

Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb's Tunisia Strategy

By Aaron Y. Zelin, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross & Andrew Lebovich

DURING THE LAST two years, Salafist activity has escalated in Tunisia. Much of this activity—primarily *da`wa* (religious outreach) designed to expand the Salafist movement—has taken place under the auspices of Ansar al-Shari`a in Tunisia (AST), headed by veteran jihadist Saifullah bin Hassine (also known as Abu Iyadh al-Tunisi).¹ A series of security incidents in and around Tunisia, however, have been attributed to al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and more recently to an opaque group known as the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade.² Regional security officials have described the Uqba ibn Nafi 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

1 Abu Iyadh was part of the United Kingdom's "Londonistan" scene in the 1990s, where he became associated with jihadist figures such as Hani al-Siba`i and Abu Qatada al-Filistini, even being described as Abu Qatada's "disciple" on some jihadist forums. See "Tunisian Salafi Ansar al-Shari`ah Gaining Hard-line Jihadist Support," BBC Monitoring, May 24, 2012; Fabio Merone, "Salafism in Tunisia: An Interview with a Member of Ansar al-Shari`a," *Jadaliyya*, April 11, 2013. He also became associated with Algeria's Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) during this period and facilitated Tunisians' travel to Algeria so they could receive militant training with the GSPC. In Afghanistan, he co-founded the Tunisian Combatant Group, which the United Nations designated an al-Qa`ida-affiliated terrorist organization in 2002. For details, see "QE.T.90.02. Tunisian Combatant Group," UN Security Council, April 7, 2011; Aaron Y. Zelin, "Missionary at Home, Jihadist Abroad: A Profile of Tunisia's Abu Ayyad the Amir of Ansar al-Shari`a," *Militant Leadership Monitor* 3:4 (2012); Lorenzo Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe: The New Battleground of International Jihad* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005).

2 Uqba ibn Nafi was a seventh century Arab general under the Umayyad Caliphate who founded the Tunisian city of Qayrawan. Interestingly, the Uqba ibn Nafi mosque in Qayrawan, a city renowned for its longstanding tradition of Islamic scholarship, has become a bastion of Salafist preaching since 2011. See "Tunisie – Mohamed Hassen à la Mosquée Okba Ibn Nafaâ: Une foule, survoltée, réclame la Chariâa (vidéo)," *Business News* [Tunis], May 3, 2013.

of figures reputedly close to AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel (also known as Abu Mus`ab al-Wadud).³ Regional security 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.

AQIM's Strategic Outlook

Understanding AQIM's policies toward Tunisia requires an awareness of the group's perceptions of the changes brought by the Arab uprisings, and how these changes in turn influence its strategy toward the region. Salafi-jihadi thinkers and strategists who are influential to AQIM quickly reached consensus about what the Arab uprisings meant, formulating their ideas about the revolutionary events even while Hosni Mubarak's regime in Egypt drew its final breaths. They agreed that the changes gripping the region were positive, primarily because they created unprecedented opportunities to undertake *da`wa*.⁴ At the same time, the movement would

3 See, for example, Benjamin Roger, "Tunisie: sur la trace des djihadistes de mont Chaambi," *Jeune Afrique*, May 7, 2013; Mourad Sellami, "Les précisions du ministre de l'Intérieur tunisien," *El Watan* [Algiers], December 22, 2012; "Tunisie-Alqaida-Aqmi: Groupes armés, Larayedh sonne l'alerte," *Tunis Afrique Presse*, December 21, 2012; Andrew Lebovich, "Confronting Tunisia's Jihadists," *Foreign Policy*, May 16, 2013.

4 See Ayman al-Zawahiri, "And be Neither Weakened nor Saddened," al-Sahab, August 15, 2011; Atiyatallah `Abd al-Rahman, "The People's Revolt...The Fall of Corrupt Arab Regimes...The Demolition of the Idol of Stability...and the New Beginning," distributed by the Global Islamic Media Front, February 16, 2011. For an in-depth discussion of early Salafi-jihadi perceptions of the Arab uprisings, see Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Tara Vassefi, "Perceptions of the 'Arab Spring' Within the Salafi-Jihadi Movement," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35:12 (2012).

not be satisfied constraining itself to *da`wa*, and this early theoretical work emphasized a phased approach wherein Salafi-jihadis—even while undertaking *da`wa* peacefully, in ways they could not under the old regimes—would prepare to later engage in violence.⁵

