

# Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb's Tunisia Strategy

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**D**uring the last two years, Salafist activity has escalated in Tunisia. Much of this activity -- primarily *dawa* (religious outreach) designed to expand the Salafist movement -- has taken place under the auspices of Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia (AST), headed by veteran jihadist Saifullah bin Hassine. A series of security incidents in and around Tunisia, however, have been attributed to al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and more recently to an opaque group known as the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade. Regional security officials have described the brigade as an attempt to establish a Tunisian jihadist group linked to AQIM, one that purportedly combines local recruits from western Tunisia's Kasserine area and some members of AST under the guidance and leadership of figures reputedly close to AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel. Officials therefore perceive the incidents on Tunisia's border with Algeria beginning in late April 2013 as highlighting AQIM's increased focus on Tunisia.

This article analyzes how AQIM, viewing events in Tunisia through its strategic lens, has responded to that country's revolution. It finds that AQIM has tried to insert itself into AST's relationship with the Tunisian state. AQIM has urged AST to be patient to prevent the Tunisian government from cracking down on its activities. At the same time, AQIM's rhetoric toward the Tunisian state has become sharper, opening the possibility of an increase in AQIM-related violence in Tunisia...

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*CTC Sentinel*

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