



Politics

26

JUL
12:16 UTC

Tunisia Analysis: President Kais Saied suspends parliament for 30 days, assumes all executive powers on July 25; political, security situation in country to remain volatile in coming days, weeks

Executive Summary

- On July 25, President Kais Saied announced that he has decided to dismiss Prime Minister (PM) Hichem Mechichi as well as suspend all the work and powers of the parliament for 30 days. President Saied will assume all executive authority during this 30-day period.
- This decision followed anti-government protests across the country on July 25 primarily to demand the government's resignation due to the mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current economic crisis.
- Although Saied's decision has been denounced as "unconstitutional" by several political parties, it has managed to at least partly placate protesters. This is underscored by the fact all of the gatherings recorded following this announcement have been pro-Saied and peaceful in nature.
- However, segments of the population, particularly those who support the Ennahda Movement that holds the plurality of seats in the parliament, are liable to perceive Saied's decision as presidential overreach. This will trigger anti-Saied protests in the coming days.
- Overall, the political and security situation in Tunisia will remain volatile over the coming days and weeks. However, the risk of a complete disintegration of the country's state apparatus is currently relatively low.
- **Travel to Tunis may continue while adhering to all security precautions regarding militancy and civil unrest. Contact us at Operations@max-security.com or +44 20-3540-0434 for itinerary and contingency support options.**

KEY TRIGGERS OF ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS IN TUNISIA



GOVERNMENT'S INABILITY TO
REVIVE ECONOMY



MISMANAGEMENT OF COVID-
19 PANDEMIC



PERCEPTION OF ENNAHDA AS
NOT SECULAR



PERCEPTION OF ENNAHDA AS
INTOLERANT OF OPPOSITION

Current Situation

Announcement by President Kais Saied

- During the late evening hours of July 25, President Kais Saied announced that he has decided to dismiss Prime Minister (PM) Hichem Mechichi as well as suspend all the work and powers of the parliament for 30 days.
- This decision came after a meeting between Saied, Mechichi, and the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP) Speaker and Ennahda Movement leader, Rached Ghannouchi. Saied also held an emergency meeting with security leaders before making this announcement.
- The decision was taken pursuant to Article 80 of the Tunisia Constitution, which allows the president to take any measures necessitated by exceptional circumstances to preserve the “integrity..., security, and independence” of the country and “ensure the normal functioning of the state”.
- President Saied will assume all executive authority during this 30-day period. The parliamentary immunity of all members of the ARP will also be lifted during this period.

Domestic Reaction & Political Landscape

- Ennahda leader Rached Ghannouchi released a statement indicating that he was not consulted before this decision was taken by the president. He has called this decision “a coup against the revolution and the constitution” and that “the party’s supporters and the Tunisian people will

defend the Revolution”.

- The following political parties and groups have denounced Saied’s decision as unconstitutional: Ennahda Movement, Qalb Tounes, the al-Karama Coalition, and the Democratic Current. These four political blocs hold the highest number of seats in the ARP and are part of the ruling coalition government.
- Although PM Hichem Mechici was an independent candidate, the majority of seats in the cabinet and the most important ministries are held by Ennahda leaders. This is because the Ennahda Movement holds the plurality of seats in the ARP.
- The People’s Movement, a secular, left-wing party, has released a statement in support of Saied’s decision.
- The Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) has yet to release a statement either in support of or against President Saied’s decision. UGTT leaders are currently in a meeting wherein they are deliberating their response to the situation.

