

Summary of AUB-Princeton Conference Panel, entitled “The ongoing Civil Wars in Syria and Iraq”

Presenters:

Jonah Schulhofer-Wohl (University of Virginia),

Samer Abboud (Arcadia University),

Ranj Alaaldin (London School of Economics)

Discussant: Kevin Mazur (Princeton University)

All three of the papers on this panel investigated the conditions under which group solidarities form and allow actors to do things collectively, whether to defend their interest as Shiis, mobilize against the authoritarian Syrian regime, or administer basic services in their local Syrian community when state authority had evaporated. The papers give conflicting answers as to what creates solidarity, focusing respectively on macro, meso and micro levels.

Ranj Alaadin’s paper, entitled “Shi’i mobilisation in Iraq,” argued that agentive action at an elite level dictated action at the mass level in the case of Shii mobilization around the Irai Da’wa party in the 1960s and 1970s. He argued that the Shi’i identity category came to trump all other material ties and networks in the community because of combination of state persecution and the organizing efforts of social movement entrepreneurs within the Da’wa organization. The paper draws on extensive work in UK archives, reading of previously un-analyzed Da’wa party documents and interviews with party members.

Samer Abboud’s paper, entitled “Authority, governance, and networks of violence in Syria,” argued that local characteristics determine meso-level action of fighting and service provision organizations in the ongoing Syrian uprising. The paper examines the relationship of fighting groups to local communities and argues that the nature of these ties determines the sorts of alliances the two groups will make and whether they can be coherent and provide services. The piece is primarily theoretical—advancing the concept of actors in an insurgency as nodes in networks—but also sketches a comparison between how networks form under the rule of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and other rebel groups.

Jonah Schulhofer-Wohl made a presentation entitled “The Dynamics of Escalation in Syria.” He investigates the ways in which the violence of the Syrian regime in the early phases of the ongoing uprising condition later levels of violence during civil war. The project draws on quantitative event data gathered from various Internet sources.