CURRENT SITUATION

Following the war between Israel and Hamas in the summer of 2014, and the collapse of Israeli and Palestinian negotiations preceding the hostilities, tensions within and between Israeli and Palestinian societies are high, the prospect of a resumption of violent conflict looms, and new challenges exist to the prospects for a negotiated settlement. Against this backdrop, USIP works at both the policy and grassroots levels to prepare the ground for peace. The Institute/USIP develops and supports programs and initiatives that work to prevent a deterioration in conditions on the ground, and that can serve to reinvigorate public support for diplomatic and other non-violent initiatives.

USIP’S WORK

The Arab-Israeli Program at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) pursues four core objectives:

• To contribute to U.S. policy development, emphasizing the need for complementary processes of official diplomacy and grassroots peacebuilding efforts;
• To support the development and implementation of an effective strategy for Palestinian institutional capacity building;
• To facilitate improved functional cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians;
• To expand the circles of those engaged in the ideological and practical pursuit of peace, supporting and engaging a broad range of civil society actors in efforts that can both propel and sustain diplomatic breakthroughs.
• Leveraging regional and functional expertise across the Institute, the Arab-Israeli Program pursues these objectives through a combination of analytical, programmatic, and grants-funded engagement.

Policy Research and Analysis: Since 2009, the bipartisan Senior Working Group on Middle East Peace, co-chaired by former National Security Advisors Stephen Hadley and Samuel Berger, has regularly convened a panel comprised of top scholars and former practitioners to develop innovative ideas related to U.S. diplomatic engagement in the Arab-Israeli peace process. The group has shared and discussed its proposals with the highest echelons of the Obama Administration.

Supporting the Quartet on Middle East Peace: USIP’s Neil Kritz serves as the Rule of Law/Justice Sector Advisor to the Special Envoy of the Quartet on the Middle East. In this capacity, he leads the Quartet’s work on strengthening the Palestinian justice system; developing an effective security sector, and advising a range of Palestinian officials and stakeholders, as well as relevant international bodies and donor governments. Since 1999, Kritz has also led efforts to foster cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian Ministries of Justice on practical issues affecting day-to-day interaction between Palestinians and Israelis.

Enhancing Capacity of the Palestinian Conflict Resolution Field: USIP is training staff from key Palestinian peacebuilding organizations, in order to enhance their capacity to facilitate inter- and intra-group dialogues, community meetings, and training workshops, and to build a cadre of trained trainers who can further this work in the long term. The goal is to enable the Palestinian conflict resolution field to increase its tangible and measureable programmatic impacts, and thereby foster a greater and more
sustainable return on the international community’s investment in these peacebuilding initiatives. In addition, since 2006, USIP has provided curricular development, training, and support to a program that trains student leaders from more than 25 Palestinian universities and community colleges in nonviolent conflict resolution skills.

**Internal Divides: Broadening Constituencies for Peace:** USIP provides ongoing support and guidance to a series of initiatives that address the growing internal polarization in both Israeli and Palestinian societies that pose a significant obstacle to the pursuit of peace. In Israel these projects have engaged Muslim and Jewish religious leaders in dialogue and joint action with each other. One project brought together 35 of the most influential religious and spiritual leaders of the settler movement with an equal number of influential Jewish Israeli political and thought leaders from the opposite side of the ideological spectrum to engage in long term processes of facilitated dialogue about the pursuit of Middle East peace. The project aims to create space for constructive engagement and creative thinking by including those that traditionally challenge Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts, thereby expanding the circles of those engaged in the pursuit of peace.

USIP provides grants to projects aiming to promote peacebuilding, nonviolence strategies and conflict resolution. Active and Recent grants and grant opportunities include:

**Yala New Media Citizen Journalists.** Through an online platform, this program – an initiative of the Peres Center for Peace – will train Israeli, Palestinian, and Arab youth from the Middle East North Africa region to be empowered “citizen journalists,” creating a mechanism for cross-border engagement, as well as broad regional outreach and youth empowerment.

**Arab Society-Police Relations Initiative.** This project of the Abraham Fund Initiatives works to enhance police training and practice in Israel by developing curricular and training materials and conducting training on methods of policing that prevent conflict and build trust in divided societies. The project has developed models of participation and cooperation with Arab society in Israel by including Arabs in police training and developing frameworks for dialogue and partnership. It is also conducting research and educational outreach through publications and dissemination activities, expanding knowledge about policing in divided societies.

USIP is currently running an active grants call for Palestinian and Israeli organizations that are employing new and creative approaches to the field of peacebuilding.

**USIP PUBLICATIONS**

USIP’s 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.

*The Peace Puzzle: America’s Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace 1989-2011* (2013), Daniel C. Kurtzer, Scott B. Lasensky, William B. Quandt, Steven L. Spiegel, Shibley Z. Telhami. This book is the product of USIP’s Study Group on Arab-Israeli Peacemaking, which convened some of America’s most experienced authorities in the field. Informed by in-depth interviews with more than 120 policymakers, diplomats, academics, and civil society figures, it provides an objective account of the role of the United States in attempting to achieve a lasting Arab–Israel peace, analyzing the relevant efforts of the various U.S. administrations of the post–Cold War period.

*Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace* (2007), Daniel C. Kurtzer and Scott B. Lasensky. This volume is designed as a tool for practitioners and scholars alike. It assesses the role of U.S. diplomacy in the Arab-Israeli conflict arena since the end of the Cold War, and offers a set of ten core lessons to guide the efforts of future American negotiators.