar's 'Bill of Rights'", freespeechdebate.com, 3 September 2012.

V. An-Nahda and Salafi violence

A. Attempts to Isolate Violent Salafis

An-Nahda's strategy towards Salafi preaching has a corollary: the isolation of violent Salafis. While this has permitted the new system to break with the authoritarian practices the old regime used to fight terrorism and shows more respect to civil liberties, the new strategy is not without risk. First, according to a Nahdawi leader, the party must avoid treating all Salafi currents as a single entity. "We should not lump them all in the same basket. That encourages them to get together. We need to separate them out from each other".¹⁹⁸ Another official said that it is useful to encourage Salafis who commit minor acts of violence to deal with institutions legally: "When they provoke fights, we dialogue with them. We tell them 'if you have any demands, present them to the competent institutions in a peaceful manner'".¹⁹⁹ The objective of this approach is to isolate those who resort to more dangerous forms of violence. A party spokesperson explained:

We should treat Salafis as citizens. It is especially important not to reject them. That would only provoke violence. We need to isolate the violent minority from the majority. We cannot tolerate those who want to impose their way of life on the rest of society. We also need to avoid making martyrs while ensuring that religion is protected.²⁰⁰

At the time of the events of Abdelia in June 2012, this approach seemed to have contributed to the restoration of calm at a time when the jihadi Salafis were in a state of quasi-revolt against public institutions.²⁰¹

Ghannouchi's party does not content itself with negotiating. It also condemns violence and affirms that the perpetrators will be punished. Its key principle resides, for the moment, in a maxim formulated by an officer in the criminal affairs depart-

¹⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Sami, lawyer, young An-Nahda official, Tunis, August 2012.

¹⁹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Noumi, Sousse, August 2012.

²⁰⁰ Crisis Group interview, Said Ferjani, An-Nahda spokesperson, Tunis, 12 June 2012.

²⁰¹ On 14 June, when tension was at its peak, the An-Nahda president called for a major demonstration the following day to defend sacred values. He endorsed the "Angry Friday" slogan launched by the Salafi movement on the social networks, stealing its thunder in the process. However the Interior Minister, Ali Laraidh, also a Nahdawi, banned the demonstration. During the negotiations at the local level that followed between Nahdawis and influential jihadi Salafi *shuyukh*, An-Nahda representatives made the argument that in the national interest, their party had agreed not to demonstrate even though their leaders had called on them to do so, and that the Salafis should do the same. A police superintendent in the poor district that was the epicentre of riots in June said: "I learned that the jihadis planned to demonstrate after Friday prayers on 15 June. I was afraid that there would be excessive violence in the area. I phoned the local An-Nahda office to ask them to try to calm things down, to try to talk with the jihadis. Representatives of the local office went to the mosque on Friday. They talked with them, especially their leader. Everything immediately calmed down". Crisis Group interview, police superintendent in Ettadhamen, Tunis, September 2012. Abou Ayadh, leader of Ansar Sharia's jihadi Salafis, also launched an appeal for calm. He reiterated his commitment to preaching and non-violence in an online video, in which he also said that violence is the result of provocation by those who want to harm the jihadi Salafi movement. The demonstration planned for Friday was cancelled and the riots ended. Crisis Group observations, Tunis, 15 June 2012; Crisis Group interviews, An-Nahda militant, Tunis, June 2012; elite brigades officer, Tunis, July 2012, video by Abou Ayadh, Talaba Revolution "fr", op. cit.

ment: “We arrest individuals on the basis of what they do and not who they are”.²⁰² A regional party official added, “it’s very important that no group should be repressed because of its political ideas”.²⁰³ Another leader said, “the state must punish the violent ones. The state must exercise its authority. We must focus on criminal activity and not ideological belief”.²⁰⁴

B. *Persistence of Violence: Collusion Between Islamists at the Local Level*

Despite this strategy, An-Nahda is caught in the crossfire between non-Islamist critics who accuse it of being too lax and even of collusion, and the Salafis, who attack it when they feel it going after them. Depending on the event – a wave of arrests or spectacular violence – Ghannouchi’s party suffers recriminations from one side or the other.

The security forces have apprehended many violent perpetrators and released them a few days later, to the great displeasure of a segment of public opinion.²⁰⁵ That reflects An-Nahda’s strategy – willingness to dialogue and to co-opt rather than repress²⁰⁶ – as well as its political calculations, particularly its fear of suddenly cutting itself off from an important part of the Islamist community. Its considerations extend to the party itself, which adheres to the notion of “the right to be different and the duty to unite”.²⁰⁷ At the local level, Nahdawis and violent Salafis sometimes work together in a bloc.

