

# DIALOGUES

SECURITAIRES  
DANS L'ESPACE  
SAHELO - SAHARIEN

## SECURITY CHALLENGES AND ISSUES IN THE SAHELO-SAHARAN REGION

THE TUNISIA PERSPECTIVE

by Mohamed Eljarh

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## FOREWORD

The recent Malian and Libyan crises have exacerbated the multidimensional insecurity (at personal, economic, political, social, environmental, healthcare, etc. levels) that affects the populations living the Sahelo-Saharan region, and have showcased not only the weakness of the States but also the necessity for regional cooperation, especially between the Maghreb and West Africa. Together, they may face up to similar challenges.

The project called "Dialogues about Security in the Sahelo-Saharan Region" stems from this observation. It was initiated by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) Office in Mali, in partnership with its counterparts in Morocco, Senegal and Tunisia, in order to underscore the strong interdependences that exist between North and West Africa regarding security matters, and to promote national and sub-regional dialogues about the security challenges and issues that prevail within the States and across borders.

It aims at assessing the overall situation in the region, in light of the concept of human security. This is why country-based studies were conducted in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Chad and Tunisia. Each country-based study went through a validation process led by a committee of human security specialists from the country in question. Also, each country-based study was discussed by experts during a workshop that was organized for the purpose of not only identifying shared issues, but also agreeing on the top political actions that must be carried out in the Sahelo-Maghrebian region.

These country-based studies represent the first phase of an on-going multiyear project. They are also the intellectual basis on which some upcoming activities will be based, such as a regional conference that will focus on the priority issues that the experts have defined during their respective workshops.

The outcomes of the project will be used by all the key players involved in the various aspects of human security across the region. They will also be important sources of information and guidelines for the policy-makers and the members of the civil society, as well as for national and foreign researchers and university staff members.

Bamako, July 2016

Jan Henrik Fahlbusch  
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Program Leader

## INTRODUCTION

Several security issues and challenges exist in the Maghreb and Sahel regions today, and they threaten the stability and security of Tunisia. The rise of radical Islamism and of jihadist terrorism, the proliferation of all kinds of trafficking networks, the claims emanating from ethnic groups, and the chaos that resulted from the Arab Spring revolution --and that is still affecting several Arab countries, like Libya-- are destabilizing the States of the region and hindering their development. These factors are exacerbated by the current deadlock that is aggravating the economic dependence of the Member States of the Union of Arab Maghreb, the interference of external powers that manipulate the causes of tension between these countries in order to best serve their own interests, and the lack of a regional cooperation framework that could federate the States of the region around shared interests.

In this context, post-revolutionary Tunisia is experiencing both a democratic transition and a multidimensional crisis that are likely to throw the country into chaos. The new authorities/decision-makers<sup>1</sup> lack a clear vision and a comprehensive strategy. Thus, they react day by day to local and regional events in a disorderly fashion, on a case by case basis, while deep and rapid changes are affecting Tunisia and the Maghreb and Sahel region. These changes have generated new challenges and threats, on the one hand, and exacerbated the existing ones, on the other hand.

Terrorism, trafficking across borders, bad governance, and many other problems existed under the previous Regime already, but they were exacerbated by ill-conceived priorities, infighting among politicians and political parties, and sharp and sarcastic criticism against all the Government initiatives. The combination of these factors prevented the designing of a contingency plan that could address the many threats and challenges the country is facing.

This study aims at providing a deeper understanding of the challenges and threats that Tunisia should address within the context of 'human security', as it was defined by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in its 1994 World Report on Human Development. This report defined 'human security' as a new concept based on people and not on territories, on the one hand, then on development and not on weapons, on the other hand. According to the UNDP, the security issues and threats that loom over 'human security' are: personal security, food security, health, the environment, economic security, public safety, and political security.

This study aims at identifying practical measures that the Tunisian authorities could use in order to address the existing security issues and threats. First, it identifies and analyzes the major issues and threats that Tunisia is currently facing, and the ways the State is dealing with such challenges. Secondly, it discusses the joint initiatives that are meant to address security issues and threats at the sub-regional level. Finally, it recommends some ways to improve the security situation in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> Most of these decision-makers demonstrated a lack of experience. They had no skills in terms of governance because they had never exercised political power before. Many were also disconnected from the reality on the ground because they were away from the country for a long time. For example, both Sheik Rached Gannouchi, leader of the Islamist party "Ennahda" which won the legislative elections of October 2011, and Dr. Moncef Merzouki who was elected President of the Republic by the Constituent Assembly in December 2011, lived in exile for nearly 20 years.

# I. THREATS AND CHALLENGES

## 1. Personal safety

In Tunisia, instability, chaos and post-revolutionary confusion made it possible for local and regional terrorist movements to perpetrate violent attacks and illegal acts of destabilization.

Two major phenomena represent a threat to personal safety in Tunisia, namely jihadist terrorism and cross-border trafficking.

### a. Jihadist terrorism

Tunisia is reacting to terrorist attacks without having a clear strategy in place. Such attacks are growing in number and intensity. In 2013 and 2014, they were limited to the border areas near Algeria --particularly the peaks of Chaambi and Samama in the western part of the country-- and they targeted Government forces only. However, they spread to major cities in 2015, and they targeted civilians as well as tourists. The two attacks that occurred in March and June 2015 --inside the Bardo Museum, which is located in the suburb of Tunis, and a hotel in Sousse, respectively-- resulted in the deaths of fifty-nine tourists. More recently, another attack took place on Boulevard Mohamed V in Tunis, against a bus carrying members of the Presidential Guard. It caused the deaths of thirteen security agents.

Initially, terrorism was confined to the mountainous and rural areas, and it targeted mainly Government forces, who symbolize the authority of the State. Currently, the phenomenon has turned into a form of urban terrorism that targets the larger society. The aim is to terrorize people and force them to accept the viewpoint of the jihadist groups that hope to rule the country one day, and replace the State with an obscurantist and totalitarian system.

Most of the terrorist attacks, whether they took place in rural areas or in urban areas, were claimed by local jihadist groups like Ansar Sharia (the main radical Islamist group in Tunisia that the Government has listed as a terrorist organization in August 2013), or by regional terrorist networks like the Organization of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, better known by its acronym 'AQIM' (AQMI) --including some of its factions like Katiba Okba Ibn Nafa-- or by the Organization of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Orient, better known by its acronym 'ISIS' (or 'Daech'). These groups use Libya and Algeria as a rear base when they carry out their actions.

