This lecture examines the emergence and transformation of pro-state paramilitarism in Syria in the context of the uprising and civil war. It focuses on the Syrian government’s deployment of the Shabbiha (later renamed ‘National Defense Forces’), irregular paramilitaries drawn from particular communities that committed a broad spectrum of violence, including torture, kidnapping, assassination, sexual violence, and massacres. Based on 7 years of ethnographic fieldwork including 80+ interviews with victims, perpetrators, and other eye witnesses, Üngör argues that the Shabbiha phenomenon manifests a fundamental complexity in its appearances, identities, motives, and cleavages. To unravel some of these complexities, the lecture looks at the micro-dynamics of Shabbiha violence in the three cities of Aleppo, Homs and Damascus, as particularly instructive examples of the broad variety of pro-state paramilitarism in Syria.