

The Fourth Conference on National Dialogues, 11—12 June 2019
The House of the Estates, Helsinki

National Dialogue – a role in bridging Libya’s complex transition?

Objective of the session

The objective of the session is to explore the how the Libyan political context has evolved in 2019, to take a critical reflection at the various transition and conflict resolution processes, assess where they stand now after the escalation of conflict in Tripoli, and question whether a comprehensive national dialogue can still play a role in bridging them. Furthermore, the aim of the session is to assess why attempts at national dialogue have so far not been central in the Libyan case, and what prospects are there for national dialogue in the future.

Background

At the start of 2019 several processes were underway to try to work towards a unification of Libyan institutions—the UN sponsored process, negotiations between the Government of National Accord (GNA) and Libyan National Army (LNA), and several attempts at forging international consensus on the way forward. These processes have been eclipsed by the recent escalation of conflict in Tripoli, which has once again sharpened relations between an increasingly polarized population. We are in many ways back to the situation Libya in 2014, prior to the Skhirat process.

Despite the progress made before the recent escalation, many of the core challenges in the country remain the same and the underlying constitutional political crisis is increasingly multi-layered and fragmented. For the country to move beyond the current impasse consensus will need to be forged in a number of overlapping *processes*. These processes vary from high-level negotiations focusing on power sharing and timing of transition milestones, affected by ongoing military maneuvers, to the efforts of unifying existing sovereign institutions’ and the constitutional and other legal frameworks; and ongoing preparations for elections.

Set against this background, broad-based consultations were conducted under the auspices of the UN to prepare a National Conference that would work towards greater consensus among Libyans on the key tenets of a stable and peaceful future. The conference was planned for April 2019 but has been postponed indefinitely due to the ongoing conflict in Tripoli. It is unclear to many Libyans whether the proposed National Conference will be able to sufficiently address the fragmented politics especially in the aftermath of the conflict.

In the aftermath of the recent conflict, Libyans and the international community will increasingly look towards national dialogue processes to help achieve sufficient consensus among political constituencies and elites. The challenge now is how to identify and bring onboard the relevant political stakeholders to

agree on the core issues, and the sequencing of steps, in a manner that supports the unification and development of institutions in Libya. Expectations for the National Conference were high, and Libyans themselves will look to such processes to bridge the various tracks on which Libya's future peace and stability depends.

Libya's national dialogue efforts have been multiple and faltering throughout the years, but greater national dialogue is needed in Libya's future, that engages individuals from across the spectrum on substantive issues crucial to a peaceful unification of the country's institutions. Such processes can help build trust and provide assurances—both of good will, and against monopoly by any one party or individual. Libya's political situation is complex, and substantive and broad-based consensus between all the key parties in Libya is still required, that covers the critical elements—constitutional referendum, timing of elections being the key ones—required to lay the groundwork for a peaceful future.

Key questions

- How can the planned NC help bridge key elements of these processes – will this be sufficient or is something additional required?
- Are all the elements in place for a substantive agreement on the core issues of contention, and is their consensus on their sequencing?
- How should the issue of armed actors be addressed, i.e. how to make eventual agreement implementable?

Composition of the session

- Mr Fadel M. Lamem, Director General, National Economic and Social Development Board & Chairman, National Dialogue Commission
- Ms Azza Maghur, Lawyer, Maghur & Partners
- Mr Moulay Qudaidi, Head of Social Council of Tuareg in Libya
- Dr Rida Al Tubuly, Founder and Director, Together We Build it
- *Moderator: Dr Edward Marques, the Interim Head of Middle East and North Africa Programmes, CMI*