This complicity sometimes provokes grave accusations against An-Nahda. One resident of a working-class area charged that “Nahdawis leave the dirty work to the Salafis”.²⁰⁸ Meanwhile, extreme left youth believe that scripturalist Salafis are An-Nahda’s religious sages and the jihadi Salafis are its armed wing, with the three currents complementing one another.²⁰⁹ A resident in a village about 30km south of Sfax went further: “There are no Salafis, they work with An-Nahda. The only difference is that they are auxiliaries [as opposed to official members]”.²¹⁰

This rather binary reasoning is not completely untrue. In Sfax, for example, activists belonging to Ghannouchi’s party and Salafis find themselves united against the UGTT. They help each other.²¹¹ One resident of a neighbourhood in this major urban centre explained:

The imam at the mosque is a scripturalist Salafi sheikh who is not a member of An-Nahda, but it is common knowledge that he benefits from its financial sup-

²⁰² Crisis Group interview, criminal affairs department officer, Tunis, 7 November 2012.

²⁰³ Crisis Group interview, An-Nahda regional official in Sousse, Sousse, 7 October 2012.

²⁰⁴ Crisis Group interview, An-Nahda official, Tunis, July 2012.

²⁰⁵ Crisis Group interviews, jihadi Salafi, Tunis, November 2012; police superintendent in Ettadhamen, Tunis, September 2012. Also see “Tunisie – Incidents de Bizerte: Quatre salafistes libérés !”, Tekiano (tekiano.com), 23 August 2012. Journalists reported the state’s lax stance. “Tunisie: l’étrange passivité de l’Etat face à la violence jihadiste”, Grotius (grotius.fr), 2 September 2012.

²⁰⁶ Crisis Group interview, An-Nahda regional official in Sousse, Sousse, November 2012.

²⁰⁷ Crisis Group interview, An-Nahda militant, Tunis, August 2012.

²⁰⁸ Crisis Group interview, resident of a poor district in Menzel Bourguiba, Menzel Bourguiba, September 2012.

²⁰⁹ Crisis Group interview, young people on the extreme left, Sfax, July 2012.

²¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Parti républicain (al-Joumhourî) activist, village in the suburbs of Sfax, June 2012.

²¹¹ Crisis Group observations, Sfax, June 2012.

port. He even encouraged people to vote for the party during the last elections. He educates the faithful throughout the year. The most assiduous live permanently in the place of worship. They all work together to promote the activities of the scripturalist Salafis and the Nahdawis – meetings, conferences, various other events.²¹²

Therefore when the UGTT, which is very powerful in Sfax, mounted a certain campaign, Nahdawis and scriptural Salafis participated in a counter-demonstration along with jihadi Salafis who came from criminal backgrounds.²¹³ When a Saudi preacher tours the area, the Salafis arrange logistics and act as security staff. A worshipper, neither Nahdawi nor Salafi, said of his mosque:

It is attended by Nahdaouis, Salafis and members of the Sfaxian bourgeoisie who have no particular political or religious leanings. The latter are afraid of the mosque's imam. He could circulate rumours about their corrupt affairs under the old regime. In order to protect themselves against such gossip and therefore against the anger of the neighbourhood's residents, they finance activities at the place of worship and abstain from any criticism of either Nahdawis or Salafis.²¹⁴

This tacit cooperation on the local level seems to be strengthening. On 9 February 2013, the date of Chokri Belaïd's funeral, the Nahdawis supported Salafis in maintaining order and combating looting in the centre of Sfax.²¹⁵

C. *A Disorganised Security Administration and Legal System*

Although this relaxed attitude toward the Salafis stems from strategic and tactical decisions by An-Nahda, disorganisation in security and legal institutions, as well as the uncertainty generated by the political transition, has reinforced it. Judges fear punishment by the justice minister if they take action against the Salafis; police officers do not completely enjoy the trust of the new Islamist leaders, who for a long time were their victims; the security services, which are no longer able to torture routinely, lack adequate training to obtain evidence against individuals suspected of violence, etc. An officer in the security forces noted:

The judges are afraid of opening investigations, especially since May 2012, when 82 of them were summarily dismissed by the minister. Do you think they prefer to keep the public or the justice minister happy? The most important thing for them is to sleep easy and keep their job. They do not want to take any risks because they do not know what the minister really thinks about the Salafis.²¹⁶

²¹² Crisis Group interview, resident of Sfax, Sfax, June 2012.

²¹³ Crisis Group observations, Sfax, June 2012. Tens of thousands attended a counter-demonstration against a national general strike called by the UGTT in early December 2012 in Sfax. The town's mosques reportedly helped to mobilise the demonstrators. Crisis Group interviews, Sfax residents, Tunis, 9 December 2012.

²¹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Sfax residents, Sfax, October 2012.