Tunisia-based researcher Monica Marks identified three major divisions of Salafism within Tunisia: *Salafiyya `Almiyya* (usually translated as scientific Salafism, but which Marks believes is better understood as scripturalist Salafism), political Salafism, and *Salafiyya Jihadiyya* (Salafi-jihadism).⁶ To those who can be categorized as *Salafiyya `Almiyya*, democracy is "a tempting, but ultimately dead-end street," and instead of engaging in party politics they choose "apolitical lives of quietist piety."⁷ Political Salafists have much in common with *Salafiyya `Almiyya*, but believe participation in democratic politics is justified despite its flaws because it "could serve as a vehicle to attain a more caliphate-like, Shari`a-

5 Prominent Mauritanian ideologue Abu al-Mundhir al-Shinqiti, who is well known for his belief in the necessity of violence, emphasized a phased approach by speaking to the need for leniency while *da`wa* is predominant. Referring specifically to Tunisia, he said that "present circumstances...require that the people of monotheism concentrate on the aspect of preaching," due to ignorance of Islam caused by Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's fallen regime. See Abu al-Mundhir al-Shinqiti, "Answers to Questions from Our Tunisian Brothers," *Minbar al-Tawhid wal-Jihad*, December 15, 2011. AST leaders have also articulated a phased approach. Hassan Ben Brik, who heads AST's *da`wa* committee, has described jihad as "certainly part of our political project," but said that AST has "no interest currently in embarking on violent initiatives, or acts of terrorism." See Sergio Galasso, "Intervista ad Hassan Ben Brik: 'Non crediamo nella democrazia, ma senza appoggio del popolo niente jihad,'" *Limes*, October 11, 2012. Another young AST leader told an Italian researcher that AST has not "eliminated the idea of jihad from our philosophy," but that the group is not currently engaged in revolutionary violence because it is focused on *da`wa*. See Merone, "Salafism in Tunisia."

6 Monica Marks, "Youth Politics and Tunisian Salafism: Understanding the Jihadi Current," *Mediterranean Politics* 18:1 (2013). This tripartite division is consistent with the strains of Tunisian Salafism identified by other researchers. See Stefano M. Torelli, Fabio Merone & Francesco Cavatorta, "Salafism in Tunisia: Challenges and Opportunities for Democratization," *Middle East Policy* 19:4 (2012).

7 Marks, "Youth Politics and Tunisian Salafism: Understanding the Jihadi Current."

based polity."⁸ Those who can be considered *Salafiyya Jihadiyya* reject both democratic participation and also the quietism of *Salafiyya `Almiyya*.

Although AST has distanced itself from violence at this time, it has shown a devotion to Salafi-jihadi ideology, a fact that can be seen from both their own explanations and threats,⁹ as well as the significant and long-standing connections that leaders and key members of the organization have to transnational jihadists.¹⁰ Indeed, because of these factors, AST has won the praise of key leaders and intellectuals in the Salafi-jihadi movement.¹¹

Its current activities within Tunisia are mostly concentrated on *da`wa*, which has allowed the movement to grow in size and give it influence beyond its relatively small numbers.¹²

The bulk of the jihadist activities in which the group might be involved have been focused abroad, such as promoting the flow of foreign fighters to Syria, although the group has also been accused of orchestrating attacks on perceived cultural opponents within Tunisia.¹³ Although the extent of AST's

8 Ibid.

9 "Abu Iyadh Threatens to 'Afghanise' Tunisia in Most Serious Salafist Menace," *Middle East Online*, May 13, 2013; Aaron Zelin, "Who's Who in Tunisia's Salafi-Jihadi Community: A Look at Key Leaders of Ansar al-Shari`a in Tunisia," *Militant Leadership Monitor*, April 2013.

10 Abu Iyadh has said that AST "shared in the same *manhaj*," or religious methodology, as al-Qa`ida. See Zelin, "Missionary at Home, Jihadist Abroad." For AST leaders' explanations of their devotion to jihadist violence, see Galasso, "Intervista ad Hassan Ben Brik"; Merone, "Salafism in Tunisia."

11 For praise of AST by key Salafi-jihadi figures, see "Journalistic Encounter with the Director of Al-Andalus Media Foundation," al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb, April 18, 2013; "Web: Jihadists Send Mixed Messages to Tunisia's Salafis," *BBC Monitoring*, November 8, 2012.

