

# Tunisian opposition seizes on Brahmi's murder to push for Egypt-style coup

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Bourgeois “left” and pseudo-left parties are seizing on the assassination of opposition leader Mohamed Brahmi on Thursday to push for a coup against Tunisia’s Islamist-led government, modeled on the bloody July 3 coup against the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) regime in Egypt.

Brahmi died outside his home in Tunisian capital, Tunis, after being shot 11 times by unknown assailants. His daughter witnessed his killing, reporting that two murderers escaped on a motorbike. There has been no claim of responsibility.

The assassination prompted protests throughout the country against the unpopular Islamist-led government of the Ennahda party. All flights to and from Tunisia were canceled.

Brahmi, 58, was a former secretary-general of the nationalist People’s Movement party and a member of the Constituent Assembly known for criticizing the ruling Ennahda party. His party also joined the coalition of several pseudo-left parties of the Popular Front led by Hamma Hammami, the leader of the Tunisian Communist Workers Party (PCOT), now known as the Tunisian Workers Party.

The Brahmi assassination occurred almost six months after the similar murder of another opposition leader, Chokri Belaïd, on February 6. Belaïd’s murder triggered protests and forced Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali to resign after he failed to reach an agreement on forming a new government. It remains unclear who murdered Belaïd, though a Salafist group tied to Ennahda was blamed for it.

Interior Ministry sources indicated yesterday that the same gun was used for the murder of Brahmi and Belaïd.

Soon after news of Brahmi’s assassination spread, protests broke out in Tunis and other cities denouncing

Ennahda for being behind his killing. Thousands protested outside the Interior Ministry in Tunis and a hospital in the Ariana district where Brahmi’s body had been taken. They chanted, “Down with the rule of Islamists,” calling for the government to resign.

Similar protests also broke out in other cities, including in the southern towns of Sfax and Sidi Bouzid, Brahmi’s impoverished hometown, where the 2010-2011 Tunisian uprising against the former Ben Ali dictatorship began. In Sidi Bouzid, protesters set fire to Ennahda’s local headquarters.

Prime Minister Ali Larayedh of Ennahda condemned the assassination, adding: “We are against all the calls to dissolve the government and the Constituent Assembly to create a [power] vacuum.” Ennahda party leader Rached Ghannouchi said the attack on Brahmi was aimed at “halting Tunisia’s democratic process and killing the only successful model in the region, especially after the violence in Egypt, Syria and Libya.”

Tunisian bourgeois opposition parties, pseudo-left groups and Tunisia’s UGTT (General Union of Tunisian Labor) trade union reacted to Brahmi’s assassination by demanding that the government resign. The UGTT called for a general strike.

Yesterday several pseudo-left groups and associations announced the formation of a National Salvation Front aimed at forming a “higher national authority for national salvation” to draft a new constitution. They included Hammami’s Workers Party, the Ettakatol movement, the Socialist Party, the Farmers’ Voice and the Arab Democratic Vanguard Party. Their statement also blamed the assassinations of Belaïd and Brahmi on Ennahda.

Before identifying any suspect in Brahmi’s murder, the Tunisian secular opposition, including pseudo-left

groups like the Popular Front, is seizing on the killing to call for the dissolution of Islamist-led Constituent Assembly (CA) and the overthrow of Ennahda. A number of deputies resigned from the CA after the killing.

Hamma Hammami said, “We call on the Tunisian people to pursue peaceful civil disobedience in all the cities of the republic to bring down the government and the Constituent Assembly and form a national salvation government.”

On its Facebook page, the Popular Front announced a sit-in in front of the headquarters of the National Constituent Assembly in Bardo, gathering people to demand the dissolving of the CA.

Brahmi’s murder comes at an explosive time, after an army coup that overthrew the MB regime of President Mohamed Mursi in Egypt. A Tunisian Tamarod (“rebel”) movement—backed by the pseudo-left parties and modeled on the Egyptian Tamarod movement that provided political support for the Egyptian coup—is calling for the overthrow of Ennahda.

Although the US-backed Egyptian military coup was aimed at Mursi, its ultimate aim is to crack down on working-class opposition to austerity measures—including scrapping food subsidies upon which millions of Egyptians rely—and impose dictatorial rule laid out in an army “road map.”

As popular discontent mounts against Ennahda—which recently reached an agreement on a \$1.8 billion loan deal with the IMF—the pseudo-left opposition forces fear rising social opposition in the working class. According to the *Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project*, about 78 percent of Tunisians are dissatisfied with the general direction that their country is taking, and 83 percent feel that current economic conditions are bad.

On July 7, four days after the Egyptian coup, Hamma Hammami called for a similar development in Tunisia: “The repetition of an Egyptian scenario is quite probable.” Announcing that the Popular Front would help establish a “road map” to “correct the process of the revolution,” he said. “The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and of the provisional government will create no constitutional vacuum.”

Hammami’s call to reproduce the Egyptian coup in Tunisia makes clear the reactionary program of the Tunisian petty-bourgeois “left” forces. In Egypt, the

army has killed hundreds of protesters since the coup and is preparing severe austerity measures—such as scrapping food and energy subsidies upon which masses of people depend—in order to balance the budget.

Financial analysts are pointing to the potential for civil war in Tunisia. Anna Boyd, Senior Middle East Analyst at London-based IHS Country Risk, said: “We are likely to see mass protests and counter-protests between secularists and Islamists, involving fighting in the center of Tunis and other urban centers.”

Since the mass uprising against the Ben Ali regime after the self-immolation of impoverished worker Mohamed Bouazizi, Tunisian pseudo-left groups including the PCOT have played a reactionary role, subordinating the working class to bourgeois rule. They backed the Constituent Assembly tasked with drafting a constitution for bourgeois rule, paving the way for Ennahda to win the October 2011 elections.

The pseudo-left forces now seek to contain opposition with the assistance of the UGTT, a long-standing prop of the Ben Ali dictatorship. While any coup would initially target Ennahda, in the end its aim would be that of crushing working class opposition in order to carry out austerity on behalf of the Tunisian ruling class and its imperialist backers.



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