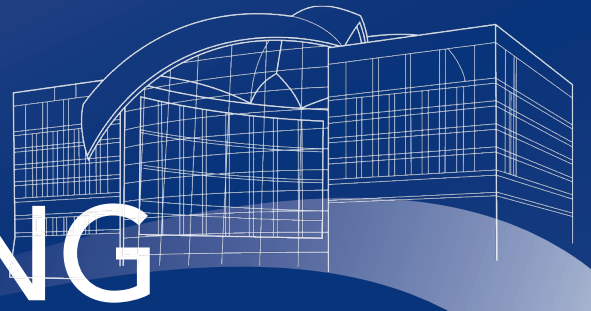


UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

PROGRESS IN PEACEBUILDING



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ISRAEL, THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

November 2010

The Current Situation

From the outset of his presidency, President Barack Obama committed himself to a renewed and sustained engagement in the peace process; therefore, the September 2010 resumption of face-to-face talks after a 20-month hiatus represented progress for the U.S. administration. However, relations between Israelis, Palestinians, and the Arab states are fragile and the road ahead is beset with challenges. Efforts to push the parties towards progress have met with mixed results, in part reflecting the fact that both Israeli and Palestinian societies face their own internal obstacles. The Palestinian Territories are under divided rule, with Hamas controlling Gaza and opposed to any Palestinian involvement in negotiations with Israel. The United States and Israel are only dealing with the Fatah-led government of President Mahmoud Abbas, currently in control of the West Bank and—under the initiative of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad—engaged in an ambitious two-year state-building plan. On the Israeli side, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu heads a coalition government made up of several right-wing parties opposed to many of the concessions that may have to be made in order for the current round of talks to yield concrete results. In addition, the country faces deepening tensions between secular and religious elements of society, as well as between Arab and Jewish citizens of the state. Meanwhile, cross-border and regional security concerns, emanating particularly from Lebanon, Gaza, and further afield in Iran, loom large. These challenges underscore the difficulties Israelis, Palestinians, and their leaders face as they look toward the ultimate goal of an enduring end to the conflict.

USIP's Approach

Throughout a period of marked deterioration in Arab-Israeli relations over the past decade, USIP has continued to dedicate its team's unique set of knowledge- and skill-based resources and relationships to a balanced and comprehensive approach to the conflict. It achieves this through policy-relevant analysis; innovative peace-oriented programming; cooperation and partnership with local organizations and initiatives; educational training; specialized publications; and the support of outside research and projects through a highly selective grants program. While work on the Arab-Israeli conflict falls primarily under the Institute's Center for Mediation and Conflict Resolution, our approach is an integrated one, drawing Institute-wide on research, education, grantmaking, fellowships, and professional training programs. As such we aim to:

- **Advise the policy community** on the role that the U.S. and the international community can have in influencing the Arab-Israeli conflict and on how to apply leverage to advance a peace process.
- **Assess and address the dynamics of the conflict** with emphasis on how the actions and attitudes of political groups, key civil society actors, and the Israeli and Palestinian publics affect efforts to initiate and sustain a peace process.

- **Cultivate relationships within and between key sectors of Arab and Israeli society** in a manner that creates an atmosphere supportive of improved relations and peaceful resolution of conflict.
- **Explore the religious dimensions of the conflict**, particularly religion's role as a mobilizing force in the politics of the region, and empower key actors, such as religious leaders and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), to use religion as an instrument of peacemaking.

Highlighted Work

Since 2000, USIP has published over 20 books and reports on subjects relating to Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Arab-Israeli relations and the role of the United States, provided about 70 grants totaling over \$2.5 million to scholars and NGOs addressing various aspects of the conflict, and supported the work of more than 20 resident scholars and fellows on this subject. This work is in addition to a host of regular panels and public events that are devoted to the issue, and to the constant demand for the expertise of our regional specialists by media outlets, public sector institutions, and NGOs. In keeping with the goals outlined above, and its commitment to an integrated, balanced, and comprehensive approach to the conflict, USIP's most recent engagement in the region includes the following:

Advise the Policy Community

- The Senior Working Group on Middle East Peace

In 2009, USIP convened a group of eminent thinkers and former senior policymakers, under the leadership of former National Security Advisers Samuel R. Berger and Stephen J. Hadley, to think through the issues surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and broader regional concerns. The Senior Working Group on Middle East Peace has held many sessions, each one focusing on distinct and diverse aspects of the conflict—including borders, institution-building, media, and diplomacy—and has provided input to the current administration in thinking through policy options and approaches.

