



# Proceeding with Reform:

## Disclosing the reasons behind the Tunisian President's decision to extend the exceptional measures

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On August 23, 2021, Tunisian president Kais Saied issued a presidential decree extending the exceptional measures of the 80th decree (July 25, 2021), whereby parliamentary activities were suspended and immunity on MPs were lifted until further notice. Saied extended these measures just one day before they were supposed to come to an end, as the 80th decree was supposed to be in effect for only one month.

### The Time Factor

The extension of the exceptional measures can be interpreted in the light of a number of reasons and factors, namely:

**1- Requiring time:** Saied primarily needs more time to organize his thoughts and to carefully choose the next government so that it can be efficient and capable of handling the economic crisis and its implications. Therefore, Saied realized that it would be dangerous to end the exceptional measures without taking enough time to consult with his aides in order to arrive at certain criteria and bases that will govern the resumption of the activities of state institutions, notably the parliament. The expression «until further notice» which Saied used in the new decree implies that the measures may be extended for several months until the president's

aims are achieved, especially proceeding with the required investigation of accusations of financial, administrative and political corruption against certain party members. In addition, Saied needs time to purge state institutions, especially security institutions, of officials affiliated with the Ennahda Movement, so as to achieve a degree of political stability necessary for establishing security in Tunisia, so that the upcoming government, when formed, can be dedicated to dealing with economic and social issues.

**2- Demanding control:** It seems that Saied desires to keep a firm grip on the executive power so as to be able to achieve a number of goals, such as giving the investigation of corruption cases an opportunity to bear fruit. Extension of the measures makes it easier to hunt down MPs involved in corruption, especially those affiliated with the Ennahda Movement and the

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Heart of Tunisia, who are accused of having received foreign funding during the latest parliamentary election.

Saied took certain measures with the aim of to keep security organs in control to prevent political parties from penetrating the Interior Ministry, so as to be able to have full command over the executive power. These measures included appointing nine top security officials, such as Sami Yahyaoui, who has been chosen to be the head of intelligence, Mourad Hussein, who is now director general of public security, and Makram Akid, who has been appointed head of anti-terrorist apparatus.

**3- Restraining the Ennahda Movement:** Extending the measures taken against the parliament and MPs would help enhance the aim of restricting on the Ennahda Movement, the political wing of the Muslim Brothers, and its allies inside and outside Tunisia, especially as the prime concern of the Movement's leaders is to bounce back and be part of the political scene again.

Going on suspending the parliament will probably worsen the state of confusion which the Ennahda Movement is suffering. Defections and conflicts between the Movement's members are perhaps most manifest in the fact that on August 23, Rached Ghannouchi, the Movement's leader decided to dissolve the executive office of the movement and relieve all its members of their posts. Ghannouchi tried to make this decision look as if it was taken in response to members' demands of internal reform; 49 Nahda members demanded that Abdel Karim Al-Haroni, president of the Shura council, to be relieved of his post. However, it is obvious that Ghannouchi made that decision to project a better image of himself so that he can remain on top of the movement indefinitely, in spite of voices demanding his dismissal.

**4- Unceasing Arab support:** The steps and measures taken by president Saied are widely supported as far as the Arab world is concerned. Saudi Arabia and Algeria are among Saied's most great supporters. Before the August decree, Algerian

Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra visited Tunisia for the third time in a month, to deliver a message from Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune to Saied. The message stressed the Algerian support of the decisions made by the Tunisian president with the aim of protecting Tunisia's security and stability. Riyadh is also communicating with President Saied to express support, especially for his decisions concerning suspending the parliament and like procedures meant to prevent Muslim Brothers from re-gaining power. This is expected, given Saudi Arabia's attitude towards the group's stances and practices in Tunisia. Saudi Arabia is keen on stressing its willingness to help Tunisia out of its current economic crisis. This gives the Tunisian president some sort of international legitimacy that would spur him on.

**4- The focus on Afghanistan:** The current developments of the political situation in Afghanistan have become the prime concern of the international community. This has helped relieve international pressure on president Saied, giving him more freedom as he is no longer under the spotlight. Of particular importance here is US stance on the situation in Tunisia; US previously expressed concern over the impact of parliament suspension on Tunisian democracy, stating that the parliament must regain its powers as soon as possible. Washington also expressed concern regarding the anti-corruption procedures, especially travel bans, house arrests, suspension of former officials, businessmen and judges, etc. US is particularly worried about the consequences of Ennahda officials being convicted of receiving foreign funding, as this may lead to excluding the Ennahda altogether from the political scene.

## Possible Scenarios

Given the facts of the current situation, we can sum up two possible scenarios that may be occur in Tunisia as follows:

**Scenario No.1: temporary extension:** According to this scenario, President Saied may extend the exceptional procedures for only one more month,



during which he may appoint a trustworthy prime minister, in response to the demands of the citizens and the representative of political parties and forces who have pressed him since the first decree in July to fill the political vacuum in Tunisia by forming a new cabinet.

**Scenario No.2: the exceptional measures can be further prolonged:** According to this second scenario, the exceptional procedures can be extended indefinitely. This is likely in the light of the

fact that the second decree did not set a specific date for ending these procedures, especially as Saied's goals have not been achieved yet, notably combatting corruption and purging state institutions of Nahda proponents. Achieving these goals would need more than one month. Therefore, Saied will have to stay in charge of the executive power, including security organs, and will perhaps appoint a caretaker government. This period will most probably end with calling an early parliamentary election.


In conclusion, extending the exceptional measures was an expected step. However, President Saied's insistence on not unfolding the political road map is not in his favour. Internal pressure from political parties and forces is expected to increase, and the President will have to put an end to the political vacuum and to resume democratic practices by forming a new cabinet. Otherwise, he will be accused of impeding, if not undermining, democracy in Tunisia.

## 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.

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