CHAPTER 4
TERRORISM IN TUNISIA

Tunisia gained its independence from France in 1956. As in the case of Morocco and Algeria, the origin of Islamist groups can be traced back to domestic and international circumstances during the 1960s and 1970s. In the following discussion, the primary role-players will be briefly presented, as will the similarities and differences in the conditions contributing to these developments. In the same way as Morocco and Algeria, Tunisia faced socio-economic challenges while its government faced a growing legitimacy crisis.

During the 1970s, Tunisia began to experience economic difficulties, resulting in high unemployment, particularly of the youth. A growing gap between the younger and older generations followed this increasing unemployment and the student unrests of 1971 and 1972. Universities joined mosques as breeding grounds for Islamists. During the 1970s the government also allowed schools and factories to build their own mosques on their premises thus enabling Islamists to increase their influence on the youth. While the Algerian bread riots of October 1988 and the earlier riots in Morocco in 1965 had served as landmark events, Tunisia's own economic crisis culminated in its own bread riots in 1984 (Hermassi 1995:107).

Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami, or the Islamic Liberation Party (ILP) – which was founded in Jerusalem in 1948 and which aimed at the establishment of an Islamic state and the restoration of the Caliphate – had a branch in Tunisia. The government became aware of its activities and prosecuted 29 members in a military court in August 1983 for 'establishing a clandestine organisation with a political objective'. Nineteen of the 29 were army officers, making this the first trial involving military personnel since 1962 (Shahin 1997:81-82).

Harakat al-Ittijah al-Islami, or the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI), was influenced by a search for an ideological alternative of the state and became a strong breeding ground for Islamism, particularly after the Tunisian government had, in the same way as Algeria, incorporated secular ideological principles. Rashid al-Ghannoushi, the MTI leader who had been

influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria and by Salafism when he was at university in Damascus, was convinced that social reform based on the true principles of Islam was the only option for his country. Reflecting a similar frustration to one that had led to the Arabisation process in Algeria, Ghannoushi made the following observation when he returned to Tunisia: 'I remember we used to feel like strangers in our own country. After having been educated as Muslims and Arabs, we found our own country totally moulded in the French cultural identity' (Shahin 1997:69-70). Still apolitical, Ghannoushi joined Abdel Fattah Mourou in giving lectures at secondary schools and mosques based on three issues:

- Promoting Islamic principles, such as studying the *Qur'an*, *Sunna* and other religious texts

- Explaining the differences between Islamic principles and those considered to be un-Islamic, including Western democracy and Marxism

- Demonstrating differences between what is practised and what is preached

During this stage, the government generally tolerated Islamic movements, which were not considered a threat. Leftist elements were then regarded as the primary threat, with Islamist movements counterbalancing the left, particularly in mosques, schools and universities. In its early days, the MTI focused on moral issues and was considered as a 'religious association with reformist tendencies' (Shahin 1997:71). With the government presenting itself as favouring Islamic principles, the MTI was free to broaden its support base. The MTI was well structured and included:

- *Usar maftuha*, or open cells, at the base, with an average of five members each. These open cells acted as study groups, tasked with discussing religious, political and economic issues. From them, committed members could be selected for integration into closed cells

- *Usar multazima*, or committed or closed cells. These were clustered around 18 regional councils. Each regional council was headed by an *amil* or governor, who in turn was appointed by the MTI's emir. The *amil*'s own organisational apparatus was responsible for the religious and political grouping of members in the open and closed cells

- In 1987 the militant core of the MTI, headed by Al-Jibali, was estimated as having between 4 000 and 6 000 members (Shahin 1997:90-91;94)

- *Al-Maktab al-Siyasi*, or the political bureau, was responsible for issuing public statements and liaising with other political actors

In the aftermath of the Iranian revolution, the Tunisian government began to question the motives of the Islamist movements, and this often led to open confrontation. Becoming defensive, the Tunisian government then tried to project the state as the guardian of Islam. Former Interior Minister Driss Guiga stated in 1981:

> We are six million Tunisian Muslims. We are all the Islamic Tendency. No one can accept that certain individuals claim the monopoly of Islam and pretend to act under its name or its sacred values in order to hide their political goals (Shahin 1997:84).

