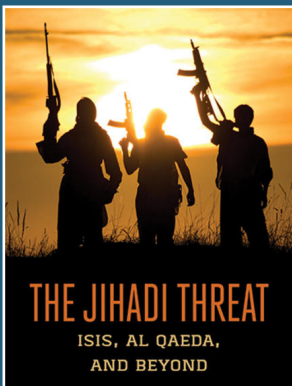




Two Iraqi troops tear an ISIS flag apart. (Kawa Omar/VOA Kurdish)



The Jihadi Threat: ISIS, Al Qaeda, and Beyond

The report, a collaboration of two USIP analysts with 18 other experts from universities and research institutions, outlines the generational effect of violent extremism and the long-term approaches needed to defeat it.

ISIS: THE CURRENT SITUATION

As a U.S.-led international coalition helps local forces recapture most of the territory once seized by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the two countries face underlying conflicts and sectarian tensions that continue to fuel cycles of violence and extremism. At the same time, as many as 31,000 foreign fighters—from 86 countries on five continents—have traveled to Iraq and Syria to join ISIS and other extremist organizations, and some are heading home. Meanwhile, ISIS has gained a foothold in Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen, and elsewhere. Cementing military gains and curbing extremist violence requires long-term stabilization based on political settlements, social reconciliation, and improved governance.

USIP'S WORK

The U.S. Institute of Peace has operated on the ground in Iraq since 2003 and in Afghanistan since 2002, as well as in Libya, Nigeria, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. As a small, agile institution, USIP works with local leaders and the U.S. government, including the military, to stabilize areas devastated by ISIS, end cycles of revenge, and address the root causes of radicalization, including corrupt and abusive governance. USIP has had impact in:

Sustaining the Peace. USIP and its local partners provide advice and training to strengthen the ability of community and national leaders to resolve their own conflicts without violence.

- ▶ In Iraq, teams of local mediators, supported by USIP and with cooperation from officials in Baghdad, have facilitated community peace accords among tribal leaders. One

such agreement was signed in 2007 to help end an insurgency in Mahmoudiyah, and others were hammered out more recently in Bartella, Tikrit, Yathrib, and Hawija. A 2015 agreement in Tikrit has allowed more than 390,000 people to return to their homes, and the mediation methods developed are being applied elsewhere, including near Mosul.

- ▶ In northeastern Syria, USIP trained tribal, religious, and civil society leaders from the al-Qahtaniya region in analysis and conflict resolution to defuse tensions among ethnic Kurds and Arabs, Sunni Muslims, Christians, Yazidis, and others. The resulting agreement reopened a vital trade route and returned displaced families to the homes they had fled amid clashes with ISIS.

Improving Security. In Iraqi communities where citizens sometimes turn to militias, vigilantes, or insurgent groups for security, USIP and local partners work with police and citizen groups to jointly improve law enforcement and justice, notably in Baghdad, Basra, Kirkuk, and Karbala. Results include a permanent crisis-management unit in the capital, mechanisms to prevent recruitment by ISIS, and systems for vetting people fleeing ISIS-controlled areas to ensure some aren't linked to the extremist group.

Curbing Extremism. From Tunisia to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and across Africa, the Middle East, and South and Central Asia, USIP has intensified its focus, at local and national levels, on reducing the lure of ISIS and other violent extremist groups.

- ▶ In Tunisia, the biggest single source of foreign fighters for ISIS in Syria and Iraq, USIP works to reduce the risks of extremist recruitment among a highly vulnerable population. The Institute and its local partners helped Islamist and secular student unions at a major university agree on a code of conduct for resolving conflicts without violence. USIP-trained mediators have headed off renewed clashes between street vendors and police such as those that sparked the Arab Spring. And the Institute works with local and national security officials, police, and community leaders to build trust and improve professional training, to reduce the kinds of rights abuses that fuel discontent and extremism.
- ▶ In Afghanistan, USIP supports local radio stations that counter extremist messages and works directly with communities in ISIS-infiltrated areas of Nangarhar and Kunar provinces, to help young people resist violent interpretations of Islam. At one of three Afghan universities that have established a USIP-backed peace education curriculum, course graduates organized to oppose extremism and violence on a campus where some students had rallied a year earlier in support of ISIS. A USIP-convened working group of Afghans also advises the Afghanistan National Security Council's team drafting a strategy against extremism.

Bringing 'Ground Truth' to Policy. Through research, analysis, publications, and events, USIP feeds its experience—from the field, from offices on the ground such as its new Tunis hub, and from its local partners—into policy thinking on countering ISIS and other strains of violent extremism. Members of Congress, the administration, and international organizations call on USIP experts regularly for briefings or to testify on Capitol Hill on topics such as the causes and consequences of violent extremism.

"The Institute of Peace is like the Marine Corps or special forces for foreign affairs and peace-building...You will find the institute's competent work behind practically every American success in Iraq and Afghanistan."

**Retired U.S. Marine Corps
General Anthony C. Zinni**