

In Tunisia, Street Riots and a Necessary Quasi-Coup

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Rached Ghannouchi, the head of the Islamist Ennahda party

The much ballyhooed “Arab Spring” began with the self-immolation of a Tunisian street seller, Mohamed Bouazizi, in protest at police corruption and his own ill treatment. His death set off riots across Tunisia, becoming a general uprising against the massive corruption of President Ben Ali and his cronies; Ben Ali was forced to flee the country. Meanwhile, in a dozen Arab countries similar street protests grew, becoming violent, and leading to challenges to the existing regimes, some of which fell (as those of Mubarak in Egypt, Qaddafi in Libya, and Saleh in Yemen), others of which resisted (most notably, that of Bashar Assad in Syria); in three of the countries that experienced the “Arab Spring” –

Syria, Libya, and Yemen – civil wars are still going on.

Meanwhile, in Tunisia, democracy seemed to take hold; Tunisia was held up as the exception, the country where the “Arab Spring” had succeeded.

But all is not well in Tunisia. At the end of July, Tunisia faced its worst crisis in a decade of democracy after President Kais Saied ousted the government and froze parliament with help from the army, in a move denounced as a coup by the main parties including Islamists. A report on this move by President Saied to temporarily increase his power is here: “Tunisian democracy in crisis after president ousts government, [Jihad Watch](#).”