12 Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, *Ansar al-Shari`a Tunisia's Long Game: Dawā, Hisba and Jihad* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism-The Hague, 2013).

13 Thomas Joscelyn, "Tunisian 'Martyrs' Celebrated by Ansar al-Sharia," *The Long War Journal*, March 13, 2013; Ahmed Maher, "Tunisia's Radical Divide over Salafi Agenda," *BBC*, June 6, 2013; Thomas A. Bass, "How Tunisia is Turning Into a Salafist Battleground," *The Atlantic*, June 20, 2013. Aaron Y. Zelin has kept a comprehensive database of martyrdom announcements issued by rebel forces in Syria that demonstrates both the presence of AST fighters and also the fact that AST subsequently

relationship with AQIM is unknown, AQIM leaders have repeatedly offered advice to the group on how to proceed in Tunisia.

Advising Tunisians, Ennahda, and AST

In its public statements, AQIM has attempted to act as a wise outsider providing counsel on the best course for Tunisia's future—offering advice to Ennahda and AST. Ennahda, Tunisia's Islamist political party, contested democratic elections after the fall of the Zine El Abidine Ben Ali government and won a majority of seats. Yet Ennahda's more moderate policies have placed it at odds with more hard line groups such as AST and other Salafists.

AQIM has a powerful message in the form of its warnings that Tunisians' hard-won victory over the former regime could be stolen from them. This message especially resonates with Tunisians who are already sympathetic to AQIM's worldview.

The first statement AQIM released on the Tunisian revolution came on January 13, 2011, when the group's *amir*, Abdelmalek Droukdel, justified the uprising by painting the regime as "exceeding its boundaries in fighting Islam like no other."¹⁴ He told Tunisians that their movement must be broad and led by the wisdom of the *ulama*.¹⁵ At the same time, he offered Tunisians the opportunity to train with AQIM for the final battle against the Jews and Christians, saying that the overthrow of the local regime was but one stage in a broader war.¹⁶ He framed Tunisians' struggle as part of AQIM's larger fight: "Your mujahidin brothers are with you, your problem is our problem, and your happening is ours."¹⁷

A couple of weeks later, AQIM released another statement highlighting the opportunities and dangers of the post-Ben Ali era.¹⁸ AQIM advised Tunisians

issued laudatory announcements when they were killed.

14 Abu Mus'ab al-Wadud, "In Support of the Intifadah of our People in Tunisia," *al-Andalus Media*, January 13, 2011.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 "To Our People in Tunisia: The Tyrant has Fled but the Infidel and Tyrannical System Remains," *al-Andalus Media*, January 28, 2011.

"to take advantage of this historical opportunity to spread the *manhaj* (methodology) of *tawhid* (monotheism) and jihad."¹⁹ At the same time, Tunisians must "prepare and be ready as the days are pregnant and the Crusade war against Islam and Muslims remains utmost intense."²⁰ This statement is consistent with the theoretical work produced by Salafi-jihadi thinkers counseling an initial stage of preaching that would culminate in violence when the movement is ready (or when its hand is forced).

AQIM did not release any new statements on Tunisia until October 2012. The return of its public rhetoric coincided with AST's ascendance, as well as Tunisia's leading Islamist party, Ennahda, distancing itself from Salafist movements following the September 2012 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Tunis.²¹ The rhetorical and later street confrontation between Tunisian security services and AST gave AQIM the opportunity to attempt to insert itself as an arbiter among different Islamist movements. Later, AQIM offered support and advice to AST, as a look at a series of AQIM's subsequent statements demonstrates.

In October 2012, AQIM took a soft tone in a public address, noting that it was only giving advice so as not to "fall in the traps of the enemies of Islam."²² The message to Ennahda was that while there might be differences in tactics, both groups want the same end result: implementation of Shari'a.²³ Therefore, AQIM said that it is better to work together than to engage in intra-Islamist infighting, which would only help those with a secular or liberal agenda.²⁴ AQIM warned against working with the United States, and also France and the old regime—an allusion to the upstart political party Nida' Tunis (the Tunisian Call), which has a number of leaders from the former regime.²⁵ AQIM stated that the "Islamic movement"

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Camille Tawil, "Ennahda Reconsiders Ties With Tunisian Salafist Groups," *al-Hayat*, May 29, 2013.

