

WE ARE ALL TUNISIANS!

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Two attackers, four hours of war scenes in the heart of the capital, some twenty people dead - the death toll less than twenty-four hours after the tragedy remains uncertain - and several dozen wounded: the attack that targeted Tunisia on March 18 was the bloodiest since that of Ghriba, on April 11, 2002 (19 dead, thirty wounded). Thirteen years ago, it was tourism and the Jewish presence (Ghriba is one of the oldest synagogues in the Mediterranean) that were targeted. On March 18, 2015, it was not only tourism to be hit again but also culture.

It seems that it was not the parliament the main target, which adjoins the Bardo Museum, (as it would have required considerable resources to penetrate one of the most protected places in the country) but the museum itself. The terrorists' idea was, no doubt, to take two pigeons with one rock: killing foreigners and attacking a symbol of culture.

The Bardo Museum is indeed one of the most prestigious cultural institutions in Africa and in the Mediterranean basin, being home to fabulous collections reflecting the rich history of the country. This history, unfortunately for the fundamentalists, is largely pre-Islamic: Carthage of course, but Rome as well has left an indelible mark. As in Mosul and Nineveh, *we must*, in the eyes of some, *destroy those parts of our memory*.

In addition, a museum is by definition, a place that attracts tourists. Killing the largest number of tourists was obviously the goal of the assassins, who are aware that tourism is one of the main sources of income of the country. By targeting it they undermine its stability. Similarly, Tunisian hotels already struggle due to a much reduced activity. We bet that in the coming months they will be empty.

Finally, an attack in the heart of the capital, under the windows of the Parliament, which was discussing an anti-terrorism bill at the time of the attack, is obviously a challenge to the state.

Among all the countries that were hit by the so-called 'Arab Spring' four years ago, Tunisia is the only one who managed to find some sort of stability, while Libya is sinking into an indescribable chaos - thank you France! -, in Egypt, President el-Sisi, whose only quality is to conduct a war without border against terrorism, has nothing to envy to Hosni Mubarak. As for Syria, it is pointless to highlight the tragedy of this country.

Tunisia was a different case: the transition has been certainly turbulent. Like the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo, the Islamist Ennahda have amply demonstrated that they were more likely to empty the state tills than to fill them, but the country has resumed; it has a liberal constitution and the recent elections brought to power a coalition largely dominated by modernist and anti-Islamist forces. All this, has been put under question on 18 March.

Is it a surprise? No, it isn't. Because a minority fringe of its youth supports Salafism and Jihadism: between 2000 and 3000 Tunisians have joined the ranks of the Islamic state in Syria and Iraq (making Tunis the main provider of volunteers for the "Caliphate") and a few hundred others, no doubt, are in Libya in the ranks of other radical organizations.

In the country, Salafist networks are well established, and in the past couple of years the Chaambi Mountains, close to Algeria, host hideouts of *Khatiba Okba Ibn Nafia* (a branch of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb). Real war operations - involving bombings, helicopter and sweep operations - have failed to overcome or even reduce their capabilities, and security forces have paid a very heavy price in attempting to regain control of Jebel Chaambi.

On March 4, the Khatiba called for "killing foreigners." Was it Khatiba to strike on March 18? The ESISC found, a few hours after the attack, a "tweet" issued by an account known to be linked to this organization that suggest that *Khatiba Okba Ibn Nafia* may be behind the attack. But other assumptions remain open, such as the work of cells close to the Islamic State.

It doesn't matter if the responsible is an "old fashion" al-Qaeda or a "post-modern" Islamic State, as these are just the same side of the hate and terror coin. The dice is rolling without interruption from Raqqa to Brussels, from Mosul to Paris, from Copenhagen to Libya, Canada, Australia or Tunis.

With these adversities in mind, two things appear certain. First, despite differences in religion or culture, we all face the same enemy: Islamic terrorism and is at war against civilization and its most essential values. Second, Tunisia cannot get it out alone. We need to provide Tunisia our assistance, in both financial and security terms. Because Tunisia is a victim of terror, as we have

already been and will be again. Because the Tunisian society and its elites, who have been seeking for four years to transform the country, deserve it. Because we must try something to repair the terrible chaos that the French intervention in Libya has triggered throughout North Africa. It is also this chaos that caused the tragedy in Tunis ...

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