Monday, June 20

Session 1a: Theories of State Building – David Lake, UC San Diego

To set the stage for the discussions to follow, Professor Lake outlined three principal eras of state building theory in American foreign policy. The central focus of the discussion of these eras of state building is how well “legitimacy” of power was developed, which refers to the public’s acceptance of the government’s enforcement of rules within a society. Early American state building abroad was characterized by enforced loyalty, stability and economic openness. These policies were often ineffective at generating legitimacy of power. Following the end of the Cold War, policy shifted in the direction of achieving legitimacy through the immediate institution of elections. This policy is generally recognized as having failed to meet its objective, with a clear lesson that elections and legitimacy are not one and the same. The most recent era of state building (post-2007) is characterized by an emphasis on promoting service provision (e.g., security, health) and attributing credit to the local state.

Professor Lake concluded with a discussion of the criticisms of the most recent form of state building policy. Does establishing public services on a local level scale to legitimate national governance? Will the original illegitimacy of the state ever fade? Can we balance the tradeoff between creating a state with legitimate authority and a state that remains loyal to Western powers? Answering such questions is an important next step for researchers in the field.

Session 1b: Theory of Sub-state Conflict and Organizations – Sandeep Baliga, Northwestern University

Professor Baliga offered a game-theoretic model to help demonstrate the causes of conflict. Citing historical examples, he identified greed and fear as primary motives for involved parties. He rationalized those interpretations of conflict by developing a coordination game in which the players can either engage in hostile or peaceful action. The two equilibria of the game are for the parties to coordinate in that they both select hostile or peaceful actions. Greed enters the game as a payoff for being hostile when the
opponent is peaceful. Fear enters the game as a payoff for being peaceful when the opponent is hostile. The levels of the fear and greed payoffs affect the actions chosen directly and indirectly, through the propensity of the opponent attacking. It is through this indirect channel that “fear cycles” can develop in which any suspicion of an opponent attacking snowballs into a decision to be hostile just in case.

By incorporating a third party into the game that has the ability to send a message (a terrorist act) to one party, Professor Baliga demonstrates that extremist groups can seed conflict as provocateurs --taking advantage of fear cycles to generate conflict between the two main parties. This message changes the preferences of the messaged party by increasing their extrinsic motivation to act with hostility. This could operate through a popular demand for retaliation or many other avenues. He also develops a second model of influence in which a third party has inside knowledge of one group’s costs of acting hostile. In this case, the third party can send a signal to a party that achieves the same outcome as the preference shock, but accomplishes it by changing the information set rather than preferences.

Session 1c: Theories of Counter-insurgency – Joseph Felter, U.S. Army & Hoover Institution

Colonel Felter offered a first-hand account of counter-insurgency theories from his extensive experience of field work with the U.S. Army. He presents a view on insurgency in which the ability of individuals to pursue violence is critically dependent on the strength of the state. The fundamental problem in this case is that the incentives of the local state may not be aligned enough with the goals of U.S. practitioners. Given that money often flows preferentially to areas afflicted with violence, the level of optimal violence for the state to permit is non-zero. Colonel Felter referred to this phenomenon as “rewarding failure rather than success”, and cautions that it is all too present in modern counter-insurgency efforts. He further argued that local state institutions may have a strong interest in perpetuating conflict, even at the expense of the state or its’ citizens.

Colonel Felter also spoke on the difficulty of measuring success in combating insurgency and building stable communities. For example, he presented data from Afghanistan that shows a very clear hill-shaped relationship between citizen-reported stability and measured violence against security forces. Increased stability, if it requires troop presence, is sometimes associated with more violence up to a point, at which the expected negative relationship appears. Therefore, success on the stability front is costly in some sense. He emphasized that such “tactical risks to avoid strategic failures” are a necessary component of any successful counter-insurgency plan.
Tuesday, June 21

Session 2a: Civil Military Engagement – Mark Alexander, U.S. Army Special Operations Command

This brief talk provided an overview of the activities and doctrine of the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade, a division of the U.S. Army’s irregular warfare group. Their purpose is to link efforts by many organizations, governmental and non-governmental, to engage in civil projects all over the world. Four-person teams form the “nuclei” of the unit, allowing for mobility of deployment and malleability of objectives. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the brigade has been tasked with combating both tacit and active support of insurgency through civil interventions. In peacetime, the brigade is often deployed in response to natural disasters as well.

