The Eye of the Storm: Centrality and the Syrian Civil War

Guest lecture by Dr. Steven Radil, University of Idaho
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CPO 4721 Politics of Ethnic Conflict
10:40 am, Anderson Hall 101

The Syrian civil war, now in its 7th year, exemplifies the complexity of contemporary armed conflict: a myriad of non-state armed groups fighting each other and the Syrian army, webs of alliances and rivalries that break along ethnic and religious lines, waves of foreign interventions, and a war that never seems to end. A new network dataset developed by researchers at the University of Idaho peers into the patterns of conflict and cooperation among 30 prominent warring groups within Syria, tracking relations between them over time. This dataset will be used to illustrate various network centrality measures (such as degree, closeness, and betweenness centrality), which are widely used to identify the most important actor or group in a network. We will also discuss the political implications of being 'central' to the set of positive and negative relations that help shape the war and consider how the political aims of such groups are either enabled or constrained by their relative position in the network.

Steven M. Radil is an Assistant Professor of Geography at the University of Idaho and a political geographer with interests in territoriality, social networks and other spatialities of political power. His primary research revolves around issues of conflictual politics, especially the geographies of war at various scales; he has published on a diverse set of political topics, including terrorism, interstate war, civil war and urban violence. Dr Radil's current research explores ways to theorize political agency geographically, the importance of context at multiple scales for political outcomes and the increasing role of geospatial technology in politics.

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