Introduction

What began as a group of frustrated citizens protesting in an alleyway in Benghazi on the night of February 15th, 2011 ended up in a bloody six-month internationally aided war against the tyranny of the dictator Moammar Qaddafi. Today, over three years after the Libyan uprisings, the country is finding itself in a situation with a degree of complexity far higher in magnitude than that which required the defeat of the late dictator. Public security – more precisely, the lack thereof – is the most pressing challenge facing the country, and one which the state has yet been able to address sufficiently. Currently, thousands of small militia groups have been bred from the power vacuum marked by the absence of a functioning state army in Libya. Only a fraction of the 200 000 registered militia members have actually fought in the 2011 uprisings, and each group lays claim to its own weapons, alliances, ideologies, and ideas over how they aim to run the country. Interestingly enough, yet unsurprising considering the national demographics, young people under the age of thirty are the ones dominating the militias, particularly in terms of membership. At Yaumena, the youth dimension to this case study has captivated us because it has become clear that solving the militia problem requires delving specifically into what triggers youth responses to insecurity. In other words, how has the Libyan state contributed to the problem of youth turning over to militias? We have collaborated to develop a synthesis of the dialogues generated on this question through the cooperation of the Yaumena research team, as well as the ideas exchanged between the Dialogue panelists, guest panelist Dr. Fawaz Gerges, and the audience participants.

What is the Libyan state?

Before delving into the cusp of the security crisis, it has proved important for the members of the dialogue to discuss what, in fact, *is* the Libyan state. What makes Libyans feel that they can assign themselves an overarching Libyan identity? More importantly, are there any discrepancies that taint such an allocation? Indeed, there are

certain elements that compel us to further examine the theoretical identity base of the Libyan state. A country long controlled by foreign entities, from the Romans to the Ottomans to the Italian colonial powers, Libya's three major provinces (Cyneraica, Fezzan, and Tripolitania) only had a chance to consolidate into an independent nation-state in 1951. When Qaddafi came into power, he had the opportunity to build cohesive entities out of the inherited fragmentation and self-explanatory disintegration of multiple societies in Libya. However, similarly to other Arab autocrats, what he delivered was a cult of personality – an authoritarian state which mutilated even the most fragile institutions established by the colonial powers and the ensuing rule of King Idris. With that in mind, certain tribes and regions were favoured over others (the eastern region of the country claiming the most marginalization), and formal institutions were never in place to mold populations together or develop a cohesive national historical memory of a state in Libya. Moreover, Qaddafi made sure to eliminate a national army that could one day challenge his rule and instead relied on brigades largely controlled by his own family members.

As we return to examine the anarchical situation in today's Libya, it is important to keep in mind this history to shed light on the provincial and tribal loyalties that citizens have tended to fall back on in the absence of a functioning state that should have provided an institutional base for force, resources, and protection in the country.

The State vs. Militias

Due to unsuccessful attempts on part of the General National Congress (GNC) to disintegrate 'revolutionary' militias and establish a functioning national army, the legislative authority of the country quickly slipped into a rocky marriage with some of the militia groups as GNC members built alliances with some, and the ministries with others. Hundreds of militia groups were enrolled and salaried under the government (elected and formed by the GNC), and that eventually backfired because the government found itself stuck between realising the conflicting demands of militia

leaders while also trying to establish its own legitimacy as the governing body of the country. To break this down on a micro-level, the youth dimension to this conflict becomes apparent as we analyse the reasons behind them joining militia groups. Aside from the fact that Libyan citizens have been joining militias due to the attractive salaries unmatched by the ones available to day laborers and students, for most members, being in a militia represents a sort of ownership over their security. It allows them to feel a sense of agency and importance in shaping the course of the country, something that they have never been able to do as a result of their birth under a severely repressive regime. However, as the increasingly-chaotic events have displayed, this romantic image of agency turns into one of competing and contradictory motives on part of different groups which has resulted in daily violence, bloodshed, blackmail, and kidnappings. The citizens have ultimately paid the highest price as they feel the terror of the militia violence and the bitterness of the GNC's paralysis on a daily basis.