In addition to the jihadists themselves, many young Tunisians join the ranks of terrorist organizations such as the Organization of Al-Qaida or ISIS. According to some sources at the Ministry of the Interior, there are about five thousand such individuals fighting outside the country, and their preferred destination is Syria.

Young people from poor areas<sup>2</sup> did not benefit economically and socially from the Revolution. They were disillusioned and left these areas in great numbers. When they return home, they sit idle and lack clear perspectives. Today, they are like time bombs because they are trained to use weapons and have gained some experience in fighting. From the statements they make, the State authorities seem aware of the danger. However, they have taken no action towards the integration of these former fighters.

Given the unprecedented level of violence, the Head of Government has announced his determination to carry out "an all-out war" against terrorism. It was at the end of a meeting that the Supreme Council on Security held after the attack on the bus of the Presidential Guards, on November 24, 2015. Unfortunately, his statements were not followed by concrete actions like defining top priorities and elaborating a comprehensive strategy in order to win the war. The Government focused its efforts on safety initiatives which mobilized only the security forces and the army to fight against terrorism. However, they lacked both experience and appropriate means to win.

Indeed, the fight against terrorism was never the main or even the secondary mission of the Tunisian army. Consequently, it had no plans pertaining to fighting terrorism, no training was provided to the troops, and no equipment was ever acquired in this regard. The Tunisian army is structured so that it may fight against conventional threats and defend the integrity of the national territory. Its armament is constituted of heavy war machines that require long enough periods to get deployed. They are incompatible with the fight against terrorism, which requires lightweight equipment that can be deployed quickly and moved around easily as needed. In addition, the lack of governing texts and laws regarding the military getting involved in the fight against terrorism complicates the situation further. For example, no matter their ranks in the military hierarchy, members of the armed forces do not have the same prerogative as the judicial police. Thus, they cannot arrest or question people.

As for the internal security forces, they were ill-prepared for the fight against terrorism. When President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali was in power, they focused on homeland security issues. As a result, no effort was made in preparing these forces, and in

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<sup>2</sup> The poor regions are located in the interior of the country. Since Independence in 1956, they are neglected in comparison to the coastal areas, which were already endowed with some infrastructure during the colonial era, and continued to concentrate the touristic and industrial projects. The unemployment rate reaches 30 to 40% in the poor regions.

acquiring equipment and know-how in order to combat terrorism. This became evident when the security forces started to fight against terrorists, but they lacked bullet-proof jackets, combat helmets, and night vision equipment. Many security officers paid this lack of adequate equipment and know-how with their lives.

The Ben Ali regime refused to accept the fact that terrorism represented a threat to Tunisia. Therefore, it did not get ready to fight this threat. It was very concerned with presenting the image of a serene and stable Tunisia in order to protect the tourism sector in particular, which represents more than 7 per cent of the GDP<sup>3</sup>. It kept quiet about the terrorist attacks on the positions of the National Guard near the borders with Algeria (the post of Sraï in February 1995 and the post of Soundous in May 2000), where six and three members of the National Guard lost their lives, respectively. The Regime also tried to conceal the attack on the synagogue located on the island of Djerba (La Ghrîba), which occurred on April 11, 2002. It declared initially that the related explosion was an accident. However, given the nature of the targeted building and the nationality of most of the victims (14 Germans among the 19 victims), this attack could not be kept hidden from the public.

The State is currently making a notable effort to provide adequate equipment to both the army and the internal security forces so they may fight against armed groups. However, getting ready to fight terrorism takes more than just purchasing equipment. It requires a restructuring of the army into small, light and agile units, a training program about the new equipment, a good mastery of the best methods to fight terrorism, and a clear strategy to address the existing threats. In addition, the laws and other legal texts should be amended to cover the members of the military regarding their actions against terrorists. All this takes time. In the meantime, the reactions of the State to terrorist attacks are disorganized and do not follow any guiding thread or coherent policy.

## **b. Trafficking across borders**

### **1b. The proliferation of weapons**

Arms trafficking has reached a dangerous level in the region since 2011, to the delight of the traffickers and jihadist terrorist groups. The fall of the regime of Colonel Gadhafi created a context in which more than 25 million pieces of weapons circulate freely in Libya.

The arsenals that previously belonged to the Colonel fell into the hands of militias. They were dispersed across the region through arms trafficking networks. This situation prompted many traffickers to engage in the lucrative trade of weapons in Tunisia, to the benefit of terrorist groups. Regular Tunisian citizens had never felt the need to carry weapons in order to protect themselves. In Tunisia, the average person has no mania for carrying weapons. Only shotguns may be purchased after one gets a license from the Ministry of Interior, and the State has the monopoly of their importation.

During the Tunisian revolution and the months that followed immediately, many illicit goods could be brought into the country without the authorities knowing it. This is because the security apparatus became very weak or had even collapsed during the revolutionary phase, and border controls were almost nonexistent. Thus, weapons, ammunition and explosives could be imported illegally, hidden in caches inside the country, then used for the purpose of destabilizing Tunisia.

Several weapons caches were found in Medenine and in other locations in the South, or even in the suburbs of Tunis, like Douar Hicher and Mnhla where the National Guard found such weapons as Kalashnikov rifles, ammunition and explosives. These findings attest to the magnitude of the problem. It is a serious threat to the security and stability of Tunisia because illegal weapons correlate not only with terrorism, but also with banditry and organized crime.

### **2b. Smuggling**

The smuggling and trading of illicit goods represent huge security and economic issues for Tunisia. Indeed, the weakness of Government services made Tunisia and the whole region a fertile ground to trafficking, smuggling and all other kinds of criminal activities. The precarious social and economic conditions many Tunisians live in, particularly in poor rural border areas, prompt some people to engage in various forms of smuggling and illicit trade.

The successive increases in the prices of oil and gas had made these illicit activities highly profitable in Tunisia. Several inhabitants of the Tunisian-Libyan and Tunisian-Algerian border areas started to make daily round trips in order to fill up their car tanks after they had crossed the borders. They sold the content of their tanks once they returned to Tunisia. The market of smuggled foreign cigarettes is also very lucrative in the western border areas. This is the case in the provinces of Jendouba and Kasserine to the West, and of Tataouine and Medenine to the South, in particular.