- The Study Group on Arab-Israeli Peacemaking

Since 2007, USIP has engaged in a critical study of the course and nature of Arab-Israeli peace negotiations since 1991, with an eye to implications for future negotiations. The target audience for the Study Group's findings is foreign policy professionals and policymakers in the United States, the international community, and the region, with a special emphasis on presenting the project's findings to Congress and the executive branch. With a core membership of William Quandt, Steven Spiegel, and Shibley Telhami, the Study Group is chaired by former U.S. Ambassador to Egypt and to Israel, Daniel Kurtzer, and Scott Lasensky, Senior Research Associate in USIP's Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention.

- "Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace"

In consultation and cooperation with their core Study Group, Kurtzer and Lasensky co-authored the monograph "Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace: American Leadership in the Middle East" which was published by USIP Press in 2008. Receiving high praise from Middle East Special Envoy George Mitchell for its incisiveness, timeliness, and relevance for American policymakers, senior American officials have made the book required reading for diplomats working in the region. In addition it has been the subject of dozens of news articles and book reviews, and has been adopted as required reading in a number of university courses. A second book focused on a detailed history of U.S. involvement in the peace process is forthcoming in 2011.

Assess and address the dynamics of the conflict

- Public Events

In 2010, USIP launched a series dedicated to exploring the internal dynamics of the Israeli Palestinian conflict. Through panel discussions and related publications, "The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Internal Challenges on the Road to Peace" addresses domestic Israeli and Palestinian concerns that have strong implications for the broader conflict, and for international efforts towards a peaceful resolution. From secular-religious divides, to the challenges of coalition politics, divided government, state-building, and educational reform, such issues are key to a comprehensive understanding of how the conflict is

sustained and where creative approaches to managing and resolving the conflict may be found. The series was launched with a public panel discussion entitled “Towards a Palestinian State: Is Institution Building Succeeding?” (September 2010).

- Research and Analysis

USIP frequently publishes reports on a variety of topics relevant to the conflict that range in focus from analysis of formal government-to-government peace process efforts to the evaluation of civil society initiatives and the exploration of creative approaches to conflict management. Recent reports have included “Peacebuilding through Health Among Israelis and Palestinians” (January 2010); “An Education Track for the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process” (September 2009); “A Renewable Energy Peace Park in the Golan as a Framework to an Israeli-Syrian Agreement” (July 2009); “Hamas: Ideological Rigidity and Political Flexibility” (June 2009); and “Mapping Peace between Syria and Israel” (March 2009).

- Education and Training

USIP specialists have long worked with conflict management education partners in Israel and the Palestinian Territories to focus on strategies for measuring and enhancing the impact of training and materials designed to teach about conflict management and “the other.” For more than seven years, USIP’s Education and Training Center (ETC), now the Academy for International Conflict Management and Peacebuilding, has supported the efforts of the Palestinian NGO The Center for Applied Research in Education (CARE), and its work to train students and educators in conflict resolution, nonviolence and facilitation skills. In 2008, Jeffrey Helsing, the Academy’s Dean of Curriculum, conducted a program that culminated in participants signing a nonviolence agreement at Palestinian universities, and the establishment of a protocol for security forces to disarm while on campus. The following cycle of student elections saw a marked reduction both in violence between student factions and in political arrests on campus. In addition, USIP’s training has ensured that follow-up workshops are now run by a strong core of Palestinian conflict resolution trainers.