²¹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Sfax residents, Tunis, 9 February 2013. Also see the pro-An-Nahda Facebook page "The Sfaxian World". The many videos published on this page show such scenes and encourage Salafis to follow this path.

²¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, security forces officer, Tunis, July 2012. Also see "Omerta du ministère de la justice sur les noms des juges révoqués", Nawat (nawaat.org), 29 May 2012.

Similarly, a close associate of the interior minister said:

If suspects are not caught in the act, it is difficult to prove that they are responsible for acts of violence. The police's basic training is in repressive methods but they cannot now do as they did before and use torture to extract confessions. The police don't know how to do their job in any other way. Perpetrators are brought before the examining magistrate, who sees that the prosecution doesn't have enough evidence.²¹⁷

There are also problems in the interior ministry's command centre. These problems are, first and foremost, related to changes in the security administration after the uprising. A senior ministry official explained:

During the uprising, more than 600 police stations were attacked. The police officers fled and were completely exhausted. Under Ben Ali, the police worked under the governor and each officer worked in synch with the hierarchy. All that changed on 14 January. The security forces were beaten in the field. Many governors, directors, district chiefs and municipal councils were ousted. Moreover interior ministers dismissed 84 senior officials, most of whom had played a pivotal role in the chain of command. Since then, it is as though the security machine has ground to a halt. We carry on working from day to day but the ministry has neither a plan nor a strategy.²¹⁸

Finally security agents and officers attribute their paralysis to the lack of legal protection at a time when the government's solidarity, and support in the event of public anger, is in doubt.²¹⁹ At a local level this is manifested by a lack of motivation and a sense of insecurity on the part of many police officers and national guardsmen who say they do not feel protected when doing their job. To be sure, the scope of law 69-4, which still defines the mission of the security forces, is not clear. This law, which dates from the end of the 1960s, provides for police officers and national guardsmen to open fire when their life is in danger.²²⁰ But some of them say that about one hundred officers were jailed for having applied this law against rioters in December 2010 and January 2011.²²¹

The security forces say they do not want to take pointless risks by confronting the Salafis, who are very powerful in some districts and villages. A police superintendant in the poor district of Ettadhamen, a Salafi stronghold in the capital's suburbs, explained:

The Salafis locate their street vendors at key points in neighbourhood to earn better profits and recruit new followers. They have a fruit and vegetable stall right next to the police station so they can observe our movements. We can do nothing

²¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, close associate of the interior minister, Tunis, September 2012.

²¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, senior interior ministry official, Tunis, August 2012.

²¹⁹ A similar phenomenon was observed in Egypt, where the security forces, uncertain of the Muslim Brotherhood's attitude to the government, sometimes hesitated to use force for fear of possible sanctions or public retribution. Crisis Group interviews, Egyptian security forces members, Cairo, December 2012; American officials, Washington DC, December 2012.

²²⁰ Law 69-4 of 24 January 1969 regulating public meetings, funeral processions, marches, demonstrations and gatherings.

²²¹ See Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°123, *Tunisie: Combatting Impunity, Restoring Security*, 9 May 2012; Crisis Group interview, interior ministry official, 7 November 2012.

if we arrest a jihadi for committing a crime, because they give a signal and their “brothers” arrive with reinforcements to free them.²²²

As a result many agents regularly request a formal written order from the interior ministry before taking action against violent Salafis, in the hope they will be able to use it in their defence if charges are brought against them.²²³

D. *Hardening of the Security Logic and Radicalisation of the Jihadis?*

In the wake of the attack on the U.S. embassy, two new factors transformed the security sector’s response to Salafi violence. Firstly according to several security officials, for the first time, Interior Minister Ali Laraidh reportedly gave written instructions that authorised the police to use lethal force in self-defence if police stations, and therefore their lives, were threatened.²²⁴ Second, individuals were placed under provisional detention, not for what they had done – acts of violence – but for what they had said – incitement to violence and murder.²²⁵

An ambiguous reality emerged. In November an official at the criminal affairs department said about 220 jihadi Salafis had been arrested for criminal acts, though the latter claimed that more than 900 of their colleagues were behind bars.²²⁶ Other developments also suggested that government attitudes had hardened. About 30 individuals were charged under the anti-terrorism law for recruitment and incitement to jihad in Syria.²²⁷

²²² He also pointed at the failures of the intelligence services, which had been backed by the governing party under Ben Ali’s regime: “Before 14 January, each police officer made a daily report on the economy, security and public grievances. This system was abolished on 14 January. We have therefore lost a lot of data. Special services are currently responsible for intelligence but there is a real lack of field work and a glaring lack of information on the movements and behaviour of many people”. Crisis Group interview, police superintendent in the working-class district of Ettadhamen, *ibid.*