Session 2b: Conflict, Security and Development – Holly Benner, World Bank

Holly Benner summarized the recently released 2011 World Development Report on conflict, security and development from the World Bank. The report focuses on the causes and ramifications of violence in the developing world, and what institutional interventions are required to stabilize development. The Bank points out that while there has been a major reduction in civil war violence following the conclusion of the Cold War, violence still represents a major factor impeding growth, citing the poor economic performance of states affected by violence in the past two decades. They simultaneously argue that the poor economic outcomes generated by violence, specifically unemployment, result in more violence. In this way, states in conflict are caught in self-reinforcing cycles.

As prescriptions, the Bank recommends that assistance needs to be focused on reducing the fragility of institutions in conflict areas, strengthening international partnerships with local institution, creating jobs, taking more entrepreneurial risks with investment, and reducing the volatility of aid supply. Because, as the report demonstrates, institutional reform often takes a generation to materialize, a key aspect of accomplishing all of the above goals is undertaking projects that can be viewed by the local population as “quick-successes”. These serve to keep public opinion on the side of developers and prevent the cycle of violence and economic weakness from restarting.

Session 2c: Reflections on Conflict, Institutions and Development – Edward Miguel, UC Berkeley

As a contrast to the World Bank’s view on the role of local governance institutions in development, Professor Miguel presented the results of a large-scale field experiment he and his co-authors performed in Sierra Leone. The experiment focuses on one of the most common institutional interventions in developing states: electing community development councils. Across the country, the authors randomized the setup, funding and training of these councils. These councils had access to bank accounts, included women
and had the ability to allocate project funds to infrastructure, agriculture, skills-training and small business investments. The over-arching goal was to provide an institutional structure that would lower the cost of villages taking collective action.

Professor Miguel’s results show that while the councils were well-established in treatment villages and the funds associated with them translated into public good investment and market activity, they had no effect on increasing the participation of women and young men in governance, and failed to stimulate the raising of public funds (rather than funds that came with the treatment) for collective action. Treatment also failed to affect the way that communities participated in a structured community activity in which villages could select between free batteries or a free tarp (both valuable economic commodities for the village). Decisions in treated villages took no longer (as would be indicative of a democratic process), and the use of the goods for public goals was no more common. He concluded by contrasting these results with those from a similar intervention in Liberia, citing differences in pre-existing governance structures between the two nations as a potential explanatory factor.

**Session 2d: Institutions, Incentives and Peace-building – Philip Keefer, World Bank**

Philip Keefer’s talk focused on the importance of collective action in two separate frameworks: the ability of a citizenry to act collectively against a regime, and the ability of a military unit to act collectively against a regime. He points out that the ability of these groups to act collectively in such ways is a credible threat that the groups can use to enforce pacts between themselves and ruling regimes: for a politician’s promise to the electorate to be credible, it must be that the electorate has some means of punishing the politician for reneging on the promise; similarly, for leaders to promise soldiers payment and privilege at the end of the day, it must be that the soldiers have an ability to punish the leader for reneging on the promise.

The main takeaway of the talk was that factors that affect the ability of such groups to act collectively are critical in determining the enforceability of contracts and thus outcomes in developing states. This can explain why once in power, leaders often limit military power. Reducing the ability of their forces to act collectively against the enemy also reduces their ability to act against the incumbent. It also speaks to the fragmentation of political parties in developing nations. Strong (temporally robust) parties organized around policy platforms enable collective action against leaders who deviate from those platforms. Weak (temporally transient) parties organized around an individual or ethnicity limit collective action to co-ethnics and family members, to whom credible promises can be made more easily.

**Session 2e: Conflict, Corruption and Development: A Tactical Perspective from Baghdad – Jeffery Peterson, U.S. Military Academy**

Professor Peterson reflected on his service as an officer in the U.S. Army in the spring of 2007 in Baghdad. Focusing on a very specific section of the city, he took us step by step through the specifics of providing security and services in zones of conflict. During the
time period in question, the major concern in the city was sectarian violence between Shia and Sunni residents. The primary goal of U.S. forces in the city at the time was to pass authority to the police. However, the police were thoroughly infiltrated by Shia militants and an instrument of sectarian violence. Thus the goal of bestowing legitimacy on the regime was at odds with the goal of reconciling sectarian differences; the Sunni population saw the government and police as another supplier of Shia violence.