In its study entitled "[Assessing the informal trade across the land borders of Tunisia]", the World Bank estimated the value of such a trade between Tunisia and its two neighboring countries, Algeria and Libya, to 1.8 billion dinars. This amount is higher than fifty percent of the value of the official trading with Libya, and it is higher than the total value of the official

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<sup>3</sup> de FOUCAUD Isabelle [Online], "Le tourisme, un secteur clé mais fragilisé de l'économie tunisienne", Le Figaro, 19 March 2015. Available on: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/conjoncture/2015/03/19/20002-20150319ARTFIG00279-le-tourisme-un-secteur-cle-mais-fragilise-de-l-economie-tunisienne.php>

trading with Algeria, according to the study. The study also revealed that Tunisia loses a total amount of 1.2 billion dinars every year, including 500 million dinars in Customs fees<sup>4</sup>.

The smuggling of illicit goods and weapons across the border with Libya (459 km), in particular, prompted the authorities to erect a security wall that is 170 kilometers long. The remaining 280 kilometers delineated a military zone. The wall is, in reality, a series of trenches and sand walls that regular vehicles cannot cross easily. On Saturday, February 6, 2016, the Minister of Defense, Mr. Farhat Horchani visited the buffer military zone. He announced that the construction of a sand wall along the Tunisia-Libya border was completed and this barrier was operational. The Minister added that surveillance cameras will be set along the borders, that Germany and the United States will assist Tunisia militarily and technically with carrying out this project, and that "[the Tunisian intelligence services will cooperate with their U.S. American counterparts]"<sup>5</sup>.

This 'security wall' caused an outcry on both the Tunisian and Libyan sides of the border. The residents of the area protested against the fact that the wall blocked human and commercial exchanges also.

The State authorities are finding it difficult to cope with the existing threats and to develop an effective security strategy. On the one hand, the number of violent attacks illustrates the rise of jihadist groups in post-revolutionary Tunisia, and on the other hand, the growing size of cross-border trafficking threatens the security and stability of the country.

### **3b. Factors that contribute to the proliferation of threats**

Several internal and external factors contribute to the proliferation of the aforementioned threats. The main internal factors are:

- \* The weakness of the State and the lack of a coherent and comprehensive strategy to fight against terrorism and trafficking. Such a strategy should take all the dimensions of the concept of security into account;
- \* The collapse of the security apparatus, especially when it comes to its intelligence component<sup>6</sup>, which is the backbone and cornerstone of any effective strategy;
- \* The deterioration of the economic and social conditions, following the protests and social demands that occurred in the context of the January 14 Revolution. Sit-ins, strikes and excessive pressures for salary increase forced the State to yield. However, these excessive demands became a source of inflation, budget deficit and decline in competitiveness. As a result, people engaged in all kinds of trafficking;
- \* Poverty and unemployment affect the youth mainly. Thus, they are likely to amplify the capacity of jihadist terrorist groups to indoctrinate and recruit idle young people;
- \* Corruption is prevalent, due to the weakness of the State audit services. This situation allows illegal trafficking to proliferate;
- \* Ambiguities regarding the application of counter-terrorism laws and the reluctance of judges to apply the laws rigorously. The reasons range from concerns over respecting Human Rights to fearing reprisals that terrorist groups might inflict upon the judges and their family members;
- \* Several mosques (In 2014, Mr. Khadmi, Minister of Religious Affairs, had estimated the number at more than two hundred) are operating outside the control of the State. They contribute to the spreading of extremist and fanatical religious discourse, and increase the chances for the jihadist groups to indoctrinate and recruit more terrorists;
- \* The lack of cooperation with key partners at the regional and international levels, especially when it comes to intelligence sharing. The reasons are a relative lack of trust in the Tunisian authorities, and concerns about the future of the country.

If it is true that the deterioration of the Tunisian situation is largely related to internal problems, the cases of its neighboring countries and the regional context also do not help to stabilize the State. To the East, Libya has become a hotbed of terrorism and a sanctuary for jihadists who threaten directly the security of the Maghreb and Sahel regions. Today, this country is a refuge for the candidates for jihad who come from the Sahel-Maghreb area.

According to a letter dated November 18, 2015 and addressed to the chairperson of the Security Council by "[the Committee for the follow-up of the Council resolutions on Al Qaïda and its affiliates]", the cities of Ajdabiya, Benghazi, Derna to the East, of Syrte and Mosrata in the Center, and of Sabrata to the West, are sanctuaries for Ansar Eccharia and some factions

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<sup>4</sup> World Bank [Online], "La révolution inachevée : créer des opportunités, des emplois de qualité et de la richesse pour tous les Tunisiens", Development Policy Review, Report No. 86179-TN, May 2014. Available on: [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDS/IB/2014/09/16/000456286\\_20140916161554/Rendered/PDF/861790DPRoP12800Box385314BooPUBLIco.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDS/IB/2014/09/16/000456286_20140916161554/Rendered/PDF/861790DPRoP12800Box385314BooPUBLIco.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> E.Z. [Online], "Farhat Horchani: La barrière de sable entre la Tunisie et la Libye est achevée", Business News, 06 February 2016. Available on: <http://www.businessnews.com.tn/farhat-horani--la-barriere-de-sable-entre-la-tunisie-et-la-libye-estaevee,520,62294,3>

<sup>6</sup> The intelligence network that existed under President Ben Ali included essentially lower ranking Administration officials who were affiliated with the ruling party. This network disintegrated quickly once these officials became the target of the rioters during the Revolution of January 14, 2011.

of 'Daech'. The same source mentions that the Ansar Eccharia factions in Benghazi and Derna have helped AQIM to carry out its training activities, and have established ties with the Ansar Eccharia group in Tunisia.

Investigations carried out by the Tunisian Ministry of Interior have clearly demonstrated that, since 2011, people who perpetrated terrorist attacks in Tunisia had lived in training camps in Libya at one point or another. Due to the porosity of the borders, these thugs crossed into Tunisia on their own or via the networks of smugglers. In addition, the weapons, ammunition and explosives used during such terrorist attacks originated from Libya.

The U.S. American air strike of February 19, 2016 against a training camp of 'Daech' in Sabrata, which killed dozens of jihadists, proves that Libya has become a real sanctuary for terrorist groups.

Furthermore, in the vast Libyan South where jihadists from northern Mali relocated after the SERVAL<sup>7</sup> operation, and where criminal networks have access to five States (Egypt, Sudan, Niger, Chad and Algeria), some militias are imposing their own laws and competing with each other to control the numerous trafficking and terrorist networks.