²²³ The idea of obtaining a written order is a recurrent theme. For example, the local police in Menzel Bourguiba requested one on 14 August 2012, when a group of Salafis prevented a comedian from performing at the town’s arts centre and attacked people attending the event. According to someone present, “The Salafis began by praying in front of the arts centre a few days ago. Then they went to speak to the police at the station adjoining the centre. They told the police that there would be trouble if the performance was not cancelled. The police did not even warn the organisers of the show! The following day, the Salafis came but the police did not get involved. They told us they needed a written order from the interior ministry in order to intervene. Before, under Ben Ali, there was no need for that, a phone call from the governor was enough for the police to intervene directly, irrespective of the reason”. Crisis Group interview, member of the Menzel Bourguiba youth centre committee, Menzel Bourguiba, 15 August 2012.

²²⁴ Crisis Group interview, interior ministry officials, Tunis, November 2012. Also see “Douar Hicher: le ministère de l’Intérieur précise”, *africanmanager.com*, 31 October 2012.

²²⁵ Abou Ayoub, ex-number two of Ansar Sharia, was sentenced to four months. He moreover had been sidelined in the organisation because of internal disputes. He was imprisoned for inciting violence and murder. See “Le jihadiste Abou Ayoub condamné à 4 mois de prison ferme”, *Leaders (leaders.com.tn)*, 4 January 2013. Hassen Brik, an Ansar Sharia official was given a suspended sentence of two months for incitement to violence during clashes with security forces at Jendouba in February 2012. “Hassan Ben Brik condamné à deux mois de prison avec sursis”, *Mosaïque FM*, 17 January 2013.

²²⁶ Crisis Group interviews, criminal affairs department officers and jihadi Salafi, Tunis, November 2012.

²²⁷ “Tunisie: un parti salafiste dénonce le recours à la loi antiterroriste”, *Tunis Tribune*, 8 October 2012.

Other more recent events seemed to confirm that the public authorities were hardening their stance: the government announced that it had dismantled, near the border with Algeria, a group allegedly linked to AQIM;²²⁸ searches in the working-class district of Douar Hicher resulted in the death of a Salafi's wife; and a large arms cache was seized in Médenine, in the south of the country, which led to the arrest of jihadi Salafis.²²⁹

Yet even if the government has firmed its position – apparently owing to jihadi radicalisation, the opinion of some segments of the public, elements in the interior ministry and the U.S.²³⁰ – there are lines it has yet to cross. In particular it has not taken action against Ansar Charia, which it suspects of having planned the attack on the U.S. embassy.²³¹ In January 2013, the police released most of the movement's members who had been arrested during the investigation of the incident.²³² As for the perpetrators of the violence, identified with the help of videos and photographs, their trial has yet to take place.²³³

In more general terms, relations between jihadi Salafis and Nahdawis seem to be deteriorating, even though the most recent statements by Ansar Sharia's Abou Ayadh, both before and after Chokri Belaïd's assassination, showed he was open to a rapprochement with An-Nahda's preaching wing.²³⁴ Until the September 2012 arrests, the Salafis' tone towards An-Nahda was rather conciliatory.²³⁵ Some do not trust Ghannouchi's party and consider it to be an Islamist party that, belonging to an older generation, is not very attractive for young people; yet Salafis in general have conceived it as most scripturalist Salafis do: as a movement that lets them work and defends Islam against its enemies, including left-wing militants from middle-class districts and former members of Ben Ali's party.²³⁶ In December 2011, one jihadi Salafi expressed relief at An-Nahda's coming to power: "[That] reassured us a little.

²²⁸ The interior minister implicitly referred to Abou Iyadh's group, Ansar Sharia, when speaking about its "land of preaching" strategy at a press conference on 21 December 2012, following the dismantling of this AQIM cell. "In Tunisia, we are all Muslims and our society is neither the preaching society nor the jihadi society that some people would prefer". Quoted in "Evènements de Jendouba et Kasserine, l'Aqmi est dans le coup", *op. cit.*

²²⁹ Nehed Chouaib, "Tunisie – Ali Zarmedini: 'Lien évident entre les saisies d'armes à El Mourouj et à Médenine'", *Jawhara FM*, 18 January 2013.

²³⁰ Crisis Group interview, American diplomat, Tunis, 18 January 2013.

²³¹ Crisis Group interview, close associate of Hassan Brik, Ansar Sharia official responsible for preaching, Tunis, 18 January 2012.

²³² Imen Gharb, "Hassan Brik libéré", *L'Economiste maghrébin*, 2 January 2013.

²³³ Crisis Group interview, American diplomat, Tunis, 18 January 2013.