Faced with this situation, the steps taken by Professor Peterson were seemingly at odds with the military’s long-term goal, and criticized by his superiors. Despite this, by the time his unit was pulled out of the area, it was clear that his method of isolating the Sunni population from the reach of the National Police and militant violence and supporting safe, prosperous communities was effectively generating trusting relationships between U.S. personnel and the Sunni community, and promoting economic activity. Within these “isolation zones”, he focused on generating one safe neighborhood at a time; providing local entrepreneurs with capital, protecting and funding schools and interacting frequently and informally. Professor Peterson emphasized the importance of opening markets, keeping incentives aligned correctly and avoiding weak institutions. Eventually the influence of the sectarian Mahdi Army on the police was diminished by removing their leaders from the Ministry of Interior.

Wednesday, June 22

Session 3.a: Polling After Conflicts and Disasters – Jishnu Das, World Bank

In October 2005, a 7.6 magnitude earthquake suddenly struck Northern Pakistan, prompting large-scale humanitarian aid from the Pakistani government and foreign donors. This session presented the results of an author-initiated survey examining how past experience with foreign aid providers in the wake of the earthquake affected current levels of trust in foreigners. Foreign aid workers were predominantly allocated to the hardest hit areas of Pakistan (near active fault lines). Respondents who lived closer to the major active fault-lines in 2005 rated foreigners (Europeans/Americans) as much more trustworthy and helpful when surveyed four years later, indicating a persistent effect of humanitarian assistance on trust.

Attitudinal questionnaires measure trust by asking directly (i.e. would you say people can be trusted?), which has the potential to be biased and confusing. A key innovation in this survey is that it elicited trust by presenting a concrete situation to the respondent (would ___ return accidentally dropped currency), which minimizes the biases inherent in asking individuals to reflect broadly on themselves and society.

The results have implications for the wider context of development in conflicted areas. First, humanitarian aid is non-strategic; recipients believe that it is provided because it is needed, not because it promotes some hidden agenda. Traditional development assistance, especially as it relates to counterinsurgency, may not be perceived as impartial. Second, personal interactions with aid workers are important; monetary aid alone is unlikely to change perceptions.
Session 3.b: Interviewing on Sensitive Topics: Asking Questions about Wartime Sexual Violence – Dara Kay Cohen, University of Minnesota

Professor Cohen discussed methodological and logistical issues that she experienced in the field interviewing about sexual violence in Sierra Leone, East Timor and El Salvador. She addressed veracity: how to preserve truth when conducting interviews. Anonymity and privacy are paramount in making respondents more comfortable. She advised interviewing in quiet/private spaces in order for respondents to feel more open about sharing, but also cross-validate from other sources. In her work, Cohen interviewed not only victims of sexual violence, but also military commanders, other ex-combatants, and the broader community. She stressed the importance of allowing the interviewee to have control – enabling them to broach any sensitive subjects, and halting the interview if the respondent become uncomfortable. An interpreter or local research assistant is helpful in these dimensions since they are familiar with the social and cultural cues that a foreign interviewer would miss. In addition, the qualitative methods she presented were combined with more systematic data on sexual violence from the State Department’s Human Rights Country Reports (1980-2009). The results suggest that sexual violence is frequently a unit-level phenomenon, rather than a top-down one, used as an initiation rite to signal and build social bonds among combatants.

Thursday, June 23

Session 4.a/b: Data Collection/Analysis in Conflict Areas – Jacob Shapiro, Princeton University and Radha Iyengar, London School of Economics

Empirical social science research faces the dual problems of data collection and analysis. In conflicted spaces, both problems are magnified: how do researchers get data in areas of active violence and insecurity and how do we appropriately take those issues into account in our studies? In the first half of the session Professors Shapiro and Iyengar discussed how to find usable data in conflicted spaces – knowledge culled from their own experiences in the field.