During its conference in May 1981, the MTI decided to continue with its double strategy. Keeping its clandestine base, it also worked to achieve broader recognition by forming alliances with other political role-players (Mahmoud 1996:250). At the same time, President Bourguiba began to experience difficulties, particularly because of the lack of well-defined economic and social policies. The government introduced authoritarian policies, moving towards a domination of power and control, while Islamists saw an opportunity to take control. Opting for a political non-violent approach, the MTI asked for recognition as a political party. The government reacted in July 1981 by arresting 60 members, including the MTI leadership, charging them with forming an illegal organisation, defaming the president and publishing false news reports (Shahin 1997:87).

In the mid 1980s Tunisia had a favourable climate for the growth of extremism. As well as poor socio-economic conditions and in particular a high unemployment rate, the government was weak and disorganised and open to direct challenges. These led it to ban radical fundamentalist groups, and this action in turn led to feelings of marginalisation. After decades of relative prosperity, the Tunisian economy was in crisis in the early 1980s. Revenue from oil was halved in 1986 due to the fall in world prices. Income from tourism dropped by 11 per cent after the Israeli raid on the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) headquarters in Tunis. And the substantial income flow from Tunisians working in Libya was cut after Colonel Gadaffi expelled 40 000 Tunisian workers in 1985. Also, following the drought of 1986, food imports doubled (*The Times* 1987).

From 1985 to 1987, the Tunisian government, particularly under Interior Minister Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, cracked down more severely on opposition

groups, adding to the growing political crisis. Helping to justify harsher counter-measures were events including:

- The arrest in France of a group that included seven Tunisians suspected of planning bombings in Paris in March 1987 (Shahin 1997:97;99). Possible links with Iran were suggested, playing into the hands of the Tunisian government in its campaign against the MTI

- In July 1987 violent demonstrations organised by the MTI left eight policemen and a demonstrator injured. Approximately 200 young people carrying MTI banners threw petrol bombs and stones. A police car was burnt out before riot police managed to restore order (MacDonald 1987)

- On 2 August 1987 bombs exploded injuring 13 people at Hana Beach, Hannibal Palace, Le Kuriat and Sahara Beach in Sousse and Monastir. The Tunisian government implicated the Iranian government (Middle East Economist Digest 1987). Notwithstanding these claims, a group calling itself *Jihad Islamique*, or Islamic Jihad, claimed responsibility for the attack (Ghiles 1987)

In the aftermath of these developments, the MTI was implicated in a plot to overthrow the Tunisian government and replace it with a new government based on the Iranian model. Subsequently, in August 1987, 99 MTI members were charged with 'forming an illegal organisation; plotting subversive actions with Iran; and attempting to overthrow the government'. Five of the seven members sentenced to death were Hamadi Jebali, Ali Laaridhi and Salah Karkar, accused of organising the violent street protests in July; Fethi Maatoug, accused of planting bombs in a hotel on 2 August; and Abdelmajid Mili, charged with direct involvement in the blasts. Another 69 received sentences ranging from two years to life imprisonment. These sentences had international repercussions. For example, in Beirut on 28 September 1987, Islamic Jihad, a pro-Iranian Lebanese group which was holding Western hostages, threatened to kill Tunisian government officials if the death sentences were carried out (*The Globe and Mail* 1987).