²³⁴ "Une interview interdite d'Abou Iyadh divulguée sur Internet", *Maghrabia.com*, 8 February 2013 and "Assassinat de Chokri Belaïd: Ansar Chariaa pousse Ennahdha à aller de l'avant!", *op. cit.*

²³⁵ The first real breach in Nahdawis-jihadi Salafis relations came at the end of March 2012 when Ghannouchi announced that article one of the constitution would not be amended to include a reference to Sharia. The second dates to the arrests made in the wake of the events at Abdelia in June 2012. The third and most important followed the investigation into the attack on the American embassy in September. Crisis Group interviews, Nahdawis and Salafi militants, June-December 2012. One of the movement's influential personalities, Khatib Idrissi, affirmed he had never had any illusions about An-Nahda: "Parties like An-Nahda, it is the West that decided they should win in order to domesticate the Islamic resurgence. That was the case in Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco and Turkey. They say they are Islamic, but they are in fact secular as they do not want to govern according to divine law. Nothing has changed since Ben Ali. All that is against divine law in the constitution is still in force today. All Muslims know that". Crisis Group interview, Khatib Idrissi, Sidi Ali Ben Aoun, 12 September 2012.

²³⁶ Crisis Group interviews, jihadi Salafis, Tunis, December 2011.

Under Ben Ali, I could not even go into Tunis's town centre, I was stopped every 2km because I have a beard".²³⁷ Another said that in the final analysis, An-Nahda was Islamist, and able to put into practice "40 per cent of Islam".²³⁸

Since September however, many jihadi Salafis have started expressing anti-An-Nahda sentiments, such as, "An-Nahda is the RCD with Islam!",²³⁹ "An-Nahda are hypocrites (*munafikun*)"²⁴⁰ and "God is America and Rached Ghannouchi is his Prophet!"²⁴¹ Jihadi Facebook pages now show An-Nahda's logo affixed to the stars and stripes of the American flag.²⁴² A young jihadi said he had realised that the party had "manipulated" him.²⁴³ Another said that he felt closer to the extreme left than to Ghannouchi's party.²⁴⁴ Several of his comrades were finding it difficult to stay calm, especially after the security forces's muscular response to the clashes at Douar Hicher at the end of October and the death of two young, hungerstriking jihadi Salafis.²⁴⁵

A vicious circle – a hardening of the security logic and radicalisation of the jihadi Salafis – seems possible. That in turn could have another consequence: in order to avoid excessively alienating Salafis and provoking a move from peaceful preaching to violent jihad, An-Nahda could wind up making more concessions on the question of Islamising society.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Crisis Group interview, imam close to Salafis in a peri-urban area, June 2012.

²³⁹ Crisis Group interviews, jihadi Salafis, Tunis, October-November 2012.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, criminal affairs department officer, Tunis, 7 November 2012.

²⁴² See Facebook page "Sniper Officiel".

²⁴³ Crisis Group interview, jihadi Salafi, Tunis, December 2012.

²⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, jihadi Salafi, Tunis, January 2013.

²⁴⁵ The hunger strike was undertaken to demand their release from provisional detention during the investigation into the attack on the American embassy.

VI. Conclusion: Out of the Labyrinth

For the moment, and despite a certain amount of disorganisation in the legal and security institutions and state weakness in some interior regions, Tunisia should not be said to be in the murderous grip of jihadi violence. Low intensity violence at the hands of Salafis has increased, a disquieting phenomenon that frightens large sectors of the public that have paid the price. Cultural and moral pressures, also alarming, have been brought to bear. The worst, however, has been avoided, in part thanks to An-Nahda's ambiguous melding of complicity and collusion.

That said, the country is at a crossroads regarding the Salafi question. In an environment shaped by the political crisis and social violence provoked by the assassination of Chokri Belaïd; an extreme polarisation between Islamists and anti-Islamists; serious divisions within An-Nahda; and a certain radicalisation of jihadi discourse and practice, the authorities could be tempted to manage the situation exclusively through the security services. One could imagine, in response, terrorist acts much more violent than the spectacular vigilante operations for which jihadi Salafis are known; the aggressive approach also could foreclose the institutionalisation of radical Islamists, a process that could promote moderation. It could also push An-Nahda to adopt a more restrictive religious perspective, and in doing so, accentuate the divide between Islamists and secularists in the run-up to elections.

Since the problems attributed, wrongly or rightly, to Salafism in Tunisia are varied in nature, the country needs a differentiated strategy. It is undeniable that one of the manifestations of the country's malaise is violence, but this problem, in relative terms, is not widespread.

A security response is certainly necessary, particularly since one form of jihadism is increasingly cross-border in nature. But it is necessary to distinguish between Tunisian Salafism and al-Qaeda-style jihadism; to lump them together and treat them similarly would risk provoking greater radicalisation and more violence. It is obvious but worthwhile to repeat: generalised repression against individuals based on their presumed political and religious affiliation, as under Ben Ali in the 2000s, would only encourage many Salafis to resort to violence.