First, there are many uncertainties regarding the quality of data collected in spaces with active conflict. For many problems of interest, appropriate data may not even be collected or even exist. In addition, the security situation of interest might very well limit the movement of academics in the field, so we are reliant on other parties acting as data collection agents. If data of interest are actually collected, it rarely comes with documentation, and serious questions about how it was collected and what exactly it is measuring remain unresolved. The presenters discussed rudimentary indicators of survey quality, like enumerator training, pilot procedures, and sampling methodology. They also emphasized that the key to inducing organizations to cooperate and share data is convincing them that doing so also benefits them, by addressing a problem they have or addressing a question they are invested in.
The second half of the session considered “best practices” when analyzing data. Shapiro and Iyengar both walked through examples from their own work, with particular attention to the usual threats to identification (omitted variables, selection, measurement error, endogeneity) and how each particular application addressed these issues. A common thread running through both presenters’ empirical examples was that deep institutional knowledge, either from personal interviews with decision-makers or from a detailed reading of the relevant rules, regulations, and laws, provided the basis for addressing concerns about estimating causal effects.

Session 4.c: Measuring Corruption: Lessons from Vietnam – Edmund Malesky, UC San Diego

For questions that are not easily quantifiable or directly measured, researchers usually resort to survey questionnaires to gauge the spread and depth of the problem. Corruption is one such problematic issue which, in addition to being difficult to measure directly, is also subject to bias and under-reporting due to its illegality. Professor Malesky’s presentation detailed his experiences estimating corruption from survey measures, specifically what a well-designed “list experiment” looks like, and any inferential limitations that exist. Briefly, a list experiment is one where a survey question lists a few items and asks the respondent to report how many of those items they agree with or have experienced. The majority of items are benign, and participants are randomized into having a list that includes the controversial behavior of interest (here, corruption) or not. This allows the researcher to recover the average proportion of individuals who engaged in, say corruption, while alleviating concerns that respondents are reporting illegal activity.

A well-conceived list experiment is good for gauging behavior that has actually occurred (I have given a bribe in order to receive service) rather than hypotheticals (I would pay a fee to receive service), but by its nature, is most appropriate for gauging aggregate rather than individual behavior. Similarly, “good” benign activities to include in the list are socially non-controversial activities that some, but not all, of the sample population would have engaged in. A final point was that enumerator training must be very explicit to prevent enumerators from helping respondents count the list items and otherwise ruining the experiment.

Session 4d: Talking to Terrorists? Strategies for Interviewing Terrorists, Ex-Terrorists and Counter-Terrorists in Conflict Situations – Richard English, University of St. Andrews

As a complement to the quantitative methods reviewed in earlier sessions, Professor English recounted his experience conducting open-ended, in-depth interviews. Those were based on long-term rapport with former terrorists and law enforcement officers built over two decades studying the Irish conflict. The first issue with interviews is intimacy and access. Building up trust is difficult and time-consuming, with payoffs frequently occurring long after the first meeting. However, such intimate interviews reveal significant, local-level details that would otherwise be missed in a survey. Second,
Professor English’s own experience suggests that ex-terrorists relate past events as being “inevitable” or “contingent” from their perspective even though the sequence of events is unlikely to be as inflexible as stated. Finally, recall and memory are imperfect; personal accounts can be self-serving or be post-hoc rationalizations, whether they come from former insurgents or from members of the state. This suggests that each individual story should be corroborated with both historical and current records to build a clear image of past events.

Friday, June 24

Session 5.a: Survey Design in Post-Conflict Areas – Khalil Shikaki, Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research

Even in the current relatively-secure environment in Palestine, surveying presents challenges. Well-designed surveys should manage to provide an appropriate sample despite the logistical (i.e. checkpoints) and practical difficulties of operating in areas with restricted movement and a history of violence. Representative sampling is important in providing information that is useful both to researchers and to policymakers.

The first step to a reliable survey design is ensuring that it has a proper sampling scheme. In conflicted spaces, updated maps and demographic information is unlikely to be available, so specifying an accurate sampling frame is likely to involve additional work. Dr. Shikaki trained his data collectors to actually draw the necessary maps, collecting street names, landmarks, and housing units for all the potential survey areas.