On 7 November 1987, the retired General Ben Ali, who by then had become Prime Minister Ben Ali, replaced President Bourguiba as the head of state due to medical reasons. In an attempted reconciliation with moderate Islamists, President Ben Ali introduced measures including:

- The reinstatement and reaffirmation of Islam as the country's religion

- The adoption of a more conciliatory attitude towards what for the first time was considered moderate Islamism

- Strict legal measures against all types of subversive activity in the name of Islam (Hermassi 1995:109-110)

On the political level the following concessions were made:

- A general amnesty for MTI members then imprisoned

- The inclusion of the MTI and its secretary-general, Sheikh Abdelfattah Mourou, in the High Islamic Council, a consultative body created by the government to deal with religious matters (Reuters 1988)

- The inclusion of the MTI in the the National Pact, which brought together all political parties to draft rules of political participation

- The participation of Islamists in the elections of 2 April 1989 as independents

- The legalisation of an Islamist student organisation

- The legalisation of the publication *al-Fajr*, an Islamist newspaper (this legalisation was, however, withdrawn in January 1991)

The MTI expressed its willingness to adhere to the new party law of 1988 which prohibited the formation of political parties on the basis of religion, region or language and changed its name to *Harakat an-Nahda* or the Renaissance Movement (Wright 1988). In essence, *an-Nahda* hoped to introduce *Shari'a* law through participating in the electoral process, in the same way as other organisations, such as the FIS, had done in Algeria. Other ideals included 'distributing the wealth of the country, transparency, modernising Islam, and rebuilding an Islamic identity and civilisation in Tunisia and the world'.

In the elections of April 1989, *an-Nahda* candidates attracted tremendous support for the party's ideals, gaining a position as the opposition (Carroll 2007). Although *an-Nahda*'s application to be a political party had been turned down, its candidates stood as independents and won 15 per cent of the total vote, with up to 40 per cent in major cities including Tunis. However, instead of being admitted to parliament the *an-Nahda* independents were arrested on suspicion of attempting to overthrow the government.

Subsequently, the government introduced harsher measures against Islamists, including banning Middle Eastern Islamic clothing, changing the curriculum of Islamic subjects, closing mosques after prayer and controlling mosques with government-appointed imams (Shahin 1997:100-101). For example, on 16 November 1987, 76 people including middle-ranking police, army and customs officers were arrested in connection with a plot to assassinate members of the government. According to Interior Minister Habib Ammar, the suspects obtained arms from Mohamed Chammam, a leader of the MTI. Chamman was sentenced in absentia to 20 years in jail at a mass trial in September. Sayed Ferjani, a Tunis video-club owner who had been among those arrested, was believed to have assisted two MTI leaders also sentenced to flee the country. According to security forces, tear gas bombs were bought from France with money from Habib Mokni, a prominent MTI leader living in exile in Paris (Dick 1987).

During the government crackdown:

- On 16 April 1988 Fatah Deputy Commander Khalil al-Wazir, alias Abu Jihad, was assassinated in Tunis (the PLO in Tunisia had previously been targeted in October 1985) (Dick 1988)

- On 17 February 1991 the office of the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Democratique* in Bab Souika was attacked and one guard was killed

- On 21 May 1991 a court in Tunis sentenced eight of the accused in the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Democratique* attack to life imprisonment and 19 others to between two and 20 years in jail (Reuters 1991)

- In May 1991 the interior ministry announced the discovery of a plot initiated by *an-Nahda* to overthrow the government. Subsequently 300 suspects were arrested, including some 100 senior military officers. According to prosecutors, the officers had met in the region of Hammamet, 60 km south of Tunis, on 6 January to plot their coup. Among other targets, they planned to seize the defence and interior ministries, take over radio and television stations and take over the security force barracks around the capital before occupying the presidential palace (Reuters 1991a)

- In August 1992 a plot to assassinate President Ben Ali by a suicide attack was uncovered. There was a later indication that the plot had a transnational dimension after Italian police intercepted a letter written in 1993 while he was in custody by Mondher Ben Mohsen Baazaoui, alias Hamza the Tunisian. Baazaoui, a member of *an-Nahda* and also a

