



# A Possible Downfall

## The implications of the mass resignations within the Ennahda movement in Tunisia

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Eighteen members of the Ennahda Movement, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, submitted their collective resignations from the movement's membership on September 26, 2021, just only three days after 113 others have resigned as well. This brings the total number of members who resigned in two days to 131 members. This is a significant indication of the intensifying disputes and divisions within the movement following the Tunisian President's announcement of exceptional measures in the country on July 25, 2021.

### The Faltering of Internal Reform

There are a number of factors that may explain the reasons behind this large number of Ennahda members submitting their resignations, most notably the following:

**1- The tyranny of Ghannouchi:** The members who resigned from the Ennahda membership attributed their resignation to Ghannouchi's adoption of a dictatorial approach in the decision-making process within the movement, in addition to the acquisition of his affiliates, particularly his relatives, of leadership positions within the movement, which prompted the resigning members to accuse him of turning the movement into a "family affair" rather than a political party.

Ghannouchi's attempt to run for a third term in late 2020, and to change Ennahda's internal system,

which stipulates against running for presidency more than two times, was met with widespread rejection within the movement. More than a hundred leaders from the Ennahda signed a petition calling on Ghannouchi to commit not to run for a third term. The list of signatories to the petition included members of the Executive Office and the Shura Council, which are the highest decision-making authorities within the party, in addition to parliamentarians and leaders at the regional level and within the party's local offices.

Instead of responding to these decisions, Ghannouchi deliberately postponed the movement's annual conference to prevent talk of objecting to him running for a third term. He also dismissed all members of the movement's executive office, as well as referring some key leaders to internal investigations and freezing their membership, such as Imad Al-Hamami, Minister of Employment and Vocational Training in the

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government of Youssef Chahed, which exacerbated internal disputes and discords.

**2- Ghannouchi's corruption:** The cases of financial corruption associated with the Ghannouchi family, specifically his son Moaz and his son-in-law Rafik Abdel Salam, are growing. They are both accused of assisting Ghannouchi run front companies publicly led by fictitious personalities, while they are actually managed by Moaz and Rafik. This included Al-Zaytouna TV, which received around \$350 M from third parties in 2013.

This prompted some senior leaders, such as Abdelhamid Jelassi to resign several months ago in protest against Al-Ghannouchi's corruption. He was preceded by the director of Ghannouchi's office, Zubair al-Shahidi, in addition to the resignation of Mohamed Grad, who was in charge of foreign relations.

**3- The 'escalation' policies:** The resigned members accused the movement's general secretariat, headed by Ghannouchi, of adopting improper policies, procedures and positions over the past ten years, specifically throughout the last year. They also held him responsible for the decline in the Ennahda's popularity.

Among the faulty policies of Ghannouchi is the dispute with President Saied over the authority granted to him regarding shaping the foreign policy with other countries. Ghannouchi attempted to exploit his position as Speaker of Parliament to drag the country into the Turkish-Qatari alliance, even though the authority of his position does not guarantee him that.

This comes in addition to Ghannouchi's escalation of disputes with the Tunisian President by the former supporting the dismissed Prime Minister Hisham Al-Mashishi, through the alliance with the Heart of Tunisia Party, whose head is charged with acts of corruption, as well as supporting the Dignity Coalition, which contributed to the aggravation of the political and economic conditions in Tunisia in an unprecedented manner. This resulted in the isolation of the movement at the public and political levels, causing its popularity in the Tunisian street to decline. Furthermore, the Tunisian General Labor Union has rejected the movement's calls for a national dialogue to resolve the current political crisis.

#### **4- A decline in public support:**

The Ennahda's popularity has clearly declined in the Tunisian street. One of the indications of that is the failure of Ghannouchi to mobilize the movement's supporters to demonstrate in front of the parliament headquarters on the morning of President Saied's announcement of the exceptional measures last July 25. There is a widespread public support for the exceptional measures taken by the President, and recent opinion polls have shown a noticeable decline in the number of citizens supporting the movement, and an obvious rise in President Saied's popularity.