Large groups of armed jihadists remain active in Algeria. In general, they target security forces and army units. Most of these groups are hiding in the mountainous areas located to the East of Algiers, or close to the Tunisian border where the thick vegetation complicates the sweeping operations that the army conducts regularly in these regions. In addition to these jihadist cells, which reject the authority of the State, there are other terrorist groups in Algeria, including members of AQIM, Al Mourabitoune fighters, and even jihadists who belong to 'Daech'. The latter group regularly crosses the Libyan border, and sometimes the Tunisian desert, to enter Algeria with large stocks of weapons that feed their trafficking networks. According to a statement from the Algerian Ministry of National Defense, the Algerian forces found more than one ton and a half of explosives, last November, in the city of Boumerdes, East of Algiers, and they destroyed 16 bunkers that contained explosives also, in the Tizi Ouzou area, East of Algiers.

In the Sahel, which represents the southern flank of the Maghreb region, the security situation remains worrisome. This is particularly true in northern Mali where the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation, which was negotiated in Algiers and signed recently by the various rebel factions and the central Government in Bamako, is still subjected to multiple dealings. Generally speaking, insecurity prevails in the vast Sahel region (5000 kilometers long and 300 kilometers deep) due to the failure of the Sahelian States on the political and economic fronts, the rise of terrorism, all kinds of trafficking, and religious and ethnic intolerance. In the Sahel, the combination of these factors has produced a dangerous cocktail that threatens the stability and security of not only Tunisia, but also the entire Sahel-Maghreb area.

## II. FOOD SECURITY

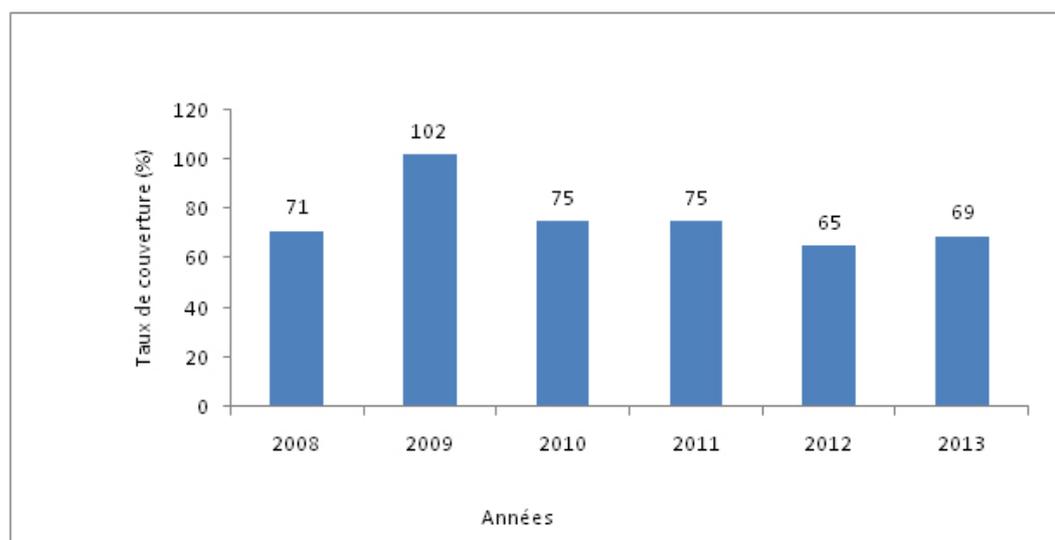
In February 2012, the International Institute of Food Policy Research published a study entitled "Beyond the Arab awakening". It estimated that the risk for Tunisia to suffer from food insecurity was moderate. A number of factors may threaten food security in Tunisia.

Agriculture is the pillar of food security, but it is affected by several internal and external challenges that hinder the country from reaching self-sufficiency. One of the main handicaps is climate. Indeed, the agricultural production of Tunisia depends largely on the quantities of rainfall. Another limiting specificity is the shortage of arable farmland. Today, 80% of the farms count less than 20 hectares of arable land. This resulted from dividing up rural properties during successive inheritance phases. In addition, occasional and seasonal farm workers are increasingly hard to find, even though the unemployment rate is high in Tunisia. At the structural level, there are important shortcomings like the lack of farm service providers and the yoke of debts that a growing number of farmers must reimburse. The rising prices of agricultural products on the world market are also getting the costs of production to increase. This complicates the food security situation in Tunisia.

The coverage ratio of the 'food economic balance' (an indicator of the level of food security in the country) depends largely on grain production. On the average, this ratio is 75%. This means that the country is able to cover 75 percent of its food needs, on the average. However, some large enough variations may be noticed between dry and rainy years (Graph N° 1).

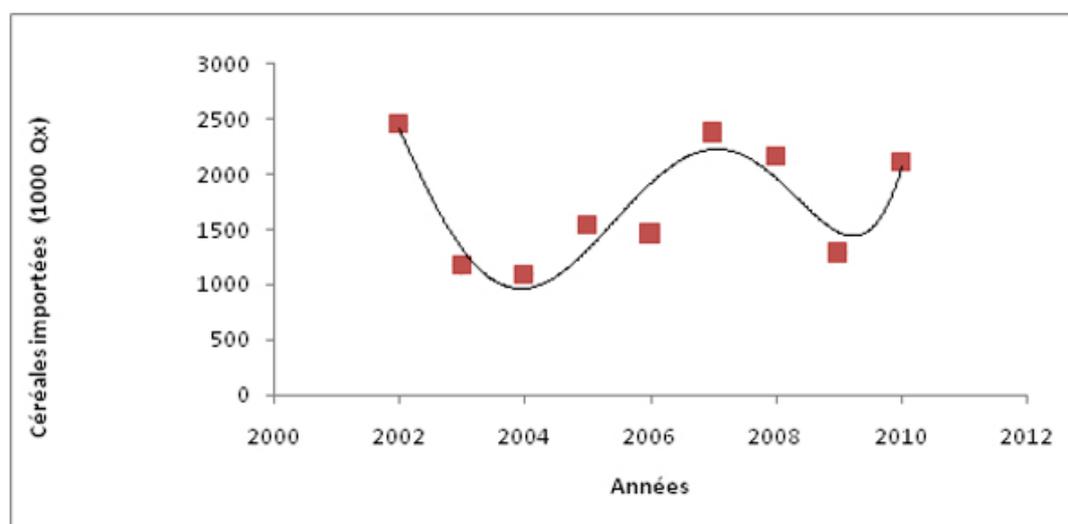
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<sup>7</sup> Military operation led by the French army in Mali from January 2013 to July 2014.



Graph N° 1: Coverage ratio of the 'food economic balance' of Tunisia<sup>8</sup>.