Security Situation - Post-Announcement

- The Tunisian Armed Forces (TAF) have been deployed around the ARP building in Tunis’ Bardo District since the late evening hours of July 25. They prevented Ghannouchi from entering the parliament building during the early morning hours of July 26.
- TAF troops have also been deployed around the Carthage Palace in Tunis since the morning hours of July 26 and are preventing government officials from entering the premises.
- Flights to and from Tunis-Carthage International Airport are operating normally as of the afternoon hours of July 26.
- Reports indicate that security forces forcefully entered the office of a major Qatar-based news agency in Tunis during the afternoon hours of July 26 and expelled the media outlet’s journalists from the premises.
- Protests in support of President Saied’s decision have been reported in Ariana, Siliana, Manouba, Bizerte, and Tunis governorates since the morning hours of July 26. Hundreds of protesters gathered on Tunis’ Habib Bourguiba Avenue during the early morning hours of July 26 where they waved the national flag and chanted slogans in support of Saied.
- Security forces also had to use tear gas to prevent protesters from approaching the Ennahda offices in Sfax and Tunis’ Montplaisir neighborhood during the overnight hours of [July 25-26](#).

Protests on July 25 - Prior to Announcement

- Violent unrest had been reported across Tunisia, including Tunis, during the evening hours of July 25 wherein protesters demanded the resignation of the Ennahda-led coalition government.
- Protesters had vandalized and torched the Ennahda offices in Tunis’ Cite Ettadhamen, Tozeur Governorate’s Nafta, Manouba Governorate’s Tebourba, and Kebili before they were dispersed by security forces using tear gas. In Kairouan and Siliana, protesters had entered and vandalized the Ennahda office before being dispersed by security forces.

Assessments & Forecast:

1. An increasing number of anti-government protests have been recorded across Tunisia over recent months to call upon the resignation of cabinet ministers. The primary reason for most of these protests is the locals’ perception that the Ennahda-led coalition government lacks the competence to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and boost the flailing economy. Tensions have also been rising between political blocs within the ARP in recent months. The secular Free Destourian Party

(PDL) has held frequent protests in Tunis, such as on [June 19](#), to denounce the Ennahda Movement's alleged crackdown on opposition leaders. Security forces have often forcefully dispersed these protests on the pretext of COVID-19 regulations, which has reinforced the perception of Ennahda's policies as oppressive.

2. The locals' growing anti-government sentiments surrounding socio-economic issues have also conflated their existing perception of the Ennahda Movement as "not secular" and "undemocratic". July 25, which is commemorated as Republic Day in Tunisia, also coincides with the anniversary of the assassination in 2013 of the People's Movement leader, Mohamed Brahmi. The People's Movement is a secular, left-wing party that at the time of the assassination was part of the Popular Front coalition. Although the perpetrators behind the killing were never apprehended, widespread allegations suggesting Ennahda's involvement in the attack compelled the then ruling Ennahda party to step down from the government in 2013. These allegations were largely based on the perception that Ennahda's close ties to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt were leading to the "Islamization" of Tunisia. Although Ennahda dropped the term "Islamic" from its party charter in 2016 and cut off all ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, the party has often been perceived as too "Islamic" by other secular political blocs. This is partly due to the party's stance on issues like women's rights and the LGBTQ community and partly due to its leaders' close ties to the Muslim Brotherhood-friendly Qatar. The anniversary of Brahmi's assassination combined with the symbolism of Republic Day thus provided the locals with the framework to express their grievances. This is underscored by the protests' distinct anti-Ennahda undertone and the widespread attacks on Ennahda offices across the country.
3. The widespread and violent nature of the protests and specific calls for the cabinet's resignation recorded on July 25 likely prompted President Saied to heed their call and invoke Article 80 of the Tunisian Constitution. The Ennahda Movement and several of its allied political parties have called the decision unconstitutional based on the fact that Article 80 does not allow the president to dissolve the ARP even "in the event of an imminent danger threatening the nation's institutions or the security or the independence of the country". However, the decision to not dissolve but only suspend the functioning of the ARP for 30 days allows Saied to circumvent this legality. Article 80 of the constitution entitles the Speaker of the ARP or 30 other members of the ARP to legally approach the Constitutional Court after 30 days of such a presidential decision to "verify whether or not the circumstances [in the country] remain exceptional". **FORECAST:** Nevertheless, the Ennahda Movement and its supporters will continue to use this argument of unconstitutionality to propagate the image that President Saied's latest decision is indicative of a "coup" attempt.
4. Saied's decision has managed to at least partly placate protesters as underscored by the fact that all of the gatherings recorded following this announcement have been pro-Saied and peaceful in nature. The large turnouts at these gatherings indicate that this presidential decision has been perceived favorably by at least some locals. **FORECAST:** However, segments of the population, particularly those who support Ennahda, are liable to perceive Saied's decision as presidential overreach. The Ennahda Movement has remained one of the biggest parties in the ARP since the overthrow of former President Zine Abedine Ben Ali in 2011, despite multiple controversies surrounding the party. This shows that Ennahda has a wide support base in Tunisia, which the party can mobilize in its favor. Therefore, there is a high risk of anti-Saied protests occurring across Tunisia over the coming hours and days. Ennahda supporters are known to engage in unruly behavior during protest activity, such as vandalism and looting. This increases the risk of violence during such protests. Although Saied has deployed the TAF to secure vital institutions across the country, given precedent, the security apparatus will get overwhelmed as the protests spread in terms of scope and intensity.
5. **FORECAST:** Local governorate headquarters and Ennahda party offices will remain the main focal points for protests across Tunisia over the coming hours and days. In Tunis, protesters are likely to gather in front of the ARP building in Bardo District, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) building on Habib Bourguiba Avenue in downtown Tunis, the Carthage Palace (the official residence and seat of the President of Tunisia), and the Ennahda office in the Montplaisir neighborhood. Anti-Saied protests are most likely to occur in Tunis' Le Kram neighborhood, which has a strong Ennahda support base. These protests have a high risk of turning unruly as Ennahda supporters in this area are known to frequently engage in vandalism and arson attacks to express their grievances. Security forces' expected use of riot dispersal measures to contain the protests is liable to give rise to the

