Cadets participate in Middle East crisis simulation

By the Defense and Strategic Studies Program

Thirteen Defense and Strategic Studies cadets traveled to New Jersey Dec. 7 and participated in a Middle East crisis simulation run by Princeton University’s Center for International Security Studies.

The cadets joined nearly 30 students from the Woodrow Wilson School and ROTC cadets from both Princeton and Rutgers Universities.

The focus of the simulation was the ongoing crisis in Syria in which participants had to consider how to deal with the regime, rebel elements, refugees, and terrorist groups. At the same, they could not ignore other geo-political issues and how their actions relating to Syria impacted other strategic issue areas.

The simulation participants were broken into four country teams: Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the U.S.—with each country further divided into an executive and military team.

According to Zach Cooper, the director of the center’s Strategic Education Initiative, the simulation was designed to foster critical thought about strategy setting and implementation, decision-making under time constraints, bureaucracy, the “fog of war” and civil-military relations.

Based on the experiences of the cadets and students, the simulation exercise achieved its goals. Class of 2014 Cadet Kevin Finerty was part of Saudi Arabia’s military team.

“I thought a highlight of the exercise was the interaction between the military and executive cells,” he said. “We talk about civ-mil relations a lot and this simulation put that into practice.”

Class of 2014 Cadet Steven Pashko, who was part of the Iranian military team, said for half the exercise they were unsure of exactly what their civilian counterparts were trying to accomplish.

“At the same time, our executive cell was getting frustrated that we weren’t delivering them the options that they were looking for,” Pashko said. “[The exercise] did a brilliant job at simulating the ‘fog of war’ and made the exercise much more challenging and fun.”

Cooper said including cadets in the crisis simulation is critical to the center’s educational initiatives.

“Integrating West Point cadets into Princeton’s crisis simulations has been a central attraction of the Strategic Education Initiative’s events and has provided Princeton students with a unique learning experience,” he said. “There is no better way to teach civil-military relations than combining aspiring civilian and military leaders and giving them a chance to work together to set a strategy, make decisions under pressure, and learn how to work as a team.”