22 "To the Wise Men of the Islamist Movement in Tunisia," *al-Andalus Media*, October 22, 2012.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

should focus on spreading its message through *da'wa* while avoiding *takfir* (excommunication).²⁶

In a March 2013 statement, AQIM further emphasized the importance of *da'wa* by exhorting Tunisians to stay in their own country rather than joining the jihad abroad.²⁷ Without a critical mass of Salafi-jihadis at home, AQIM warned, Tunisia would be ceded to secularists who "spread corruption."²⁸

Yet the tone of AQIM's statements shifted less than two months later, as a confrontation heated up with Ennahda and the Tunisian state on one side, and AQIM and AST on the other.²⁹ At the time, Tunisia was undertaking military operations against the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade on its border with Algeria, and there were also low-level clashes in Tunisian cities due to the state's cancellation of AST's annual conference in May 2013. AQIM was evolving to a more hostile stance toward Ennahda—one that mirrors the increasing anger of Salafists and Salafi-jihadis toward Ennahda, and the worsening AST-Ennahda relationship.

For the first time, AQIM explicitly criticized the Islamist Ennahda party for its perceived wavering on the issue of Shari'a, and for selling democracy as legitimate under Islam. "Don't be deceived by the people who call to democracy by decorating it under the name of the truth and give it a religious garment," the statement implored.³⁰ Therefore, AQIM advised Tunisians to shield themselves from these provocations by joining "your sincere preachers of Ansar al-Shari'a, who stood next to you."³¹ Yet while these statements were hostile toward Ennahda, Mauritanian AQIM member Abu Yahya al-Shinqiti also counseled AST to be

26 Ibid.

27 "Call to the Youth of Islam: To Those Who Aspire to Hijrah in the Way of God in the Islamic Maghreb in General and Tunisia in Particular," *al-Andalus Media*, March 17, 2013.

28 Ibid.

29 Abu Yahya al-Shinqiti, "O People of Tunisia of al-Qayrawan Be Supporters of Shari'a al-Rahman," *al-Andalus Media*, May 18, 2013; Shaykh Ahmad Abu 'Abd al-Ilah, "Letter of Advice to Ennahda in Tunisia of al-Qayrawan," *al-Andalus Media*, May 21, 2013.

30 Al-Ilah.

31 Ibid.

cautious of the Tunisian government's "provocations," and to demonstrate "patience and wisdom" rather than being dragged into "random actions."³² AQIM's public stance has been to counsel AST not to escalate its conflict with the government, so that it can maintain its ability to undertake *da`wa* openly. At the same time, AQIM serves as an ominous presence in the background, a dark cloud hanging over Tunisian society.

AQIM Operations in Tunisia

When the Algeria-based Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) became AQIM in 2007, one goal behind its founding was to integrate into one structure the various jihadist groups in North Africa, including the Tunisian Combatant Group (TCG). The TCG's

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involvement with the GSPC/AQIM, however, was limited for a number of years. Early Tunisian global jihadist activity, such as the arrangement for two Belgian-Tunisians to kill Afghan mujahidin commander Ahmad Shah Massoud in 2001, involved direct links to al-Qa`ida's core organization rather than to GSPC/AQIM.³³ The GSPC and later AQIM were regarded as largely focused on Algeria.

This is not to say that Tunisian jihadists were not involved with their Algerian counterparts during this period. TCG co-founder Tarek Maaroufi worked with GSPC networks in Europe, Tunisians trained in GSPC/AQIM camps, and some Tunisian radicals were captured or killed by Algerian security services.³⁴ Still, this cooperation appears limited.

Yet with the Arab uprisings and the fall of Ben Ali, AQIM's reported presence in Tunisia became more visible. In May 2011, a gunfight that killed two Tunisian security force members (including a colonel) broke out in the southern Tunisian town of Rouhia after security forces discovered men trying to transport weapons.³⁵ The militants, reportedly AQIM members, included Algerians, Libyans, and Tunisians, two of whom were, according to Tunisian authorities, part of a group of fighters who tried to infiltrate and recruit fighters in Tunisia in 2006 and 2007 known as the Suleiman Group.³⁶ The next year, in Bir Ali Ben Khalifa, fighting between suspected militants and security forces broke

34 For information on Maaroufi, see "The United States and Italy Designate Twenty-Five New Financiers of Terror," U.S. Treasury Department, August 29, 2002; Christophe Dubois and Frédéric Vézard, "Le Tunisien d'Al-Qaïda fréquentait un cybercafé de Menton," *Le Parisien*, October 22, 2002. For information on Tunisians training in GSPC/AQIM camps, see Anneli Botha, "Terrorism in the Maghreb: The Transnationalisation of Domestic Terrorism," Institute for Security Studies, July 2008. For information on Tunisians killed or captured by Algerian authorities, see Mounir B., "Six terroristes tunisiens arrêtés à Annaba," *Le Quotidien d'Oran*, April 17, 2005.