> Bosnian *Mujahideen*, had written to Imam Mohamed Saidani in Bologna, who in turn knew Anwar Shaaban of the European Shura council and Osama bin Laden (Kohlmann 2004:76)

In summary, while *an-Nahda* presented itself as a non-violent political party, it was implicated in clashes with security forces, sporadic violence against government institutions and plotting the violent overthrow of the government and replacing it with an Islamic state. While neighbouring Algeria was experiencing similar but more extensive activities, it was to be expected that Tunisia feared a similar path. In reaction, President Ben Ali declared *an-Nahda* illegal and jailed its leaders and many of its adherents. Although they had attracted support, the Tunisian Islamists, in contrast to their counterparts in Algeria, had underestimated the strength of the country's government and overestimated their own strength.

Subsequently, a proactive anti-terrorist policy effectively safeguarded Tunisia from Islamist extremism until 2002. However, in spite of a rigid anti-terrorism campaign a number of Tunisians along with other North Africans became involved in transnational terrorism. Some examples:

- The identification of Fakhit, a Tunisian, as the mastermind of the Madrid train bombings

- Tarek Maaroufi, a Tunisian headed the GSPC's network in Belgium.

- In Afghanistan the assassination of General Ahmad Shah Mas'ud, an anti-Taliban Afghan leader, was the responsibility of two Tunisian suicide bombers – former residents of Belgium who had disguised themselves as journalists in order to interview Mas'ud. When they finally did, they detonated their booby-trapped camera

However, apart from the Tunisian involvement in Algeria, the majority of suspects involved in transnational terrorism used European countries as a base.

One of 12 Tunisians captured in Afghanistan and Pakistan was Nisar Sassi (28), who had been handed over by the US in 2004 and was subsequently arrested in France. According to Abdallah al-Hajji, who was handed over to Tunisian authorities by the US in 2006, Sassi had worked in a fabric store in Pakistan since 1990. Pakistani authorities had arrested Al-Hajji in 2003 and had turned him over to the US. Back in Tunisia, Al-Hajji was being prosecuted for his suspected affiliation with the Tunisian Islamic Front (FIT). Earier, in 1995, a Tunisian court had tried Al-Hajji in absentia and sentenced

him to 15 years' imprisonment for joining a terrorist organisation in Pakistan (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007dd). The involvement of Tunisian nationals in Iraq will be discussed in a later chapter.

On 11 April 2002, a Tunisian, Nisar Naouar (24), alias Nisar Seif Eddin al-Tunisi, drove a truck loaded with cooking gas cylinders into the El Ghriba synagogue in Djerba, the oldest in Africa, killing 16, including 11 Germans, one Frenchman and three Tunisians, and injuring a further 26 Germans. The Islamic Army for the Liberation of the Holy Sites claimed responsibility. This group was allegedly connected to *al-Qa'eda* and claimed responsibility for the attack in letters to Arabic newspapers in London. Authorities in Tunisia and France arrested relatives and friends of Naouar after the attack, including Belgacem Naouar, his uncle, who was later prosecuted and convicted in Tunisia. Two accomplices, a Polish convert to Islam and a Moroccan, were arrested in Paris (Henley 2002). The attack was also linked to Germany through a telephone call Naouar had made an hour before the explosion to Christian G. According to German authorities, Christian G was a Polish-born German living in Duisburg, Germany (*Financial Times* 2002).

The Tunisian Combatant Group, founded in 2000 by Tarek Maaroufi and Saifallah Ben Hassine, is linked to *al-Qa'eda* and other extremist groups in Europe. Some of its associates are suspected of plotting to attack the US, Algerian and Tunisian embassies in Rome in December 2001. The group functions mainly as a recruiter for Muslim fighters and a false document facility. Maaroufi himself was arrested and charged by Belgian authorities with providing assistance to the assassins of Ahmad Shah Mas'ud, an Afghan rebel leader and ally of the US, by giving them stolen passports and fake visas (AFP 2002a).