Population growth, rapid urbanization, changes in eating habits as well as increases in revenues have caused a greater demand for food. Thus, the country is forced to import a growing portion of the food it consumes (especially grains/cereals, Graph N° 2). The surge in food prices and the growing dependence on food imports make the country vulnerable, as it relies on the international market to meet the local demand.



Graph N° 2: Quantities of imported cereals (wheat and barley). Source: Office des céréales<sup>9</sup>.

In 2012, the African Development Bank (AfDB) published a study on the food security prospects in North Africa. It stated that the increasing prices of imported commodities are partly responsible for the rise in the cost of living, which contributes to such problems as poverty, malnutrition, and other negative impacts on social welfare. According to the study, these problems counted among the reasons that triggered the popular uprising of 2011.

The importation of food products is just one aspect of the issue of food security. Other parameters that help determine the level of food security in a country are wealth and income distribution, and the budgetary situation. Many disparities exist between the different regions of Tunisia in terms of wealth and income distribution. The budgetary situation of the country is strained. For instance, the debt ratio was estimated at 48% of the Gross Domestic Product in 2014, according to the Governor of the Central Bank.

<sup>8</sup> HAMDJ Salem [Online], "Le facteur déterminant de la sécurité alimentaire", LEADERS, 18 March 2015. Available on: <http://www.leaders.com.tn/article/16587-le-facteur-determinant-de-la-securite-alimentaire>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

### III. HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY

In Tunisia, health services are as much an issue as food security. Although the right to adequate healthcare is guaranteed by the Constitution and is mentioned prominently in the Constitution that was ratified on January 27, 2014, three women died in December 2015 in hospitals located in the governorate/province of Médenine, in the South of the country. There were no qualified medical personnel to assist them as they gave birth to their babies.

The current healthcare system in Tunisia includes two sectors, a public sector and a private sector. There are very limited interactions between the two. The public sector is deteriorating. The private sector is growing, but is poorly regulated. Thus, there is a clear disparity between the types of healthcare services that the two sectors provide to patients.

Indeed, the public healthcare sector provides services to 80% of Tunisians. It employs half of the doctors in the country. They serve in healthcare facilities located across the country, but some western and southern areas lack skilled medical personnel and adequate equipment. Consequently, most of the skilled personnel are concentrated in healthcare facilities along the coastline, while there is only minimal delivery of healthcare services to the populations in the interior and the South. The public healthcare sector is negatively affected by such problems as limited quantities of medicines and medical equipment, as well as their uneven distribution between the regions of the country. Hygiene and safety conditions often fall below the recommended standards.

The private healthcare sector employs the other half of the doctors in the country. It counts nearly 70 percent of the heavy equipment used for diagnosis and treatment (radiology, radiation therapy, cardiology, etc.), but provides services to only 20% of Tunisians. Foreign patients make up half of the people who use private healthcare facilities in Tunisia.

In general, Tunisians have lost confidence in the public healthcare delivery system because recurrent problems and new health hazards caused by changing lifestyles and the degradation of the environment have hampered the functioning of the public health sector.

With regard to environmental safety, the situation is far from satisfactory even though there is a Department called "Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development". Pollution and chaos prevail in several neighborhoods and cities since the Revolution of January 14. Household trash and demolition waste are piling up on the sidewalks and in the streets. This is due to both decades-old and more recent structural problems such as the lack of financial means, human resources and necessary equipment at local community level, and a waste management system based on landfills instead of eliminating waste producing factors.

There are other factors that date back to the Revolution. They include protest movements and strikes organized by the various agencies involved in collecting waste (municipal officers, agents working in the dumps...), and the behavior of some citizens who apply the well-known "not in my backyard" rule. However, several municipalities made a notable effort in cleaning up the streets and minimizing the harmful effects of this situation.

Another major environmental concern is industrial pollution in several regions, especially in the Gulf of Gabes located in the southeastern part of the country. Indeed, in Gabes, phospho-gypsum<sup>20</sup> is spilled untreated in the Gulf via an uncovered canal. It mixes with sea water and becomes a "gypseous sludge" that is toxic for both the local wildlife and flora. This is the case since the creation of the Tunisian Chemical Group in 1972. The Group is a heavyweight in the Tunisian industrial sector. It represents 3 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and generates more than five thousand jobs.

Swimming is prohibited in the area and many fish species have disappeared. Fishermen frequently organize protests in the streets of Gabes. Obviously, local residents are not immune to this scourge. They are concerned about the consequences on their health, as well as air pollution and bad smells in the area. Yielding to pressures from civil society organizations, the Tunisian Chemical Group is considering several measures meant to reduce the environmental impact of pollution. They include the decision to no longer release phospho-gypsum in the open sea, and to build a landfill near the factory. This new facility will include a 'geo-membrane designed to protect groundwater against infiltration', according to the Group.

Industrial pollution affects not only the Gulf of Gabes, but also the Gulf of Tunis and the lake of Bizerte. More than 200 polluting industrial plants are located in these two regions to the northeast of Tunisia (steel industry, metallurgy, food processing, etc.). The final destination of the industrial waste they generate is still the sea.

Meanwhile the Department of the Environment says that it is working "[to support and develop the means and methods of preventing industrial pollution by elaborating an environmental code and issuing legal and regulatory texts that will modify and update the Tunisian environmental standards]<sup>21</sup>". Thus, there is no solution yet available to the problem of pollution, which is a serious threat to the health of the citizens.

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<sup>20</sup> Toxic waste generated by the exploitation of the phosphate.

<sup>21</sup> The website of the Tunisian Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development: <http://www.environnement.gov.tn/index.php?id=25#.Vsbb433hBdg>

## IV. ECONOMIC SECURITY

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) considers that economic security is based on "[a guaranteed minimum income, which is either generated through productive and paid work, or paid by a State sponsored social security system, as a last option]".

In Tunisia, strikes, sit-ins and other forms of social demands, like occupying factories and blocking roads or railroads, became common practices in the wake of the Revolution of January 14, 2011. Several foreign companies stopped their activities and left the country because of these protests, which caused a decline in production. Mr. Imed Derouiche, Executive Director of the Anglo-Tunisian oil and Energy Company called "Petrofac", was the guest of Midi Show broadcasted by Mosaïque FM radio on Thursday, February 4, 2016. He stated that 80 foreign companies that were involved in the energy sector had left Tunisia since the Revolution. The activities of the company he headed were interrupted for 18 days, he explained. Because they wanted the public authorities to hear their plea, about 80 jobless individuals blocked production activities in the area where his company was located, while he had no connection with their problem. He added that the daily loss could be estimated at about 200 thousand dollars. His company produced 12.5% of the gas the country needed and the Tunisian State collected 80% of the revenues it generated, he also said.

