



# *Iraq Fact Sheet* **United States Institute of Peace**

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The United States Institute of Peace has been involved in Iraq since 2004. As the examples below illustrate, USIP is working at both the national and local level, but increasingly it is engaging in grassroots work – building peace community-by-community and neighborhood-by-neighborhood.

## **PREVENTING SECTARIAN VIOLENCE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL**

- Recognizing the importance of working directly with local communities and of working outside of the Green Zone, USIP supported a conflict mitigation project based in a Baghdad neighborhood of Sunnis, Shia, Kurds, Christians and Turkmen. The project team brought together key groups, including commanders of the Mahdi Army, sheikhs from Shia and Sunni tribes, imams from local mosques, tribal chieftains, militia leaders, and government officials. After agreeing on basic principles—including a pledge to end incitement and violence—the group formed a follow-up committee to work together to reduce neighborhood violence. Based on surveys conducted by security officials, kidnappings and armed assaults went down significantly after the committee became active. USIP is now working with its local partners to refine and replicate this model.
- Through a mosque-based project, USIP supported nine workshops on inter-communal relations for some 250 Sunni and Shia women in different neighborhoods of Baghdad, including Sadr City. The workshops targeted mothers and schoolteachers from different Muslim sects and focused on the importance of unity among Iraqis – regardless of religion or community – for the nation's stability and the future of Iraqi children. Topics included ethnic stereotyping and the influence of conflict on child development. The project increased ties among diverse communities and strengthened relationships at the grassroots level.
- USIP helped facilitate discussions between the (mainly Shia) political and military leadership of Mahmoudiya, a Sunni-majority community on the southern edge of Baghdad, and Sunni sheikhs living in Amman, Jordan. One of the goals of the meetings was to convince the sheikhs to return to Mahmoudiya and to contribute to political reconciliation and development. In the words of the U.S. Army colonel who invited USIP to undertake this dialogue, "USIP's conflict resolution and negotiating expertise played a critical role in both getting the sheiks to agree to meet and in creating an atmosphere in which real communication could take place." At the army's request, USIP will also facilitate a conference in early October that will bring the sheiks to Baghdad and result in an action plan for improving security and economic prospects in Mahmoudiya.

## **DEVELOPING LEADERS AT UNIVERSITIES**

- USIP also supported the establishment of a student society at the University of Babylon-Hilla. In 12 months, the society disseminated thousands of copies of student-produced newsletters (al-Iraqi) and held a total of 21 debates on controversial and timely issues, such as the role of Islam in government, federalism, unemployment, and terrorism. Surveys indicated that over 90% of the students felt that the newsletter increased their understanding of democratic processes. The student society has grown into the largest student organization on campus -- larger even than the Sadrist Islamic Student Union.

Top administrators at the university confirmed that the project has been very beneficial in helping dispel the power of radical groups on campus. This project has since been replicated at the University of Baghdad, the flagship institution in the Iraqi higher education sector. On that campus, membership in the student society has reached over 550 students. Students from three other universities (the Universities of Mustansiriyya, Dhi Qar and Basra) are now considering setting up their own societies.

### DEVELOPING LEADERS IN HIGH SCHOOLS

- In many ways the prospects and burdens of building long-term peace rest with the next generation of Iraqis. In times of violence and uncertainty, a USIP-sponsored essay contest showed that optimism among high-school students still exists. The question addressed in the essay-contest was “What Do I Want from the Future Iraq?” Sixty Baghdad schools participated. Students submitted 120 essays, and ten awards were granted. Teachers, administrators, and parents also became engaged—producing a powerful multiplier effect. In the words of one Iraqi, “It is projects like this that, quietly and earnestly, will help build a free Iraq.”

### DEVELOPING LEADERS IN GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

- USIP’s educational efforts extend beyond the secondary and university levels. It has also trained almost 200 Iraqi officials from six different ministries on managing conflicts peacefully and on working together constructively in a democratic system. As part of these programs, Iraqis – crossing sectarian and ethnic divides – collaborated to develop shared goals for Iraq and corresponding work plans to achieve them.
- USIP has also trained provincial-level government and civil society officials, who have gone on to conduct their own training programs for fellow Iraqis. The Iraqis involved in these training activities considered them extremely useful, rating them an average of nine on a ten-point scale, and using their expanded skills on local peacebuilding projects. For example, several USIP-trained Iraqis conducted an unprecedented conflict resolution project involving representatives of Sadr City and Adhamiya – Shia and Sunni areas of Baghdad – which had theretofore been unwilling to talk to each other.
- In Kirkuk, the Institute engaged in an extensive training effort with local leaders, concurrently fostering joint problem-solving among Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen. This work continues and, based on the early success, is expanding.