It is more appropriate to distinguish among the various phenomena and deal with each in a different way: actions of the young unemployed or marginalised who find an easy outlet in jihadi Salafism; attempts to impose a particular religious or moral order against the wishes of many; and, finally, terrorist jihadism in its generally understood form.

1. *Social response*: Some of the most widespread Salafi violence is perpetrated by disorientated youth in the country's interior and poorest, most disadvantaged working-class districts. Before embarking on any security-based response, the government should provide wide-ranging and substantial social and educational development services to these young people, especially programs to help them return to employment and education.²⁴⁶

The government could support the work of civil society in disadvantaged areas by encouraging joint initiatives by Islamic and secular associations, which should better communicate with residents and pursue joint micro-projects to improve living conditions. Another essential requirement for dealing with criminal violence is neigh-

²⁴⁶ See Crisis Group Report, *Tunisia: Confronting Economic and Social Challenges*, op. cit.

bourhood policing, in order to reestablish contact with the population in high-risk areas and win back its trust.

2. *Ideological response:* The polarisation from which the country suffers has multiple reasons; central among them are fears of gradual Islamisation and the type of society that An-Nahda and other Islamist forces may want to impose. The numerous instances of intolerance – towards cultural expression or different social customs – are worrying, as are, for some, the concern that An-Nahda may be aiming to Islamise places of learning.

Despite serious internal divisions, this Islamist party – as part of a broad consultation conducted through the religious affairs ministry, political parties and civil society – could try to draft a charter of civil liberties to preserve the intellectual efforts of 19th-century Tunisian reformers confronted with the challenges of modernity. Such a charter could incorporate Zitounian education, which, while not well structured, seems destined to expand and train a new generation of *shuyukh*.

Even as it seeks to reassure those outside the party, An-Nahda could support this conception of a Tunisian Islam as an integral part of the country's cultural, intellectual and religious heritage. The party should develop and defend such an approach through its newspaper *Al-Fajr* and its digital publications, and encourage organisations close to the party to disseminate it. In particular it should spread the ideas among its activists through the use of training materials on culture, politics and religion.

3. *Security response:* There can be little doubt that the country's security apparatus needs to become more effective in order to reassure citizens, prevent excesses and prepare for the potential emergence of a terrorist form of jihadism. Like other countries in the region undergoing rapid change, political upheaval in Tunisia has been accompanied by the disorganisation and demobilisation of the security forces, the expansion of the ungoverned areas which the state is absent, and an increase in arms trafficking and the circulation of jihadis.

To remedy these problems, the government needs to promulgate a new law defining more clearly the legal status of the police and National Guard and their rules for engagement, which could help to reduce their feeling of insecurity and restore their professional motivation. In addition security service agents and officers should have access to continuous training on techniques for maintaining public order. To reduce the loss of life during violent clashes, in particular with Salafis, they should also be supplied with modern, non-lethal, anti-riot equipment.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ Most Salafis who have lost their lives were shot dead with live ammunition. Police officers and national guardsmen say they used live ammunition because of the poor quality of the non-lethal anti-riot equipment at their disposal. Crisis Group interviews, police officers and national guardsmen, October-November 2012. According to someone close to the union of internal security forces, in order to avoid fatalities when dispersing violent demonstrations, the security forces stopped using military weapons that, when fired into the ground as a deterrent, discharged bullets that ricocheted and inflicted mortal wounds; with a view to reducing loss of life, but having very little non-lethal equipment, such as tazers and water cannons, they started using hunting rifles loaded with buckshot. A Salafi was reportedly killed by this type of weapon during the attack on the American embassy in September. Crisis Group interview, Tunis, November 2012. A protest organised by the UGTT and left-wing parties in December was dispersed using this type of ammunition. More than 300 people were wounded and sixteen lost their sight. See "À Siliana, des Tunisiens à bout contestent les islamistes", *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 2 December 2012.

Finally, the circulation of firearms and explosives in the country and the porosity of its borders with Libya and Algeria – a problem aggravated initially by events in Libya and later by the situation in Mali – demands a regional response and, in particular, close cooperation on security matters between Algiers, Tripoli and Tunis.²⁴⁸ Seizures of such materiel have multiplied since early 2013 and the situation may worsen.²⁴⁹ On 13 January, the head of state declared that Tunisian jihadi Salafis were in contact with “terrorist forces” involved in the Malian conflict, and that Tunisia was, in his opinion, on the point of becoming a “corridor along which Libyan arms are transported to the Mali region”.²⁵⁰ The permeability of nation’s frontiers similarly could make it easy for Tunisian jihadis to make their way to Algeria and Mali. This has already become a reality: eleven of the 32 involved in the kidnapping at the In Amenas gas plant in Algeria in mid-January were Tunisians.²⁵¹

4. *Political response:* Given the urgency occasioned by the assassination of Chokri Belaïd, the government should set up an independent commission of enquiry. It should then revive dialogue aimed at overcoming the divide between Islamists and non-Islamists by creating, as soon as possible, a national council for dialogue that brings together the main political parties, associations and trade unions; this would provide a forum for them to debate the political, social and economic questions provoked by the uprising and by the violent episodes following the departure of Ben Ali, which are, in part, at the origin of the current crisis.

