CURRENT SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

The fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 launched more than a decade of international efforts to rebuild the country and re-establish political order. This effort, while achieving some major successes, remains incomplete. It is frustrated from the outside by a resilient insurgency and undermined from within by government structures criticized as corrupt and often predatory. The international presence now is declining significantly, opening a “transition decade” marked by Afghans taking greater responsibility for their own security and economic development.

USIP’S WORK

The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) has worked to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan since 2002, and in 2008 opened an office in Kabul to manage an expanding program of conflict-resolution and peacebuilding activities. USIP’s research suggests that a major cause of instability and conflict in Afghanistan has been the failure of state institutions to respect and promote the rule of law and to act accountably and effectively. USIP seeks to inform U.S., Afghan and international policies and programs, support the capacity of the State to govern effectively and legitimately, and strengthen the capacity and skills of civil society organizations and civil servants in conflict resolution and public advocacy for better governance and accountability. USIP’s recent work includes:

Rule of Law: Through research and pilot projects, USIP aims to enhance access to justice, particularly for women; promote adherence to rule of law based on the Afghan constitution; and link Afghanistan's customary and formal justice systems. In one program, USIP launched a curriculum-based radio drama series illustrating the importance of rule of law. Called “One Village, A Thousand Voices,” it is broadcast twice weekly on one of Afghanistan’s most popular radio stations.

“Vote for Peace” Campaign: In advance of the 2014 presidential and provincial council elections, USIP initiated its “Vote for Peace” campaign to help reduce electoral violence and increase voter turnout with more than 30 projects in 18 provinces as well as research and analysis, public and private events, and high- and mid-level working groups in Washington to inform policymaking and highlight the importance of Afghanistan’s political transition. Local civic groups and national and local-level media outlets organized events such as candidate debates and poetry readings to raise awareness among voters that credible elections are a prerequisite for peace and stability.

Partnership with Afghan Universities: In an effort to strengthen the capacity and skills of civil society organizations and higher-education institutions, USIP works with the Gawharshad Institute of Higher Education (GIHE) to develop a pilot training program for students, civic activists and Afghan government officials. The goal is to institutionalize a degree program and a curriculum for peacebuilding that focuses on principles for preventing, managing and resolving conflict without violence. A successful pilot project can then be used by other universities around the country.

Land Conflict Resolution and Registration Pilot Project: USIP’s research has identified disputes over land ownership as a major source of conflict. The Institute partners with Arazi, the government’s newly independent land authority, to work with local communities on documenting disputes that
have been resolved through traditional methods. The goal is to prevent future conflicts arising out of settled disputes, to support Arazí’s capacity to document land issues around the country and to help develop legislation for the formal registration and deeding of land.

**USIP PUBLICATIONS**

USIP’s work in the field also informs policymakers, practitioners and scholars in the international community. Institute staff and experts publish in-depth reports, as well as short, timely policy briefs, that distill expert research, lessons learned and problem-solving solutions to advance peacebuilding in Afghanistan.

In the first half of 2014, USIP produced 15 research publications. Recent research has focused on the political transition, the 2014 elections, economic prospects, barriers for women and strengthening the rule of law.

**Peaceworks:** The Taliban and the 2014 Elections in Afghanistan (February 2014)

**Special Report:** A Rough Guide to Afghan Youth Politics (April 2014)

**Special Report:** The Afghan National Police in 2015 and Beyond (May 2014)

**Special Report:** Sharia and Women’s Rights in Afghanistan (May 2014)

**PeaceBrief:** Afghanistan’s Looming Fiscal Crisis: What Can Be Done? (August 2014)

**USIP EVENTS**

USIP frequently hosts events, bringing together thought leaders, scholars, experts, policymakers and elected officials. In the first six months of 2014, USIP convened nearly 20 on- and off-the-record events, roundtables and conferences. Recent events include:

**The Legacy of President Hamid Karzai:** In July 2014, Retired U.S. Marine Corps General John Allen, former United Nations Special Representative to Afghanistan Ambassador Kai Eide, Afghan journalist Mujib Mashal and USIP Afghanistan Director Scott Smith considered the outgoing president’s record and how he would be viewed in history.

**Women’s Access to Justice in Afghanistan:** USIP convened its inter-organizational Lessons Learned Working Group in July 2014 to hear from Senior Program Officers Lillian Dang, Tim Luccaro and Erica Gaston and Gender Advisor Steven E. Steiner, a retired ambassador, about the findings of a six-month study of how Afghan women seek justice, and the consequences of cultural stigmas and practical barriers they face.

**Getting Beyond 2014 in Afghanistan:** In February 2014, Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Ambassador James Dobbins cited televised candidate debates, millions of new voters registered legitimately and other visible signs that the April 2014 elections would give Afghanistan a chance at scoring the country’s first peaceful and democratic transfer of presidential power.