### **Significant Indicators**

The recent mass resignations from the membership of the Ennahda movement reflect significant political implications, most notably:

**1- Leadership resignations:** By reviewing the names and positions of the members who resigned from the membership of the Ennahda movement, it is noted that they included a good number of the front row leaders in the movement, headed by Abdellatif Makki, who previously held the position of Minister of Health in the governments of Al-Jamali and Ali Al-Areed, as well as leaders who represented the movement in the frozen parliament, most notably Jamila Ksiksi, Toumi Hamrouni, Rabab Al-Latif and Nusaiba Ben Ali. This is in addition to some members of the movement's National Constituent Assembly, most notably Amal Azzouz, and some members of the National Shura Council, the regional Shura councils, and the regional and local offices.

#### **2- A deterioration in the movement's credibility:**

The mass resignations due to Ghannouchi's tyranny also reflect the latter's lack of credibility. He no longer has the right to talk about dialogue with the President to get out of the current political crisis. He is accused of tyranny and of refusing to dialogue with members of his party, as he dismissed a number of them as part of his pursuit to run for a third team in leading the movement.

**3- Curbing US interference:** The US was undoubtedly seeking to pressure President Saied, because of the slow announcement of the roadmap, and the Ennahda's attempt to portray this as an attempt by Saied to



control the political scene. The storm of resignations that struck the Ennahda will definitely force Washington to realize that relying on the movement is not a safe option, particularly with the escalation of partisan and public rage over the meeting that brought together the Ennahda and the US Embassy in early September.

**4- Reinforcing the President's authority:** The mass resignations reflect the movement's failure to confront the exceptional measures imposed by President Saied last July 25. This is an important indicator of the movement's internal fragility, as some of the recent withdrawals have caused it to lose a great deal of its balance, specifically after things became clear that it no longer had a monopoly on representing currents that are sympathetic to political Islam.

## Possible Scenarios

The previous facts reveal that the scenarios for the future of the Ennahda movement could be labelled as follows:

**1- First scenario- a continuing regression:** According to this scenario, the Ennahda movement is likely to repeat the same experience of the Nidaa Tounes Party. After the latter presided the Tunisian political scene, the party split and collapsed as a result of the increase in divisions and internal conflicts, which contributed to a significant decline in the party's popularity.

According to this scenario, the mass resignations of members are likely to continue, thus emptying the movement of senior leaders. This will cause the party to lose its strength in political life in general, leaving Ghannouchi alone at the head of the movement due

to his inability to realize the collapse of the Ennahda because of his escalatory policies.

**2- Second scenario- establishing a new party:** According to this scenario, the resigned members are likely to establish a new political party with an Islamic ideology, but with new visions and ideas in line with the current political changes in an attempt to gain public bases that will help the party later to run for elections. This is similar to the experience of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya, some of whom defected, founding a new party in an attempt to maintain their popularity in the Libyan street, and to distance themselves from the policies of the Muslim Brotherhood.

**3- A third scenario- Ghannouchi's resignation:** According to this scenario Ghannouchi is likely to resign from heading the Ennahda movement and to retire from political life in general, giving younger leaders the opportunity to lead the movement in an attempt to rearrange the ranks of the movement once more. This would come with the aim of preserving the movement's position in the Tunisian political scene during the coming period. However, this scenario is unlikely to happen, given Ghannouchi's personality, as he tends to escalate crises rather than fix them.

In conclusion, the current facts suggest that the Ennahda movement is heading towards further disintegration, after it lost the components necessary for keeping it at the forefront of the Tunisian political scene. In general, the decline in the status of the Ennahda movement in Tunisia comes to complete the regression of political Islam in Morocco and the rest of the Arab countries, confirming that these parties failed to tackle the political and economic challenges in their nations.

## 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.