### PROMOTING THE RULE-OF-LAW

- USIP was the first organization to support inclusive and broad public discourse in the constitution-making process. USIP brought together key representatives of major political parties and civil society, as well as experts from the constitutional processes of several countries, including South Africa, Afghanistan, Albania, and East Timor, to develop options for conducting the Iraqi constitutional process. USIP also provided support to Iraqi civil society groups whose responsibilities included engaging tens of thousands of people in the constitutional process, recruiting experts to advise Iraq’s Constitutional Drafting Commission, and helping organize, evaluate, and assist the Commission’s public outreach unit.
- USIP also organized a groundbreaking meeting of diverse Iraqi Sunni factions to forge a constructive approach to constitutional revision, helping pave the way for participation and compromise in the CRC process. In addition, USIP played a lead role in developing the Iraqi Committee on Judicial

Independence, a consortium of the judiciary, ministries of human rights and justice, the legal community, civil society, academia and media; many of the group's recommendations for constitutional amendments related to the judiciary were adopted by the CRC. Finally, recognizing the importance of defending minority rights, USIP helped establish the Council of Iraqi Minorities and develop constitutional options, and later constitutional amendments, to ensure the protection of minorities.

## ENGAGING WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE

Encouraging Iraqi women to participate in public life is essential to protecting their fundamental rights, as well as to sustaining peace and development. USIP, working in partnership with the State Department, supported two-dozen projects involving the development of women within Iraqi society. Some examples follow:

- USIP supported a series of training workshops designed to promote women's rights and participation in the political processes. Positive results have been plentiful: 15 participants were elected to the Iraqi National Assembly. Others were selected to the Iraqi cabinet and named to the Constitutional Drafting Commission. Several participants formed the Women's Coordination Committee in Baghdad to advocate for the protection of women's rights in the new constitution. Three workshop participants organized their own training sessions for hundreds of women in Baghdad and Suleymaniyah. Two others developed civil society projects to promote the capacity of women's NGOs in the north and the south and to create a network of peacebuilding specialists and activists throughout Iraq.
- In Iraq, the use of radio – an inexpensive medium with reach far into even the poorest rural areas – has become an important tool in forging a more open and democratic nation. With the help of USIP, the first women's radio station in Iraq, Radio al-Mahaba, quickly took advantage of this medium. USIP supported the development of radio programming (in Arabic and Kurdish) on democracy, voting, constitution-making and inter-communal relations. According to *USA Today*, the station received between 70-100 calls per day from women seeking to address “a slew of...issues that affect them as women, including family relationships and the wearing of head scarves.” The station manager said, “The radio station . . . does not belong to any political party and [is available to all] women to share their concerns and opinions without fear.”
- It is difficult to reach illiterate and semi-literate adults, particularly women, in Iraq. Through this project USIP funded the creation of booklets of “smart illustrations” to increase awareness of rights and to encourage participation in the political process. USIP's partner was able to distribute 10,000 copies each of three booklets (Women and the Democratic Process, Women and the Constitution, and Women's Human Rights) in ten governorates including Babil, Basra, Dhi Qar, Karbala, Maysan, Muthana, Najaf, Qadisiya, Wasit, and Baghdad (Sadr City, Hurria and Karrada).

## INCREASING REGIONAL STABILITY

- In order to prevent wider regional conflict and to promote greater cooperation between Iraq and its neighbors, the Institute initiated a series of groundbreaking dialogues among leading foreign policy and national security figures from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Iran and Kuwait. This initiative, the only program of its kind, has received high marks from participants and U.S. leaders; and has generated increased bilateral contacts. The resulting *Marmara Declaration*, released after USIP's most recent dialogue in Turkey (March 2007), set forth a consensus framework for a regional peace process for Iraq.

## FACILITATING THE IRAQ STUDY GROUP

- This bipartisan group conducted a forward-looking independent assessment of the situation on the ground in Iraq, its impact on the surrounding region, and consequences for U.S. interests. The resulting report received a great deal of attention and contributed significantly to the national debate on Iraq. The group was led by co-chairs James A. Baker III and Lee H. Hamilton, and was composed of four additional Republican members (Lawrence S. Eagleburger, Edwin Meese III, Sandra Day O'Connor, Alan K. Simpson) and four additional Democratic members (Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., Leon E. Panetta, William J. Perry, Charles S. Robb).