perception of excessive use of force by the security apparatus. Tensions surrounding alleged police brutality are already high in Tunisia and recently triggered unruly protests in Tunis in [June](#). Therefore, as the locals' grievances with the security establishment grow, the risk of attacks targeting police stations and security checkpoints will also increase.



6. Opposition parties, such as the PDL, and civil society organizations, such as the UGTT, are yet to release statements expressing their stance on the current political crisis. Although the PDL is explicitly anti-Ennahda, it has likely refrained from either supporting or denouncing Saied's decision to evade any possible allegations that it is capitalizing upon the public's sentiments to advance its political interests. **FORECAST:** The UGTT's stance on this issue will be critical in determining the trajectory of the anticipated protest movement and the political situation in Tunisia. This is because the UGTT is the largest trade union in the country and has a wide support base. In the past, the UGTT's support or lack thereof has been crucial in deciding the fate of controversial government policies. For example, the UGTT's opposition to the imposition of austerity measures bolstered a large-scale anti-government protest movement in Tunisia in [January 2018](#) and compelled former Prime Minister Youssef Chahed to reverse his decision. Overall, the political and security situation in Tunisia will remain volatile over the coming days and weeks. However, the risk of a complete disintegration of the country's state apparatus is currently relatively low, as partially shown by the expression of support for Saied from the military and security leadership.

Recommendations:

1. Travel to Tunis may continue while adhering to all security precautions regarding militancy and civil unrest. Contact us at Operations@max-security.com or +44 20-3540-0434 for itinerary and contingency support options.
2. Those operating in Tunis on July 26 and over the coming days are advised to avoid nonessential travel to the immediate vicinity of the following areas as they are likely to be the main focal points for protests: the ARP building in Bardo District, Habib Bourguiba Avenue in downtown Tunis, the Carthage Palace, and the Ennahda office in the Montplaisir neighborhood.

3. It is also advised to avoid nonessential travel to the Intikala, Le Kram, Ettadhamen, Ibn Khaldoun, Ennasr, Ariana, Bab al-Khadra, Mornaguia, Sidi Hassine, and Manouba districts due to the potential for unrest as well as high rates of radicalization.
4. When traveling in other cities, including coastal areas such as Sousse, Sfax, and Bizerte, avoid nonessential travel to the immediate vicinity of governorate buildings and Ennahda party offices due to the high risk of unrest near these areas.