CURRENT SITUATION

For 70 years, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has affected the Middle East landscape and defied the international community’s peacebuilding efforts. Tensions escalated after the most recent negotiations collapsed, spurring additional violence, hardening public attitudes, and threatening prospects for a negotiated settlement. Facing these challenges and their impact on broader U.S. national security interests, the current administration has identified this conflict as a diplomatic priority.

USIP’S WORK

Since the early 1990s, the U.S. Institute of Peace has worked without interruption on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Arab-Israeli relations. Through dialogue, analysis, and joint action at the grassroots and policy levels, USIP helps reduce the risk of new violence, enhances security for Israelis and Palestinians, promotes diplomatic progress, and fosters institutional and societal cooperation that can advance and sustain eventual breakthroughs. USIP has also supported over 200 grantees and more than two dozen fellows to conduct innovative work on the conflict. Recent work includes:

Convening Experts and Informing Policy. Despite the international community’s longstanding desire to resolve the conflict, few new approaches have emerged. To address this knowledge gap, USIP convenes experts from U.S., Israeli, Palestinian, Middle Eastern, and European think tanks to develop innovative diplomatic methods and provide policymakers with analysis and recommendations. This work builds on two decades of peacebuilding research and analysis, including:
The bipartisan Senior Working Group on Middle East Peace—co-chaired by former National Security Advisors Stephen Hadley and Samuel Berger—which provided ongoing policy advice to successive U.S. administrations between 2009 and 2014.


Enhancing Security and Rule of Law on the Ground. Through ongoing partnerships with local leaders, U.S. government representatives, and other key figures, the Institute works to reduce violence, expand the reach of rule of law, and ensure a more secure present and future for the region.

For example, in partnership with the Office of the Quartet, USIP meticulously mapped police access in the West Bank, enabling the most extensive expansion of Palestinian police movement across the area in 15 years.

Leveraging its expertise, the Institute works closely with senior Israeli and Palestinian security authorities and the U.S. Security Coordinator to augment coordination on police coverage. This is vital to bolstering security for Palestinians and Israelis, advancing the rule of law, developing the Palestinian economy, and building confidence and trust between Israelis and Palestinians.

USIP also funded a unique program that improved relations and communications among Israeli police and Israel’s Arab minority communities, encouraging cooperation during a tension-filled period. The police subsequently incorporated the program into its training curriculum.

Reducing and Preventing Community Violence Through Religious Engagement. Faith leaders can be crucial to diplomatic processes, using their influence to guide followers and advocate for peace. Far too often, however, these religious voices have been excluded from Israeli-Palestinian efforts.

USIP is working to make the peacebuilding process more inclusive and effective by supporting local partners who facilitate dialogue among Israeli and Palestinian religious leaders. The Institute funds trainings and other work that encourages cooperation among interfaith leaders, government officials, and police—mitigating violence and providing a model for collaboration that protects holy sites and their visitors.

Improving Practice to Maximize Impact. Supported by the U.S., international governments, and private funders, scores of peacebuilding organizations have worked for two decades to foster cooperation and trust between Israelis and Palestinians. To inform the field and improve these efforts, USIP supports evaluation of its local partners’ work and is currently assessing broader Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding interventions.

The Institute conducted a comparative evaluation of all USIP grant-funded dialogue projects, including in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The study advances understanding of how comparative dialogue models spread impact beyond an individual group to influence broader social changes.

USIP shares its evidence-based findings with practitioners and funders—including the Department of State and USAID—to strengthen program design, guide strategic investments, and maximize impact.