

Correcting the Course:

Will splits within Tunisia's Ennahda lead to its collapse?

Future Briefs

Issue 573, 11 Aug 2021

In a statement issued on July 31, some 130 members of Tunisian Ennahda Movement, including five members of the parliament, members of the party's executive office and Shura Council, members of municipal and local offices called on Rached Ghannouchi, the main leader of the movement and saker of the parliament, to prioritize the country's national interests and take any necessary measures to bring the parliament back to normal. Additionally, Mohamed al-Nouri, a leader of Ennahda, announced his resignation from the party's Shura Council.

The signatories to the statement also urged the party's leaders to take full responsibility for failure to fulfill the demands of people and understanding the reasons of turmoil. They believe that the party failed to respond to the demands and needs of people undergoing hard economic and social conditions due to soaring prices, plummeting purchasing power and rising unemployment, all compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Critical political developments:

The increasing splits within Ennahda came as a direct result of the exceptional decisions made by President Kais Saeid on July 25. These can be outlined as follows:

1- The president pushes forward with reforms:

President Saeid continues to make more exceptional decisions, recently relieving the finance and econo-

my minister Ali al-Kaali, and the communications and technologies minister Mohamed el-Fadil Karim, the minister of communication technologies. Before that, he sacked ministers of justice, interior and defense.

These measures show that the president is not willing to retract his decisions, especially as they receive popular support and were appreciated internationally, especially by the United States and France.

2- Increasing popular support:

partisan support to the president's decisions has increased. The People's Movement party believes that the president's decisions are not illegitimate but rather saved the country from the corrupt political elite. The party even urged the president not to respond to calls for dialogue so as not to bring back corrupt and terrorist system to the country.

Correcting the Course: Will splits within Tunisia's Ennahda lead to its collapse?, Future Briefs, Issue 573, 11 Aug 2021, Abu Dhabi, Future for Advanced Research & Studies.



Internal factors:

The statement issued by the 130 activists, at this time, can be explained by the following factors:

1- Influence from previous defections: for more than a year, Ennahda has been undergoing internal crises that culminated in calls from some Ennahda's figures for Ghannouchi's resignation. As a result of these rifts, a number of Ennahda leaders and members resigned in recent years. The most notable Ennahda figure to resign in November 2019 was former Secretary-General Ziyad Ladhari. Other prominent influential figures such as Abdelhamid Jelassi, Mohammed Ben Selim and Abdellatif Makki, resigned after accusing the Shura Council of being incapable of confronting political challenges and dealing with political changes sweeping the country.

2- Ghannouchi's call for violence: the leader's call for people to take to streets and his threats to use violence represented a main reason for the activists' recent protest statement. The 130 activists believe that Ghannouchi's call, as well as the fact that the party's leaders are involved in calling for violence, represent an unequivocal call for terrorism that would threaten the country's security and political stability.

The Ennahda's invocation of violence came amid reports about coordination between Libya's Muslim Brotherhood and ISIS to help 90 ISIS members to infiltrate Libya's border into Tunisia to support the Brotherhood against the president's exceptional decisions.

3- Ennahda's responsibility for the current crisis: some of the movement's leaders acknowledged the party's responsibility, through its policies and measures over the past years, for failure of successive governments to address the country's internal crises hitting at all levels. This factor in particular seems to be what pushed members of the party to sign the protest statement, especially because they realized that Ghannouchi refused to change his policies.

4- Anger over dictatorial decision-making: Mohammed al-Nouri, who resigned from Ennahda shura council, said that he quit because of the behavior of the chairman of the council Abdelkarim Harouni who

dominated the decision-making process ignoring the opinion of other council members. He further accused Harouni of turning the council into a committee under full control of the executive power. This led to members' increasing objections to some of the decisions made recently by the party.

5- Involvement in terrorism and spying: recently, the secret apparatus of the movement was accused of involvement in spying on political figures, journalists and foreigners in Tunisia and other countries such as Algeria. The movement was also accused of being involved in assassinating journalists and political activists in Tunisia, like Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi, as well as in terrorist crimes and attacks aimed at shaking the country's political and security stability over the past years, so as to ensure its presence in the political landscape and ultimately reach power.

Political significance:

The resignation of some members of the movement and the defection of others implies significant political connotations, the most notable of which are as follows:

1- Generational rifts: the resignations reveal increasingly severe disagreement among prominent leaders and the young generation which holds views different from those of Ghannouchi.

2- Institutional paralysis: Ghannouchi put off a meeting of the Shura Council that was scheduled to discuss the recent measures taken by President Saeid. The postponement followed the resignation of Mohamed al-Nouri, and the signing of the protest statement by other members. The developments show polarization and disagreement within Ennahda between those backing Ghannouchi on one side, and the rest of the leaders and members of the movement, on the other.

3- Ousting Ghannouchi: the increasingly severe rift and disagreement within Ennahda can perhaps create more members to Ghannouchi's ideology and policies, and eventually pushing him to resign and give up his post to give way to a new generation of leaders at the helm of the party. Among the indications of his



potential resignation is that prior to President Saeid's exceptional measures, Ennahda saw an increasing number of voices demanding Ghannouchi's exit from the crisis-ridden political landscape following mounting criticism for him and his responsibility for the movement's waning popularity.

4- Loosing allies: the mounting disagreement within Ennahda means it is more likely to lose its allied political parties in the parliament, and in particular the Heart of Tunisia party, led by Nabil Karoui who backed the ousted government headed by Hichem Michechi.

In the wake of the president's recent exceptional measures, the Heart of Tunisia stopped supporting Ennahda, especially after its leader Karoui travelled to France, and after the leader of its parliamentary bloc Chiraz Chebbi from her post. She stated that her party was within what she called a 'political belt' and not a ruling coalition. She added that the party will run reassessments in the coming period, and described Ennahda's reaction to the president's decisions as 'hasty'. This is a sign that the Heart of Tunisia may retract its support to Ennahda.


On the other hand, Ennahda's alliance with the Islamist extremist party, the Dignity Coalition, which agreed with Ennahda's rejection of President Saeid's decisions and called upon the Tunisian people to defend 'its revolution and freedom.'

5- Ennahda's receding popularity: splits and escalating disagreement within the movement came as its popularity has receded in the Tunisian society. A public opinion poll conducted on June 29 in Tunisia shows that 87 per cent of the people back the president's decisions. Moreover, Ghannouchi's call for demonstrations in front of the parliament received no popular response, unlike the rallies organized to show support the president. The main reason is that Ennahda, over the past 10 years, was failed to develop effective policies and solutions to address the economic and other crises hitting the country. What exacerbates the situation is that the movement involved itself in political scuffle on several fronts, confronting in particular the president over powers and jurisdictions, and interfering in the work of successive governments. Added to this is Ghannouchi's failure to properly run the parliament.


To conclude, the aforesaid developments reveal a number of facts, the most notable of which are the decline in the legitimacy of Ennahda, the possibility of suffering more splits in the future that will impact its popularity in any future elections and damage its credibility for international powers, and eventually support to President Saeid's decisions would continue.

ABOUT FARAS

Future for Advanced Research and Studies (FARAS) is an independent think tank founded on April 4, 2014 in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. FARAS seeks to enrich public dialogue, support decision-making and enhance academic research pertaining to future trends that currently constitute a real problem in the Middle East region. In light of instability and unpredictability, the overarching goal of FARAS is to help ward off future shocks regarding these developments.

 www.futureuae.com

 Tel: +971 24444513

 P.O Box. 111414 Abu Dhabi