Once a sample scheme is in place, the next hurdle is getting respondents to overcome their fear of honestly answering survey questions on uncomfortable subjects. In Palestine, enumerators work in mixed-gender teams to overcome gender norms. None of Dr. Shikaki’s surveys collect identifying information (e.g., names or addresses), to ensure respondent privacy. That precludes retrospectively conducting data quality checks. Instead, a third team member phones in real-time reports about where the current team is, what is happening, and which survey they are currently conducting. The training of enumerators is also important, with a strong emphasis on the importance of appearing neutral. As an exercise, trainee enumerators are sent out during a practice session wearing strong visual indicators of Hamas/Fatah/neutral to demonstrate how strongly such non-verbal cues can unwittingly bias survey responses.

Dr. Shikaki argues that the best way to demonstrate the relevance and importance of the survey is to convince policymakers that your data are accurate and useful by making predictions or developing quantitative indicators of items they care about. In addition, publishing results is vital to both publicity and to reassuring households that the survey firm is legitimate and neutral.
Session 5.b: Problems with non-Experimental Research in Conflict Studies – Esteban Klor, Hebrew University

In empirical studies, there is a growing emphasis on randomization as a method of cleanly estimating causal effects. Yet many questions of interest just do not lend themselves to randomization due to practical or ethical concerns. Professor Klor discussed two of his projects on how fatalities affect political views in the Israel-Palestine conflict, both of which use non-experimental data. When there is a source of variation that is “as good as random,” researchers can use well-established instrumental variables methods to estimate causal effects even if there is no actual randomization. As emphasized by earlier presenters, this requires significant institutional knowledge as to why the underlying variation in, say fatalities, is believably uncorrelated with other unobserved variables. In cases where there is no obvious instrument, empirical projects should be honest and thorough in testing for any sources of bias.

The findings of the two non-experimental papers might also have interesting repercussions for future conflicts. First, terrorism does appear to “work,” at least in the sense examined here. Israeli fatalities caused by Palestinians shift the Israeli electorate left (more favorable toward granting territorial concessions). Palestinian fatalities caused by Israelis do not appear to have any effect on radicalization of Palestinians. In contrast, major political events during an individual’s politically formative years do appear to have long-term consequences for Palestinian political views.

Session 5.c: Presentations by Participants – David Laitin, Stanford University, Discussant

Unsettling: Displacement during Civil Wars
Abbey Steele, Princeton University

Population displacement is frequently a byproduct of violence in developing countries, but relatively little is known about why it happens and how individuals are targeted for displacement by armed groups. Dr. Steele develops and tests a theory of “strategic” displacement of civilians by armed actors. In particular, civilians who are unlikely to collaborate with a particular group should be more likely to be displaced since that makes the territory easier to control. Where armed groups already have control, there should be little strategic displacement. Her case study of Apartado, Colombia provides evidence consistent with this hypothesis. Using archival records of voting and paramilitary actions, she found that neighborhoods that sided with FARC rebels were more likely to experience paramilitary violence and eviction.

The Need for Enemies
Juan Vargas, Universidad del Rosario

Dr. Vargas developed a theoretical model of leaders as agents. Suppose a politician is elected because he is the best fit to fight against an insurgency threat in the context of civil war. But suppose that the politician also gains some rents from being in office. The
situation can perversely result in the politician failing to be re-elected if he successfully eradicates the rebels. The politician needs enemies in order to remain in office; once he completes his task, he is out of a job. Formally, the model predicts that (1) the higher the probability of eliminating the rebels, the less likely the incumbent is to do so and (2) this aversion to finishing is especially strong in places that are electorally salient. To empirically test these hypotheses, Dr. Vargas examines “major” events in the Colombian civil war that severely weakened the FARC. Each of these events resulted in significant rebel defections, which should have made it easier for the President to remove the rebels, yet he held back, especially in the places he regarded as more politically salient.

The Political Economy of Election Fraud: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan
James Long, UC San Diego

The final participant presentation explored the effect of introducing election monitoring technology to the 2010 parliamentary elections in Afghanistan. Monitoring should reduce fraud since it makes fraud more “expensive” to perpetrate, but there is currently mixed empirical evidence on its efficacy. The randomized intervention involved announcing to the polling station manager an intention to photograph the station tally sheets after the poll closes. This particular monitoring intervention does appear to reduce fraud, at least the types conducted at the polling station level. However, the intervention also had interesting negative and positive spillovers: politically-connected candidates strategically shifted fraud to neighboring polling stations, while unconnected candidates suffered a reduction in fraudulent votes for them in neighboring polling stations.