

# Transnational organised crime monthly briefing | 17 July 2015

Global intelligence updates

## Attack on tourists in Port El Kantaoui highlights threat of terrorism and organised crime in Tunisia

*Dr Mary Young*

On 26 June, 38 tourists – 30 of whom were British – were killed during a terrorist attack in Port El Kantaoui near Sousse in Tunisia. Armed with a Kalashnikov AK-74 assault rifle and hand grenades, the perpetrator, 23-year-old Tunisian student Seifeddine Rezgui, opened fire at people on a beach near the Riu Imperial Marhaba Hotel before continuing his attack in the hotel. He was eventually shot by security forces after 47 minutes. This tragedy follows in the wake of the terrorist attack on 18 March at the Bardo National Museum in the centre of Tunis, in which 21 tourists were killed, including a British national. Islamic State (IS) has claimed responsibility for both crimes.

The threat of terrorism in the name of Islam in Tunisia has increased dramatically since the 2011 Jasmine Revolution, which brought about the end of more than 50 years of state-imposed secularism. Extremist preachers filled the religious void that existed immediately after the ousting of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali Jasmine. By the end of 2012, two clear strains of jihadi-Salafism had emerged in the country: one prioritised social activism and religious outreach to the mainstream majority; the other pursued al-Qaeda's approach of confronting security forces and the state.<sup>1</sup> This second strain has attracted some young Tunisians who are disappointed with the aftermath of the revolutions in Tunisia and Libya, angered by the actions of Basher al-Assad in Syria and inspired by the rapid spread of Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. They are ideal recruits for militant groups, and Tunisia is currently battling al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Ansar al-Sharia and Islamic State. Furthermore, Tunisians are believed to make up the largest foreign contingent fighting for Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, and most IS commanders in Libya are believed to be Tunisians.

Rezgui is thought to have travelled to an Islamic State base in Libya in January for weapons training alongside the two Tunisians who carried out the Bardo National Museum attack. Unlike, many Tunisian jihadists, Rezgui – referred to by the nom-de-guerre Abu Yahya al-Qayrawan by Islamic State – is not thought to have travelled to Syria or Iraq to fight alongside IS militants there. It is likely that he was radicalised online, at university and at his mosque and further radicalised during any training in Libya.

<sup>1</sup> <http://csis.org/publication/tunisia-confronting-extremism>



**open briefing**  
the civil society intelligence agency

**Open Briefing**  
27 Old Gloucester Street  
Bloomsbury  
London WC1N 3AX

t 020 7193 9805  
[info@openbriefing.org](mailto:info@openbriefing.org)  
[www.openbriefing.org](http://www.openbriefing.org)

In December 2014, the Counter-Terrorism and Organised Crime Security Division in Tunisia was inaugurated as being independent from the judiciary and was made responsible for collecting, processing and analysing all intelligence related to terrorism and organised crime. Since the security vacuum created in the immediate aftermath of the dissolution of Ben Ali's regime, the terrorism and organised crime nexus has been strengthening in Tunisia. The instability that followed created a breeding ground for organised criminals and terrorists to communicate and cooperate in illegal activities. Specifically, there has been a significant increase in the trafficking of narcotics, weapons and other contraband into Tunisia via porous borders with Libya and Algeria. The same transit routes can be used to smuggle in explosives and firearms for use in terrorist attacks and allow radicalised individuals to travel to and from Libya for training in Islamic State camps. Indeed, the assault rifle that Rezgui used in his attack was likely smuggled in from Libya, and would have cost thousands of dollars – suggesting he had well-connected backers.

Terrorism remains a high level threat in Tunisia. The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office currently advises against all travel to certain areas in the south and west of Tunisia and against all but essential travel to the rest of the country. British investigators sent to Tunisia have reportedly concluded that the country still faces a high level of threat from an only partially-dismantled terrorist cell – meaning that accomplices of Rezgui are still at large, probably with access to automatic weapons and possibly planning further attacks against Western tourists.

### **Other developments**

**The cost of global cybercrime to the financial sector is currently in excess of US\$100 billion and could be as high as \$400 billion.** Cybercrime is emerging as the single biggest threat to the global financial system, as organised crime syndicates – usually based in Russia – utilise a mix of satellites, malware and identity theft to steal money from financial institutions and their customers. Once the organised cyber criminals have stolen their illegal gains, they then convert the proceeds of digital crime into real-world, tangible, money and assets. Corporate finance vehicles and trust, hedge and investment funds all act as complex financial structures that are easily manipulated by money launderers; indeed, their complexity is the very thing that attracts criminals to use them to wash dirty money. This was recognised at the Interpol World 2015 conference held in Singapore on 14-16 April, where cybersecurity and its response to cybercriminal activity was one of the main topics debated by participating countries.