The Zarzis group is named after the town Zarzis in southern Tunisia close to the Libyan border, from where members of the group originated. In April 2004, a Tunis court sentenced six suspects, mainly high school and university students and identified as Hamza Mahroug, Abdelghaffar Guisa, Aymen Mcharek, Omar Rachedun, Omar Farouk Chalendi, and a teacher, Ridha Haj Brahim, to jail terms totalling 19 years and three months for their roles in a defused terror plot. The group's suspected leader, Tahar Guemair, who was believed to be in Sweden, and another suspect, Ayoub Sfaxi, said to be living in France, received sentence in absentia totalling 26 years and three months.

Under questioning, members of the group, also known as the Prophet Brigades, acknowledged having prepared attacks in and around Zarzis. One attack was planned to target a port security official using a rocket launcher. The group also used the internet to get access to instructions on how to construct explosive

devices. According to Tunisian officials, several accomplices left Tunisia in 2002 to establish links with *al-Qa'eda* (Dow Jones International News 2004a). A week after the previous trial, the Tunis court sentenced Abderrazak Bourguiba (18) to 25 months in prison for terrorist activities (Ben Bouazza 2004). Three months later the appeal court reduced the longer jail sentences to 13 years as the state had failed to show evidence of the materials and equipment used to prepare explosives. However, the men confessed to having planned the attack (Reuters 2004a). In February 2006 the Tunisian government released members of the Zarzis group as part of a mass pardon to mark the 50th anniversary of the country's independence from France (AP 2006).

Tunisian Nationals linked to GSPC/AQLIM in Algeria

The GSPC operated in the Tebessa region along the Tunisian border, an area also used to train Tunisian extremists. On the Tunisian side of the border, the Kasserine region proved to be a centre of activities that included attacks, as well as cross-border smuggling networks involving both Algerians and Tunisians. During 2001 it was estimated that approximately 200 Tunisian extremists linked to the Ennahda group led by Rached El Ghannouchi, in exile in London, had been trained by GSPC members in the region (AFP 2001a).

The border area with Tunisia had remained active since the start of the conflict in Algeria. For example, on 25 October 2001 a group of terrorists suspected of being associated with the GSPC attacked a border post near Oum Ali in the Kasserine region close to the Algerian border. Three soldiers were killed when two explosive devices were detonated. While only Algerians had been implicated in previous attacks, this attack indicated the involvement of Tunisians as two of the bombs that were defused had been constructed with gas bottles from Tunisia (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2001). Again on 28 October 2001, three Tunisian soldiers were killed and several others were injured when their truck hit a home-made bomb at Oum Ali (AFP 2001a). The Kasserine region again attracted attention in early November 2002 when Tunisian security forces seized 200 kg of explosives and ammunition. As part of a weapons trafficking network active between Algeria and Tunisia, seven people were arrested but three managed to get away including two Algerians. This Algerian-Tunisian network was previously implicated in the trafficking of red mercury and the printing of counterfeit banknotes (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2002).

However, security cooperation between Algeria and Tunisia is well established. Cooperation was initiated in 1991 when the Tunisian authorities allowed Algerian special forces to search for Emir Djaffer al-Afghani's GIA group inside

Tunisia (Emir Djaffer al-Afghani was later killed in March 1994 in Bouzerea). The cooperation was still in place when Abderezak El Para's group attacked a Tunisian border post, killing two Tunisian soldiers, in May 2000. Algeria was interested in the GSPC's Tunisian connections, as was confirmed in the matter involving Busto Arsisio, when four Tunisian logistics experts claimed to be working on behalf of the GSPC were arrested in 2002. Algeria in turn did not stand in the way of Tunisia when in 2001 it expelled the FIT's Zaid Bachir, who had tried to join the GSPC in the east of Algeria (BBC Monitoring Middle East, 2005e).