This climate of political uncertainty and insecurity is not conducive to the expansion of existing companies, or the coming of new investors. The weakening of the national economy transpires directly and indirectly through such negative impacts as declining growth indicators, rising inflation and persistent unemployment.

Data provided by the Government and the Central Bank illustrate how serious the economic and financial crisis is. In 2014, the revised growth rate of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 2.8%. However, it reached only 1.2% in the first half of 2015, due to a significant downturn in the manufacturing, tourism and mining sectors<sup>22</sup>. Public spending is rising rapidly as a result of salary increases in the range of 13% per year on average, over three years. Compensations increased from 1500 million Tunisian dinars (MDT) in 2010 to 5500 (MDT) in 2013<sup>23</sup>. This contributed to increasing the public debt level as well as the ratio of annual payments to be deducted from the State budget.

The number of jobless people rose to 601 400 persons, according to Institut National de la Statistique<sup>24</sup>. This represented an alarming level that had never been reached before. There were approximately 500,000 jobless people in 2010. The average unemployment rate was 13% in 2010. It reached 15% in 2015, according to the same source. The latter rate was very high, compared to the unemployment rates recorded in other non-oil producing countries of the North Africa and Middle East regions, where the average annual unemployment rate fluctuated between 9 and 12% in recent years. One should keep in mind that this unemployment rate of 15% is only the average across Tunisia. Indeed, the unemployment rate may reach 30% in some regions in the interior, while it is about 6% in other regions along the coastline.

Moreover, Tunisia could never achieve its objectives regarding the number of new jobs to be created each year. The target levels of 80,000 and more recently of 90,000 new jobs per year have been revised downward.

One of the measures adopted by the Government to correct the situation is to negotiate external loans, which reached 52% of the GDP<sup>25</sup>, according to the revised Financial Act of 2015. Unfortunately, a large part of these loans is used to pay recurring expenses, such as wages, instead of getting invested in creating more wealth for the country. The Government stated that it is committed to fighting terrorism, revitalizing regional development, and modernizing the Customs service, throughout the year 2016. It is expecting an annual growth rate of 2.5% and better results in fighting against tax evasion, smuggling and other illicit economic activities. However, it did not indicate any objective with regard to job creation.

## V. COMMUNITY AND SECURITY

Tunisia is a Mediterranean country. The majority of the population is Arab and the predominant religion is Islam. However, the country has always been characterized by religious and ethnic diversity. Throughout History, its communities were known for their sense of hospitality and welcoming exchanges with others. Tunisia is homogeneous: 99% of the population are Arab-Berber Muslims, and 1% only are Christians and Jews. Ethnic, tribal or racial differences have never been a major issue of contention within the Tunisian society. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Tunisia has become almost entirely monochrome during the past few decades. A lot of Italians, French, and a large number of Jews who resided in the country have now left. Regarding the Jews, the Israeli victory at the end of the Six Days War in 1967 led to anti-Semitic riots. In Tunis, people wrecked the Great Synagogue. More than seven thousand Jews left the country for France, and many also left for Israel. The Jewish community decreased in number to two thousand people.

<sup>22</sup> '[Note on the economic situation in Tunisia (late March 2014) and prospects of economic reforms', KPMG, March 2014.

<sup>23</sup> 'Evolution de la conjoncture économique (huit premiers mois de 2015)', Central Bank of Tunisia, August 2015.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.ins.tn/> and R.C., "Tunisie: 4 400 chômeurs de moins au premier trimestre 2015", Le Courrier de l'Atlas, June 25, 2015. Available on: <http://www.lecourrierdelatlas.com/954415062015Tunisie.-4-400-chomeurs-de-moins-au-premier-trimestre-2015.html>

<sup>25</sup> 'Note de conjoncture de Juillet 2015', KPMG, July 2015, page 2.

The French community in Tunisia is estimated at about 30,000 people. About 70% have dual nationality. A very small minority was born during the French colonial period. The others are retirees who have found better housing and living conditions in Tunisia, young professionals who work as contractors or employees in non-governmental organizations, and long term residents who have initiated or invested in various local development projects. These residents have a real influence when it comes to certain economic and social activities.

In May 2013, in an interview with the monthly magazine *Leaders*, the Ambassador of Italy, Mr. Pietro Benassi, estimated the number of Italians to nearly 6,000 nationals, and he characterized them as a well rooted and lasting community in Tunisia. The Ambassador added that in periods of warfare in Italy, Tunisia has offered asylum to many families and the number of Italians even reached 180,000 people between the two world wars. Many expressions that Tunisians still use today represent a legacy of this period.

In general, all communities are welcome in Tunisia. The State ensures their safety as it does for its own citizens.

## VI. POLITICS AND SECURITY

Public safety and political freedom do not seem threatened at the moment in Tunisia. On the one hand, the country has adopted a new Constitution that guarantees fundamental rights to citizens and they are respected by the Government. On the other hand, it has embraced democracy and organized presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014 that the international community has deemed free and fair.

Dialoguing and consulting with each other are the preferred means to manage State affairs, and good governance seems to take root as the watchword is 'Concord'. This explains why the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to four Tunisian national organizations, for solving via dialogues conflicts between political parties, which could have undermined peace in the country. In addition, the professed intention of the Government is to elaborate legal texts that will strengthen the State institutions and facilitate the decentralization process to the benefit of local communities. The aim is to better distribute the national wealth and to ensure the well-being of all the segments of the Tunisian society.

However, good intentions are not enough in this context. They must be followed by concrete actions so the Government may earn more credibility and the populations may develop a greater sense of belonging to the Nation. The current Tunisian Government has been in place for more than 1 year<sup>16</sup>, but pertinent actions are yet to follow its stated intentions.

### 1. Regional Approaches to Common Threats and Challenges

Tunisia and the other countries in the region must address similar security threats and challenges, but these security issues affect the States in question differently. They are much more pronounced and acute in Sub-Saharan countries.

In the Sahel region, the persistence of poverty and bad governance has revived ethnic and religious tensions and caused violent social movements. The weakness of State institutions and their inability to exercise a full control over their national territories contributed to creating a security vacuum that allowed transnational criminal networks to develop, and extremist terrorist organizations to take root.

Droughts, famine, poverty, unemployment, corruption, smuggling, trafficking, precarious conditions and a lack of prospects for idle young people contributed to deteriorating economic indicators, thereby threatening peace in the Sahel and Maghreb regions.