The Extremist Factions

The rise of extremist factions has played a consistent threat to the stability of Libya as it aimed to transition into democratic governance. Ansar al-Sharia, one of the more prominent fundamentalist groups, is a Salafi militia that gained attention in June 2012 when it paraded its arms around Benghazi demanding the imposition of what they deem to be Islamic law, or Sharia. This group has been associated with various terrorist activities around the country, including the killing of US Ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens in 2012. Government-associated armed forces like al-Saiqa in Benghazi have been tasked with battling the extremist militias, but with limited success. According to 'Lawyers for Justice in Libya', at least one lawyer or judge in the country has been assassinated every month by militia groups over the past year. Libya's most recent challenge emerged after Khalifa Heftar, a retired army general who was an active military figure in the 2011 uprisings, lead a full-scale ground and air assault against groups that have been conducting campaigns of assassinations, specifically targeting Islamist groups like Ansar al-Sharia. Blaming the country's Islamist lawmakers for their

ineffective governance and tolerance of Islamist militias, Heftar instilled much anxiety among GNC members and many Libyan citizens as he took the matter of defeating extremists into his own hands without a legal decree. On May 20, 2014, the interim Libyan government proposed to select a new prime minister and suspend parliament until the next election – an act of concession to the general whose actions have threatened a military coup or a civil war, which would surely add more destitution to the already anarchical situation in the country.

Just like with other militias, youth have been central targets of recruitment for the extremist-led militia groups. Holding conferences and trainings around key cities in Libya, Ansar Al-Sharia have actively developed programs and propaganda tools to lure in young adolescent males into their ideologies. General Heftar's campaigns against extremist and terrorist groups in Libya may – at best – rid the country of a few of their bases. However, instilling an effective transitional strategy that dis-incentivises young people from joining militias (extremist or non-extremist) and re-integrates militia members into a national army or into various segments of civil society requires unprecedented planning on part of the government and relevant non-state actors in order to genuinely address the problem on a sustainable level.

Yaumena Proposals and Conclusions

The Libyan state today pays many militia groups as it relies on them to compensate for the lack of police and military forces. On average, joining a militia is the most financially-lucrative employment option for a young Libyan male. In fact, more than eight percent of the country's work force are in militias. As a result of the discussions featured in the Yaumena Dialogues on youth responses to public insecurity in Libya, the following youth-focused proposals have been synthesized by the panelists, research groups and audience participants:

❖ Libyan youth need to be equipped with tools that allow them to feel that they are value-adding members of Libyan society. Capacity building through reforming the education system ought to be the primary source of action on part of the Libyan government.

❖ A national reconciliation strategy must be developed coherently in order to address the retribution-oriented tribal conflicts that have fueled much of the inter-militia violence. Further, the GNC needs to actively develop strategies to re-gain public trust in the state as a functioning authority, and institute an effective demobilization, disarmament and reintegration program for militia members.

❖ International cooperation and assistance is instrumental in helping the state to develop an effective army and address terrorism in the country.

❖ The absence of sufficient sports, leisure, and cultural avenues around Libya must be addressed if the state wishes to keep young people off the streets. Addressing this challenge would surely ease current challenges including street violence, drug abuse, and sexual harassment.

❖ Only through addressing public security threats will the Libyan economy begin to acquire growth, and only through acquiring growth will better employment opportunities attract youth away from militias.

As coined by Dr. Fawaz Gerges, the Libyan case study – although an aggravated example – is the rule, not the exception, in the Arab world. Amidst the bitter grievances and the ongoing violence, we are witnessing a process of state-building that has shed light on the catastrophic structural flaws (both from a sociological and political economy perspective) left behind after decades of severe authoritarian governance. In order for this 'new' brand of state-building to tread onto truly new territory and reach fruition, government policies *must* prioritize the wellbeing and

positive development of young people. The anarchy that we see in Libya today has proved that stability and growth in the country will not be acquired overnight. However, that should not directly translate into pessimism regarding the future of the country. Domestic pressure on part of citizen activists and civil society groups needs to be met by a renewed commitment and adherence by the GNC to the laws of the constitution that is currently being developed for the first time. That, in addition to consistent frameworks of cooperation from the international community and pressure on the Libyan state to combat violence and terrorism, hope still remains for Libya to exit this dark stage of transition.