A number of Tunisians were killed or arrested in Algeria on suspicion of attempting to join the GSPC. For example, in November 2001 Algerian security forces killed seven armed extremists, two of them Tunisians and one Mauritanian, in the Zbarbar Mountains near Bouira, 120 km southeast of Algiers (AFP 2001a). In another example, Algerian security forces arrested six Tunisians in Annaba in March 2005 for attempting to join the GSPC. The Tunisian government suspected that the six may have been part of a regional *al-Qa'eda* network planning attacks on Western targets in Tunisia. The eldest was 28 and had already received training in the Meftah Mountains. The discovery of home-made explosive devices further supported the suspicion that those arrested were preparing a large-scale attack against Western interests in Tunis or other Tunisian resorts. The security forces also found satellite images accessed through Google Earth of both the British High Commission and the US embassy, as well as the names of diplomats representing both countries (AFP 2007l).

Islamist extremism in Tunisia proved to be better organised than the Tunisian agencies suspected (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2005e). Algerian security forces also claimed on 25 April 2005 to have arrested 24 terrorist suspects, among them four Tunisians, en route to a meeting with GSPC militants close to Algiers (De Bendern 2005). In August 2005 five Tunisians were arrested after they had received paramilitary training in the Ain Barbar region and were about to rejoin one of the small GSPC groups active in the Edough Mountains (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2005f).

In October 2006 the Tunisian authorities also charged Hichem Essadi, a medical student, on suspicion of belonging to the GSPC and attempting to participate in the insurgency in Iraq. Essadi had already been serving three years' imprisonment for attempting to join the insurgency in Iraq before he was freed in terms of the February 2006 amnesty (Reuters 2006b).

Jumping to 2007, in January, Zied Ghodhbane, a Tunisian, was sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment in Tunisia after he had been arrested in Algeria in May 2005. The court also sentenced two other unidentified Tunisians to two

years in prison in the same case. One was convicted on a charge of financing Ghodhbane's trip to Algeria and the other for attempting to join a terrorist organisation (AP 2007f).

During 2007, after the alignment of the GSPC with *al-Qa'eda*, the involvement of Tunisians again received attention. In March 2007, for example, 14 Tunisians aged between 20 and 25 were convicted in Tunisia for having links with the GSPC in Algeria. Seven had been arrested in Algeria before being handed over to Tunisian authorities in April 2005, while the others were accused of planning to travel to Algeria to prepare for *jihad* in Iraq. Among them were Ghaith Ghazouani, Mahar Bezyouch and Mohammed Amine Aoun, each of whom was sentenced to ten years in prison (AFP 2007k).

In April 2007 a further five Tunisians, including Mohamed Moncef Baghdadi, a computer expert, were convicted in two separate cases. In the first, Baghdadi was found guilty of raising funds to send new recruits to the GSPC. In the second, he was convicted for training in explosives – skills he planned to use in Iraq. Baghdadi received sentences totalling 26 years' imprisonment. In the first case an additional two suspects were sentenced to ten years' imprisonment each, while another person was sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment in the second case (Dow Jones International News 2007i). A fifth accused, Mehdi Mabrouk, a student, was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for planning to join the insurgency in Iraq (AP 2005g).

On 1 August 2007 six foreigners – three Tunisians, two Libyans and one Moroccan – were killed in a large-scale security operation in the Bir El-Ater Mountain in the province of Tebessa. It was officially estimated that some 70 terrorists were operational in the Bir El-Ater region (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007de). Several attacks were also directed against members of the security forces in the Tebessa area. For example, on 17 March 2007 a home-made explosive device in Tebessa seriously injured an officer of the ANP. The incident occurred during a search operation in the mountainous Doukhane chain, in Djebel Anwel (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007df).

Algeria and Tunisia have strengthened their joint border surveillance, using electronic sensors and drones. This heightened security aims to improve the monitoring of the covert terrorist withdrawals across both sides of the border.