In our opinion, two major threats loom above Tunisia and the Sahel countries. They pertain to personal security and economic security.

#### a. Personal Safety

There is no shared regional strategy in place to mitigate threats to personal security across the Sahel and Maghreb regions, unfortunately. The States of the two regions have differing perceptions of the existing threats. Thus, the solutions they come up with are only unilateral and poorly coordinated actions that undermine the credibility and effectiveness of regional and international initiatives.

There is no regional organization to bring the Maghreb and Sahel States together and to consolidate regional initiatives in a sustainable manner. To illustrate the point, one may refer to the inefficiency of the joint military command (Algeria, Niger, Mali and Mauritania) that was created at the request of Algeria in April 2010 in Tamanrasset (Algeria). It was meant to coordinate combat operations against the terrorist groups present in the region. One may also refer to the poor performance of the joint intelligence unit that was created in September 2010 to monitor the activities of AQIM. None of these regional bodies operated effectively because each State pursued its own objectives and specific interests.

At the international level, the fight against terrorism seems to be the main justification of the French presence in the Sahelo-Saharan region. Barkhane, Epervier and Serval are French military operations against jihadist terrorist groups. They are carried out in partnership with the security forces of Sahelo-Saharan States. However, this presence also fits into a strategy

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<sup>16</sup> According to the Constitution, the Government's mandate is five years.

of pre-positioning security forces in order to better control the area and its riches. France needs uranium from Niger, the second supplier of the French group Areva after Kazakhstan<sup>17</sup>.

The U.S. American initiative to fight against trans-Saharan terrorism (Trans Saharan Initiative to Combat Terrorism, which dates back to the year 2005 and brings together eleven African States, including Tunisia) remains a seasonal exercise and does not meet all the expectations in terms of active regional cooperation. Indeed, it is an annual anti-terrorist exercise that produces very limited results when it comes to coordinating anti-terrorist initiatives at the regional level. In addition, each State seeks its own interests, and this runs counter to the objectives of the joint initiative.

Some people believe that the United States launched this initiative in order to have access to the proven as well as potential natural resources reserves in the region (oil, gas, uranium, and other rare resources). The participating countries are mostly interested in getting more assistance and equipment from the United States. They do not necessarily take into account the interest of the region as a whole.

### **b. Economic Security**

The World Bank stated in its report on Global Economic Prospects that the Sub-Saharan region's prospects remain uncertain. In addition to the on-going multifaceted crisis, the region is facing structural economic and food security problems.

The economy of Sub-Saharan countries remains largely dependent on agricultural production and exports of minerals and ore deposits<sup>18</sup>. This makes them vulnerable to the depletion of ore deposits, the fluctuations of the prices of metals and the vagaries of the weather. Thus, they should explore other ways to stabilize their economy.

The lack of adequate infrastructure and qualified labor force, the weakness of State institutions, corruption and nepotism, as well as unstable security conditions represent some additional challenges.

In the Sub-Saharan region, many economic sectors suffer from a lack of skilled labor and proven know-how. Tunisia could turn this situation into a good opportunity to reduce its high unemployment rate, especially in the ranks of the graduates from higher education institutions who could be working in top positions within Sub-Saharan companies. Besides, the Agency for Technical Cooperation (ATCT) was created in 1972 already for the purpose of sending State employees to other African countries where they may assist their counterparts. This is how the Societe Tunisienne de Banque and the STAR insurance group were able to assist the country of Niger with creating the Niger Development Bank and the Niger Insurance and Reinsurance Company, respectively.

Sub-Saharan countries need assistance in the construction, health, and agribusiness sectors and more. Last November, Mr. Siragata Traoré, the Ambassador of Mali in Tunisia, presented an overview of business opportunities in Mali. He talked of 55 projects and priority programs in several sectors that Mali would like to implement in the coming years.

The Sub-Saharan region offers many opportunities to Tunisian business leaders, who are not actively involved in this area even though a few initiatives are meant to boost trade relations. The latest initiative is the creation, last October, of the "Tunisia - Africa Business Council", which counts on the huge capacity of the African market to get the Tunisian economy moving again<sup>19</sup>. Tunisia has always looked in the direction of the European market, where 80% of its trade exchanges do take place. However, there is a recession going on in Europe now, and this is detrimental to the interests of Tunisia. The country needs to prospect other markets. It goes without saying that Tunisia is not deeply connected to the Sahelo-Saharan region. No preferential trade agreement was signed with Sub-Saharan countries. No free trade agreement was concluded with either the West African Economic and Monetary Union<sup>20</sup> or the Central African Economic and Monetary Community<sup>21</sup>. Air service between Tunisia and these countries is very limited (two direct flights per week from Tunis to Bamako, and none to Ndjamena and Niamey). In comparison, the airline Royal Air Morocco flies to 24 destinations across Africa. When it comes to direct shipping lines between Tunis and other ports located on either the western coastline or the eastern coastline of Sub-Saharan Africa, they simply do not exist. In addition, Tunisia has only 9 embassies in other African countries, against 21 embassies for Morocco. Sub-Saharan Africa represents a large market for productive investments and jobs. It is a region where Tunisia should further its economic interests. To occupy a prominent position in the region, Tunisia must compete with many other countries, and with Morocco especially. The kingdom is already involved in several vital economic sectors.

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<sup>17</sup> Laurent LARCHER [Online], "Terrorisme au Sahel, Paris en première ligne", La Croix, July 16, 2014. Available on: <http://www.la-croix.com/Monde/Terrorisme-au-Sahel-Paris-en-premiere-ligne-2014-07-16-1179971>

<sup>18</sup> Gold in Mali, uranium in Niger, oil in Chad.

<sup>19</sup> NOUIRA Imen [Online], "La croissance africaine, remède à la Tunisie", Business news, June 22, 2014. Available on: <http://www.businessnews.com.tn/La-croissance-africaine,-rem%C3%A8de-%C3%A0-la-Tunisie,519,47362,3>

<sup>20</sup> UEMOA, with Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo as Member States.

<sup>21</sup> CEMAC, with Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Chad as Member States.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Personal Safety

In the absence of a coordinated regional initiative and of a comprehensive approach to fighting against the many forms of terrorism and trafficking, no country in the Maghreb and Sahel regions is safe.