**Organised environmental crime continues to threaten the Amazon.** It is estimated that 60-80% of the timber felled within the Amazon is done so illegally, whether from state-owned forests or the land of indigenous peoples. For example, the land of the Cinta Larga tribe, which is a three-hour drive from the town of Aripuana in Brazil, is repeatedly invaded by illegal loggers, who are increasingly targeting the area for its valuable hardwood alongside illegal miners who want to exploit the region for its diamonds. It could be said that transnational organised crime arrived in Brazil when the first Europeans settled there some 500 years ago. Indeed it is well documented that the Cinta Larga have had to vigorously defend their land and people against those involved in environmental crimes. In 1967, a federal prosecutor named Jader Figueiredo catalogued 'thousands of atrocities and crimes committed against the Indians, ranging from murder to land theft to enslavement'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/brazilian>

**On the 13-17 April, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) organised a series of training sessions in cooperation with the Supreme People's Procuracy of Vietnam to teach approximately 80 prosecutors about environmental crime and money laundering,** and how to effectively apply financial investigation techniques to deal with relevant cases. The training took place over a four-day period in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. Significantly, the training days addressed the fundamental link between money laundering and the illicit wildlife trade. The Communist Party of Vietnam is making an active display of commitment to combating environmental crime and related money laundering offences. Vietnam continues to be an important source, transit and destination country for the illicit trafficking of wildlife and wildlife products. Furthermore, an immature financial system means that it is easy for criminals to laundering the proceeds of crime through the country's various financial institutions as well as through the informal banking sector. The training sessions are part of a wider regional UNODC programme relating to transnational organised crime.

#### **Also of note**

- **Inspector Martin Gallagher from Police Scotland, has published a groundbreaking paper addressing the business structures that operate between organised crime gangs and terrorist groups.**<sup>3</sup> Gallagher focuses on the decisions made by criminals that lead them to assist those engaged in terrorism. Gallagher suggests that a number of factors influence the cooperation between criminals and terrorists, including 'the nuances of criminal cultures, the use of calculated deception, cultural affinity and geographical distance from spheres of operation.'
- **Illicit financial flows (IFFs) from Africa are estimated to be US\$50 billion per annum.** At the Pan African Parliament (PAP) session hosted by South Africa in May, former South African president Thabo Mbeki presented the African Union (AU) with a detailed report on IFFs. The report states that corruption is a driver of IFFs. Specifically, corruption includes 'payments made and job opportunities offered to customs officers, judges, police and other civil servants. Corruption also extends to the use of political influence to stop officials from doing their jobs'.<sup>4</sup>
- **Following the introduction of mandatory deportation laws in Australia's Migration Amendment (Character and General Visa Cancellation) Bill 2014, a number of serious organised criminals are set to return to their home countries.** Drug traffickers, sex offenders and members of outlaw motorcycle gangs have had their visas cancelled. This includes New Zealander AJ Graham, a founding member of the notorious Rebels motorcycle gang in Tasmania, which is known to be involved in international drug and arms offences.
- **People smuggling and human trafficking through Bulgaria and Romania is likely to increase following their anticipated membership into the borderless Schengen area, within which there are no internal border checks.** It is anticipated that upon accession in 2016, Bulgaria and Romania will become more appealing to human traffickers and people smugglers, who will take advantage of the relief of customs controls along maritime borders, including the Black Sea.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/S2040-724620150000005010>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.thabombekifoundation.org.za/Pages/Address-of-the-TMF-Patron,-Thabo-Mbeki,-at-the-Pan-African-Parliament-Midrand-May-21,-2015.aspx>

- **On 24 June 2015, the National Crime Agency and South Wales Police raided addresses across Cardiff in a crackdown on organised crime in South Wales.** Officers raided locations that were suspected of being involved in high-value theft, money laundering, forced labour offences and extraction of electricity. Operation Purple Barracuda resulted in the rescue of a number of forced-labour migrant workers. Fourteen people were arrested and high value cars and cash assets were seized.

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