Whatever the make-up of the future government, the eventual changes in the balance of power in the National Constituent Assembly and the political deadlocks and consequent restructuring, the government should establish, as soon as possible, a clear roadmap for the next stages of the transition. While identifying adequate responses to the assassination of Chokri Belaïd, the government should ensure these responses are not perceived by some segments of the public – part of An-Nahda and some jihadi Salafis – as a denial of legitimacy earned at the ballot box or as the prelude to social and political exclusion, or even the repression of currents of Islamist thought.

This question of course is one element in a much broader context characterised by a massive lack of trust between Islamists and non-Islamists, with both sides suspecting the other of wanting to monopolise the political field. Worse, jihadis acknowledge they are storing arms as a preventive measure, for fear of returning to the repression they experienced under the old regime.²⁵² Some An-Nahda supporters have

²⁴⁸ Crisis Group interviews, interior ministry senior officials, Tunis, October 2012.

²⁴⁹ “Tunisie – Ali Zarmedini: ‘Lien évident entre les saisies d’armes à El Mourouj et à Médenine’”, op. cit. Crisis Group interviews, security forces official, Tunis, June-December 2012. An expert from a Swiss NGO specialising on this issue listed TNT, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and other rocket launchers, and Kalashnikovs from loyalist Libyans (Qadhafi supporters) in Tunisia and Tunisian Salafis who almost took control of the Ras Jedir, Ben Guerdane and Choucha refugee camps during the war against the Qadhafi regime. Crisis Group interview, expert at a Swiss NGO, Médenine, June 2012.

²⁵⁰ “Pour Marzouki, il y a en Tunisie ‘un consensus unique dans le monde arabe’”, France 24, 13 January 2013. The president also said that Jihadism was a great danger to the region. He added that a number of jihadis were currently travelling from Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Maghreb. “Le jihadisme, ‘un problème sécuritaire qui menace tout le Maghreb’, selon Marzouki”, *Jeune Afrique*, 3 October 2012.

²⁵¹ “La Tunisie, base arrière des jihadistes maliens”, Radio France internationale, 22 January 2013.

²⁵² Crisis Group interviews, jihadi Salafis, Tunis, September 2012. Béchir Ben Hassen, a scripturalist Salafi, said in November in a video published on his website (Béchirbenhassen.com) that if “the

similar fears and are convinced that they will be sent to prison if their party loses the next elections. An old supporter of armed struggle, now an official in a legal Islamist political party, maintains that the willingness to integrate into the political system and respect the rules of the institutional game is not an irreversible process:

For the moment, jihad means building and implementing reforms. But if a new Bourguiba or a new Ben Ali were to come to power, we would be using jihad in the sense of *qital* (combat) – because he will not only chase us from the political scene, he will want to put us in prison. At that moment, we will no longer be found in an office, but behind bars or in the mountains!²⁵³

Non-Islamists are afraid as well. If Islamists are worried because of the repressive past, non-Islamists are worried because of a threatening present, because of the attacks against individuals, cinemas and bars, considered by Islamists as offences against religion. They also are concerned by the existence of leagues to protect the revolution, which often are violent and mainly defend pro-government and pro-Islamist positions.²⁵⁴

The divide between Islamists and anti-Islamists seems to have reached new heights since the murder of Chokri Belaïd, but he was already a marked man. For example, in December 2012, the UGTT called a general strike to protest the attack on its offices by members of the leagues for the protection of the revolution, presenting itself as the leader of the anti-Islamists. In response, several mosques in the Sfax region denounced the strike and joined the leagues in organising a counter-demonstration in Sfax that was attended by close to 100,000 people.²⁵⁵ If the path of dialogue closes,

remains of the old regime return to power, it will be necessary to fight until the last drop of blood is spilled". In November, discussions on the jihadi Salafi Facebook page "Sniper Officiel" said that the main enemy was Nida Tounes, the party of the former prime minister, Béji Caïd Essebsi, and not An-Nahda.

²⁵³ Crisis Group interview, radical Islamist party official, September 2012.