In addition to the involvement of Tunisians in Algeria, Tunisian security officials uncovered Algerian involvements in threats to its security on 23 December 2006 and 3 January 2007. The first incident was near the forested area of Solimane at Hammam-Lif, 25 km south of Tunis. In an exchange of gunfire

between Tunisian security officials and a group of extremists, one soldier, one policeman and 14 of the suspects were killed and a further 15 suspects were arrested (Reuters 2007). Six of the group were believed to have come from Algeria. The head of the group, Lassaad Sassi, a former Tunisian policeman, was killed. Originally from Bir el-Bey, near Hammam-Lif, Sassi had apparently spent time in Afghanistan and Italy where he headed a cell in Milan before travelling to Algeria. The Milan cell was believed to be providing military clothing and money to the GSPC and financing and planning suicide bomb attacks in Italy. According to Tunisian security forces, Sassi and five other men – four Tunisians and one Mauritanian – had crossed the border from Algeria to organise a terrorist cell in Tunisia (Smith 2007). They had established a training camp in mountains in Djebel Ressass and Boukornine, south of the capital.

In a follow-up engagement on 3 January 2007 Lassaad Sassi's deputy, Bacha, was killed in Solimane, a small town near Nabeul, 40 km south of Tunis (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007dg). The terrorists had apparently planned to split into two groups, targeting Hammam-Chott in the southern suburb of Tunis, and Grombalia on the road to Cap Bon (*Maghreb Confidential* 2007).

In November 2007 charges including plotting an attack against the security of the state, attempted aggression aimed at overturning the regime and inciting the population to kill one another were brought against 30 suspected Islamist extremists, reportedly belonging to a group called *Soldiers of Assan Ibn Al Fourat*, the name of its leader, who had been involved in clashes with security forces in December and January. The suspects had been arrested after police had launched an attack against the group in the town of Soliman, 40 km south of the capital. Zouhair Jridi was charged with failing to provide information to security forces about planned acts of terrorism and an attack on Ain Tbornok, more than 30 km outside Tunis (AP 2007i).

On an Islamist website, the *Youth of Tawhid and Jihad* in Tunisia declared a *jihad* on President Ben Ali, accusing him of harming Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular – a reference to a recent campaign against the wearing of head scarves (AP 2007(h) and BBC Monitoring Middle East, 2007dh). Tunisia and other Muslim countries striving to enhance women rights have been confronted by extremist organisations that consider these practices 'un-Islamic'. In countering any additional threat, Tunisian authorities decided to ban all Algerian males under 30 years of age from entering the country (Guitta 2007).

On 18 February 2007, 14 Tunisians were tried on charges of joining a terrorist organisation and receiving military training outside Tunisia. Although a few

denied these accusations, a number of the accused admitted to have travelled to Algeria in order to receive military training ahead of joining the resistance in Iraq. Seven of the accused had been arrested in Algeria two years previously and had been handed over to Tunisia (BBC Monitoring Middle East, 2007di).

Conclusion

Tunisia's domestic and international circumstances were similar to those of Algeria and Morocco. However, until President Ben Ali took over in November 1987, Tunisia's political development was remarkably different from that of the other two countries in this North African region. Although the MTI in Tunisia could be described as one of the more developed parties in the region – in addition to the FIS in Algeria – subsequent developments influenced a different outcome.

President Ben Ali's dual strategy was to address both the current and the potential threats. In addition to arresting those implicated in terrorism, his government embarked on a programme to address the country's socio-economic needs.

Its closed political scenario has had the greatest influence on developments in Tunisia. Whereas in Morocco the prime factor for the increase in unrest has been socio-economic, in Tunisia the inability of the younger generation to participate in the country's political life has been the main concern. The growth of radicalisation, especially among university students, has often been on an individual basis rather than through underground organisations. The involvement of Tunisians in transnational terrorism operations in Europe, Iraq and Algeria also manifest an apparent inability and lack in support to direct its operations to Tunisia.