35 Frida Dahmani, "Tunisie: échanges de tir meurtriers entre militaires et membres présumés d'Aqmi," *Jeune Afrique*, May 18, 2011.

36 Contemporary reporting identified these two as Sofiane Ben Amor and Abdelwaheb Hmaied. See Frida Dahmani, "Tunisie: échanges de tir meurtriers entre militaires et membres présumés d'Aqmi," *Jeune Afrique*, May 18, 2011. The Suleiman Group was built around several jihadists, led by a former Tunisian national guardsman named Lassad Sassi. Sassi had trained with the GSPC in Algeria, then slipped into Tunisia and recruited and trained as many as 40 men before the Suleiman Group was broken up by Tunisian security forces in early 2007. The group, however, had difficulties with funding and equipment, and later analysis has theorized that the group posed somewhat less of a threat to Tunisian security than initial reporting suggested. See, for example, Alison Pargeter, "The Suleiman Affair: Radicalism and Jihad in Tunisia," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 23:1 (2011).

out after authorities tried to stop arms smugglers.³⁷ The clashes resulted in the deaths of two militants and the recovery of 34 automatic weapons and nearly \$55,000 in cash.³⁸ According to then-

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Tunisian Interior Minister (now prime minister) Ali Laarayedh, some of the 12 men arrested after the incident had links to AQIM.³⁹

During this period, according to Algerian officials, the flow of arms increased through and within Tunisia (from both Libya and Algeria), a trend that became noticeable in the Algerian provinces of El Oued and Tebessa, which border Tunisia, as well as in close inland provinces like Khenchela and Bouira.⁴⁰

In December 2012, the situation escalated with the emergence of what Tunisian officials termed AQIM's attempt to set up a branch in Tunisia, the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade.⁴¹ Following security incidents that month in Kasserine and the arrests of 16 militants reputedly linked to AQIM, Laarayedh publicly identified the group, saying that it was led by Algerians close to AQIM leader

37 "Tunisie: violences et défi salafiste," International Crisis Group, February 13, 2013.

38 Zohra Abid, "Tunisie. La groupe de Bir Ali Ben Khalifa est lié à Al Qaïda," *Kapitalis*, February 13, 2012.

39 Ibid.

40 For one notable incident involving an arms convoy that fled from Algeria into Tunisia, see Georges Malbrunot, "Un mystérieux convoi armé stoppé en Tunisie," *Le Figaro*, September 23, 2011. Also see "À Bir El Ater, les contrebandiers préfèrent le trafic d'armes," *El Watan*, October 7, 2011.

41 Mourad Sellami, "Cellule d'Al Qaïda démantelée aux frontières: Les précisions du ministre de l'intérieur tunisien," *El Watan*, December 22, 2012.

32 Al-Shinqiti, "O People of Tunisia of al-Qayrawan Be Supporters of Shari`a al-Rahman."

33 Benjamin Roger, "Tunisie: Abou Iyadh, au nez et à la barbe des autorités," *Jeune Afrique*, September 18, 2012.

Abdelmalek Droukdel.⁴² Laarayedh added that the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade was composed largely of recruits from the region of Kasserine, which abuts Algeria, and that the group's goal was to provide initial training before sending fighters along to "real" AQIM camps in Algeria or Libya.⁴³

After several months searching for militants in the region of Jebel Chaambi, Tunisia's highest mountain, and further north toward El Kef, Tunisian security forces struck a homemade mine on the mountain on April 29, 2013.⁴⁴ Between then and early June, at least 20 Tunisian soldiers were wounded, some seriously, and two killed by improvised explosive devices on the mountain.⁴⁵ Again, Tunisian officials identified those behind the bombs as the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade, which they alleged included fighters who had spent time in northern Mali.⁴⁶ While Tunisian officials have claimed that the group has left the mountain, Algerian security forces have stepped up surveillance and border security operations over the last two months.⁴⁷ According to *El Watan*, Algerian forces have even conducted limited counterterrorism operations in Tunisian territory.⁴⁸