The fight against these threats should include the implementation of a set of security, legislative, financial and coordination mechanisms. The goal is to create an environment that is not conducive to the proliferation of terrorist and trafficking networks:

a. **INNOVATIVE MILITARY MEASURES:** Shift paradigm, from massing troops as it is done in the context of conventional warfare to creating small, light, mobile and flexible units that may execute counter-insurgency tactics;

b. **REBUILD THE CAPABILITIES OF THE POLICE:** Restructure the Police and preserve it from the effects of political conflicts and feuds among unions<sup>22</sup>;

c. **INTELLIGENCE OPERATION:** More human and technical resources should be allocated to identifying terrorist cells and preventing their attacks. The security units charged with collecting intelligence should receive adequate equipment and training. A national intelligence agency should be created in order to centralize all the information provided by different ministries. Among other tasks, it will coordinate the initiatives that are carried out by various branches of the Police, National Guard, Customs Service, Prison Service and Army.

Information gathering efforts and intelligence-sharing are essential aspects of fighting against terrorism and trafficking. At the regional level, it is essential to activate the joint intelligence unit that was set up in Algiers, in September 2010, to monitor the activities of terrorist groups. Information sharing should also take place at the international level via formal networks of communication (secure and direct), and standardized strategies and procedures;

d. **SPECIFIC ANTI-TERRORIST LEGISLATION:** Specific laws should state clearly that planning, encouraging and participating in terrorist acts are illegal. The criminal justice system should get the tools it needs to fight terrorism within the limits of the Law;

e. **MEDIA CAMPAIGN:** It should be used to spread relevant information, limit the possibility for terrorist groups to access publicity platforms, and delegitimize their actions in the eyes of the populations;

f. **FINANCIAL INITIATIVES:** These are efforts to freeze or disrupt the financial networks that terrorist groups must rely on in order to promote their activities;

g. **SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES:** Reduce the sources of frustration and tension, such as poverty and unemployment, in the interior of the country, in particular; implement social and development programs that provide tangible benefits immediately to communities at risk; fight against the jihadist ideology by sending well-qualified Imams to teach the precepts of tolerant Islam in mosques and in prisons. Cultural centers must also participate in this educational effort by organizing cultural celebrations that highlight tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

### 2. Food Security

Tunisia was the breadbasket of Rome in Antiquity. Today, the country finds it difficult to ensure its own food security.

a. One of the main challenges is the necessity to increase grain production. Tunisia imports large quantities of grain and needs to reduce the negative impact of price fluctuations and foreign markets. The State has nationalized vast portions of farmland, but they are poorly managed. Thus, it could attribute a number of acres to young unemployed agricultural engineers, who would be required to produce given quantities of grain in return.

b. Tunisia also needs to create a national program that reduces the unemployment rate in rural areas and the number of people who migrate to the urban centers. This program must include enough incentives so farmers are encouraged to stay and cultivate farmland left in fallow.

c. Strengthen the capabilities of regional agricultural organizations so they may design and implement local projects that take into account the geographic specificities and agricultural potential of each region.

### 3. Health and Environmental Safety

There is a correlation between improving health and environmental safety, developing the public health sector, and improving the decision-making process at the level of local communities.

a. Healthcare delivery services should be deconcentrated to better meet local needs. The idea is to build in the interior of the country many more health centers with adequate equipment (polyclinics) in order to deliver health services within a reasonable timeframe. This would reduce the pressure on the main hospitals, particularly those in the capital-city.

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<sup>22</sup> Three unions defend, each in its own way, the rights of the security forces (the National Union of the Internal Security Forces; the Union of State Employees at the General Directorate of Response Units; and the Union of the National Guard).

- b. Provide financial incentives to the medical and paramedical personnel to serve in remote areas of the country, and provide them with decent work conditions and appropriate equipment so they may practice their medical specialty efficiently.
- c. Clean up the streets and give much more attention to the issue of keeping the cities clean. The task of removing and incinerating garbage could be delegated or shared with private companies in order to facilitate some of the missions assigned to local authorities.
- d. Get polluting facilities to pay a "pollution tax" that would finance the cleaning-up of affected areas within the framework of a project led by the Department of the Environment.

#### **4. Economic Security**

The Union of the Arab Maghreb, a potential market of more than 100 million people, currently lies in prolonged hibernation. The causes are diverse<sup>23</sup> and tied to rivalries over strategic interests. However, the top reason is the contention that persists between Algeria and Morocco with regard to Western Sahara.

Multiple cooperation initiatives designed and proposed by the Europeans to their partners on the southern shore of the Mediterranean –from the Barcelona Process, to Union for the Mediterranean Sea, and the European Partnership Policy-- were disappointing for the countries on the southern shore. The expectations and concerns were divergent from one shore to the other<sup>24</sup>.

In light of this situation, Tunisia must explore other regional markets where it can find new economic opportunities. The Sahelo-Saharan region seems most appropriate, given its geographical proximity and huge development potential. A sustainable multi-sectoral partnership could be established with this region as part of a strategy that aims at promoting trade and economic integration.

#### **5. Community and Security**

In Tunisia, ethnic or racial differences do not constitute a real problem. However, the country should strive to integrate its "minorities" -- like the Jews, homosexuals, single mothers, AIDS patients-- and entrench their rights.

#### **6. Politics and Security**

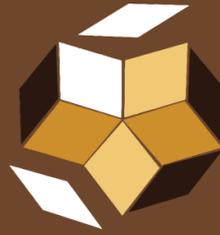
With regard to the issue of Politics and Security, the Government should work harder at getting citizens more involved in decision-making processes. It should strengthen the mechanisms for local participation and good governance.

Tunisia is a fledgling democracy. Civil society organizations serve as safeguards against abusive measures and dictatorship. This is why such organizations should be created in all areas across the country. The more their number will increase, the more it will attest to the strength of the Tunisian civil society.

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<sup>23</sup> The lack of regional integration and trust between Member States also contributed to the inefficiency of the AMU.

<sup>24</sup> The countries on the southern shore are looking for economic and social development opportunities, while the countries on the northern shore are trying to satisfy their security needs through fighting terrorism and stopping illegal migration.



## DIALOGUES

SECURITAIRES  
DANS L'ESPACE  
SAHELO - SAHARIEN

### Biography of the author

Retired Brigadier General Nouri BEN TAOUS has held several high-ranking positions in the Tunisian army. He worked as General Director of the office in charge of military security. He also worked as Executive Director of the National Defense Institute (IDN), the think-tank of the Tunisian army.

### Summary

The country-based studies highlight the nature of the State and the key question of governance in the Sahelo-Saharan region. The types of relations that the State maintains with the populations become a crucial issue when one considers the identity/ethnic dimensions of the demands that minority groups often express at the risk of destabilizing the entire region. The issues of violent extremism and of crime organized across borders are also discussed.

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