²⁵⁴ These leagues are the heirs to the committees for the protection of the revolution created spontaneously in the wake of Ben Ali's departure by unaffiliated youth, trade unionists and secularists. These leagues now unite most An-Nahda militants and backers, as well as pro-government Tunisians who provide critical support in the name of the revolution and Islam. The leagues became more structured during the course of 2012 and increased their level of activity. They are present in most parts of the country, including the most remote areas. Self-proclaimed protectors of the revolution, they do not hesitate to flex their muscles: intimidating businessmen whom they perceive as close to the old regime; holding counter-demonstrations and counter-rallies that sometimes end in violent clashes with secularist party or UGTT members; and attacks on journalists and opposition militants. Their members foster a discourse that is often Manichean, encouraging witch-hunts against individuals and organisations that they identify with the old regime or secularism, such as Nida Tounes and the Front populaire, a coalition of extreme left and Arab nationalist political parties and associations. These leagues, which radical left militants describe as An-Nahda militia, provoke strong fears among non-Islamists, who accuse them of giving their members preferential treatment – regarding, for example, employment and loans – and above all of preparing the ground for serious political violence. Several extreme left activists say that although these leagues are distinct from jihadi Salafi groups and closer to the preaching wing of An-Nahda, they operate as "fascist" leagues and had advance warning of Chokri Belaïd's assassination. Crisis Group interviews, leader of a league for the protection of the revolution in a Tunis suburb, Tunis, 26 January 2013; residents of Tunis and Sfax, December 2012; extreme left militants, January-February 2013.

²⁵⁵ Béchir Ben Hassen, one of the leaders of scripturalist Salafism in Tunisia, described the strike as illegal in the eyes of Islam. Crisis Group interviews, residents of Sfax, Sfax, 15 December 2012; jihadi Salafi, Tunis, December 2012.

the approach of the next elections could give rise to new violence, given that their result has taken on an existential character for both sides.

These mutual fears, which partly explain the escalation of political tension, show that many Tunisians do not believe that their new political freedoms are secure. A national dialogue and the adoption of a new constitution enshrining these freedoms would be a first step – necessary but insufficient – to dissipate these concerns. In more general terms, the political forces must identify ways of convincing each other that, in the wake of the election, whatever the short- to medium-term scenarios, Islamists and non-Islamists alike will neither be subjected to a painful backlash nor be forced to countenance repression or arbitrary treatment, whether political or religious.

Tunis/Brussels, 13 February 2013

Appendix A: Map of Tunisia



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Appendix B: Glossary of Abbreviations

AQIM – Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: armed Salafi organisation of Algerian origin and successor to the Groupe Salafi pour la prédication et le combat (GSPC), a dissidence of the Groupe islamique armé (GIA) formed in 2007.

NAC – National Constituent Assembly, elected in October 2011 to draw up a new constitution.

CPR – Congrès pour la République: centre-left political party founded in 2001. Member of the illegal opposition under Ben Ali. Led by Moncef Marzouki until December 2011 when he became President of the Republic. Currently part of the Troika.

FIT – Front islamique Tunisie: political group that advocated the armed struggle at the end of the 1980s.

GCT – Groupe combattant tunisien: jihadi organisation created abroad in 2000. It helped organise the assassination of Sheikh Massoud in Afghanistan, on the eve of 11 September 2001.

ISROR – Instance supérieure pour la réalisation des objectifs de la révolution, la réforme politique et la transition démocratique, Higher Authority for the Realisation of the Objectives of the Revolution, Political Reform and Democratic Transition. Led by Yadh Ben Achour, it was formed in March 2011 and dissolved before the elections of 23 October 2011.

LTDH – Ligue tunisienne des droits de l'homme: first league for human rights in the Arab world, formed in 1977.

MTI – Mouvement de la tendance islamique: former name (1979-1988) of the Islamist party An-Nahda.

PCOT – Parti communiste des ouvriers de Tunisie: founded at the end of the 1980s, it is now one of the main tendencies in the Tunisian radical Marxist left. It changed its name to the Parti des travailleurs tunisiens in July 2012.

PDP – Parti démocrate progressiste: a centre-left political party founded in 2001. On 7 April 2012, the party merged with six other centrist parties to form the Parti républicain (Al-Joumhouri).

RCD – Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique: party of former president Ben Ali. It was the heir of Néo-Destour ("Destour" means constitution) and the Parti socialiste destourien (PSD), founded by Tunisia's first president, Habib Bourguiba.

UGET – Union générale des étudiants tunisiens: student union founded in 1952.

UGTE – Union générale tunisienne des étudiants: student union close to the Islamist movement, founded in 1985, dissolved in 1991 and officially recognised in 2011.

UGTT – Union générale tunisienne du travail: formed in 1946, it was the only trade union central until the fall of Ben Ali. Now led by Hassine Abassi.