Cultivate relationships within and between key sectors of Arab and Israeli society

- Strengthening the Palestinian Justice System

Building on more than a decade of work on the topic, USIP’s Senior Scholar in Residence Neil Kritz has been providing ongoing analysis and policy guidance to Palestinian Authority officials and international stakeholders with respect to strengthening the Palestinian justice system. This work is conducted in collaboration and consultation with the Palestinian and Israeli ministries of justice, the State Department, and the various international actors relevant to the project, including the U.S. Security Coordinator, the Quartet Representative, and the European Union Police Mission in the Palestinian Territories.

- Palestinian-Israeli Legal Dialogue

USIP has also long facilitated dialogue and cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli justice officials, including through ongoing assistance to the recently reconstituted Palestinian-Israeli Joint Legal Committee. When the Committee was first established in 2000, the Israeli and Palestinian Ministers of Justice requested that USIP organize a special dialogue on Palestinian-Israeli legal matters. At roundtables and follow-on working groups in Israel and the Palestinian territories, members of the two legal communities and foreign experts discussed practical legal issues affecting the daily interaction of their two systems, considered relevant examples of legal relations between neighboring countries around the world, and proposed solutions to common problems. Through its current work with the re-established committee, USIP seeks to build professional relationships between the two legal communities and enable them to jointly explore and resolve a range of issues.

- Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel

USIP is working with The Abraham Fund Initiatives (TAFI) NGO, giving support to a robust educational program that places Arab teachers in the Jewish public school system to teach an innovative communicative Arabic language curriculum. The program aims to bridge cultural divides beginning at the elementary school level. The success of the program has been acknowledged by the Israeli Ministry of Education, which has now adopted the model and is implementing it in more schools in a growing number of districts and municipalities. In addition, the Academy’s Dean of Students, Ted Feifer, is working with municipalities, community mediation centers, and NGOs in Israel’s mixed Arab-Jewish cities to strengthen the skills and capacity of professionals and volunteers to manage and resolve conflicts at the street and neighborhood levels.

This is in partnership with the American Embassy in Tel Aviv.

Understand the religious dimensions of the conflict

• Interfaith Dialogue

USIP has been a primary supporter of the Alexandria Process for religious peacemaking since 2002, when a coalition of religious leaders committed to use their religious and moral authority to help end violence and to encourage the resumption of the Arab-Israeli peace process. As developments in the region underscored the urgency of widening that coalition and enhancing its role in promoting dialogue and cooperation between the religious communities there, USIP identified the local organizations best suited to deepen the agreement reached in Alexandria. Most recently, USIP has supported the MANDAT Initiative—a project of the Mosaica Center for Inter-Religious Cooperation in Israel—that under the leadership of Rabbi Michael Melchior aims to decrease tension between Jews and Muslims in Israel. Facilitated seminars that bring together a network of prominent Muslim and Jewish clergy with broad legitimacy in their respective communities are ongoing through the end of 2010. Through relationship-building and mutual exposure to the guiding texts and worldviews of each other's faith, the program aims to create a longstanding forum of rabbis and sheikhs who would act in a systematic manner to change the discourse about the "other" in their respective Jewish and Muslim communities in Israel, and to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts between those communities when they arise.

• Intra-faith Dialogue

USIP has committed to an investment in research and analysis, as well as funding, for initiatives that address the growing internal divides within Israeli and Palestinian societies. One such division, that has the potential to obstruct any hope for societal consensus towards progress on the peace process, is the deepening alienation between secular and religious populations. Most currently in this regard, USIP is working with the new Center for Peace at Mishkenot Sha'ananim in Israel, supporting and partnering on an initiative that has brought together an unprecedented mix of Jewish Israeli prominent scholars, public intellectuals, and religious leaders who span the full breadth of the ideological and political spectrum from right to left. These individuals are working together, through facilitated dialogue, with a view to reconstituting a more inclusive peace movement in the region. Influenced by the success of the first group, a second group has already been convened, and the pilot group has chosen to continue meeting, committed to devising a strategy for giving a public voice and face to their diverse coalition for peace.



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USIP provides the analysis, training and tools that prevent and end conflicts, promotes stability and professionalizes the field of peacebuilding.

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