Interestingly, at a time when Tunisian security services were hunting fighters in Jebel Chaambi and El Kef, militant-linked violence in the regions of Algeria bordering Tunisia appears to have increased. While it is unclear to what extent this violence may have been connected to developments in Tunisia or to the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade, at least one incident in February 2013—a coordinated assault on an Algerian army base at Khenchela—was reportedly conducted by a group of fighters bearing a striking resemblance to the descriptions of the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade.⁴⁹ This could bolster suggestions that the group is using Tunisia largely for recruitment and training, while focusing on combat operations elsewhere, such as in Algeria or Mali.

While Tunisian officials have charged that members of AST may have been involved in the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade and the incidents around Jebel Chaambi, and that AST leader Abu Iyadh al-Tunisi has visited the mountain, this information is impossible to confirm and could be related to the tensions between the Ennahda-led government and AST.⁵⁰

Conclusion

It is likely that the tenor of the relationship between AST and the Ennahda-led government will continue to deteriorate, as will the relationship between AQIM and the Tunisian state. AST has something to lose, however, if it moves toward direct confrontation with the state: the group has been able to provide social services to areas neglected by the government, and has positioned

itself as a leading voice opposed to a system widely seen as failing. Although AST remains numerically small, it enjoys influence beyond its numbers. Going to war with the state would mean sacrificing its ability to engage in *da`wa* openly.⁵¹

Thus, while it is not clear that this is the result of coordination between the two groups, AQIM has served as a safety valve for AST. It has urged AST to deescalate its confrontations with the state, even while AQIM itself has adopted an increasingly harsh tone toward the Tunisian government and appears to be escalating its activities in the Algeria-Tunisia border region.⁵²

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42 Dorra Megdiche Meziou, "Al Qaïda, menace-t-elle vraiment la Tunisie?" *Business News*, December 21, 2012.

43 Ibid.; Roger, "Tunisie: sur la trace des djihadistes du mont Chaambi." Other reports indicated the presence of purported training camps in Tunisia as early as last fall. See Malik Aït-Aoudia, "Tunisie: qui protège les camps jihadistes?" *Marianne*, October 23, 2012.

44 "Fifth Mine Explodes in Mount Chaambi, No Victims," *Tunis Afrique Press*, May 20, 2013.

45 Antoine Lambroschini, "Jihadists Hunted in Tunisia 'Former Mali Fighters,'" *Agence France-Presse*, May 8, 2013.

46 Ibid.

47 Amira Masrouf, "Government Says Chaambi Attacks Planted by Actors Outside the Mountain," *Tunisia Live*, June 7, 2013; "Tunisie - l'armée algérienne soupçonne les terroristes de se déplacer sous la couverture de contrebandiers," *Business News*, June 10, 2013.

48 Aziz M., "Frontière algéro-libyenne: Le boom du trafic d'armes," *El Watan*, June 21, 2013; "Algérie: surveillance renforcé à la frontière tunisienne," *Agence France-Presse*, May 4, 2013. If true, the reports about Algerian deployments in Tunisia would mark a shift from Algeria's public stance on the deployment of Algerian forces outside of Algerian borders.

49 The attack was conducted by approximately 50 fighters, matching some estimates of the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade's size, and reportedly involved a mix of Algerians, Tunisians, and Libyans. See "Algérie: un groupe armé attaque une caserne militaire," *Radio France Internationale*, February 7, 2013.

50 According to an *El Watan* article, "Concerning the origins of the people captured, Ali Laarayedh indicated that the majority of these terrorists are originally from the Kasserine governorate and were known for their activities in protests organized by Ansar al-Shari`a." See Mourad Sellami, "Les précisions du ministre de l'Intérieur tunisien," *El Watan*, December 22, 2012. Also see Imed O., "Selon les services de renseignement spéciaux tunisiens: Abou Iyadh aurait visité les terroristes au mont Chaambi," *Liberté-Algérie*, June 15, 2013; Lebovich.

51 For its part, AQIM might lose traction if it found itself in an actual fight with the Tunisian state, as that could darken many Tunisians' perceptions of it.

52 Al-Ilah.