THE CURRENT SITUATION IN IRAQ

Iraq has been ravaged in recent years by cycles of warfare, an internally displaced persons (IDPs) crisis, crippling sectarianism and, most destructively, a three-year campaign to drive ISIS from the third of the country it controlled. Even after the military defeat of ISIS, Iraq continues to face severe challenges including resolving the political, sectarian, and tribal conflicts that fueled the spread of extremism and its entanglement in regional rivalries.

Iraqis have made some progress in building their government, approving a new constitution and holding successive elections for parliament and provincial governments. Still, strengthening governance, tackling corruption and economic reforms remain critical to the country’s and region’s long-term stability.

USIP’S WORK

The U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) has worked without interruption in Iraq since 2003 and maintains offices in Baghdad and Erbil. USIP’s initiatives strengthen institutions’ and communities’ capacity to prevent, mitigate, and resolve conflicts without violence. Our strategic partners, Sanad for Peacebuilding and the Network of Iraqi Facilitators (NIF), have halted violent feuds, saving lives and re-stabilizing communities.

In 2015, for example, USIP and its Iraqi partners carried out a series of dialogues that led to the prevention of violence among tribes following the Speicher massacre in which 1,700 Iraqi cadets were brutally killed by ISIS. Later, in 2017, a similar initiative prevented a resurgence of communal violence in the city of Hawija, following its liberation from ISIS.

Speaker of the Council of Representatives
Mohamed al-Halbousi delivered a public speech at USIP on March 29, 2019 after meeting with U.S. government officials. The speaker discussed the newly formed parliament’s priorities, the ongoing battle against violent extremism, and his vision for peace and stability in Iraq.
Communities within Iraq have struggled with internal divisions, tension and conflict. Iraqi civil society’s peacebuilding capacity is essential not only to stability, but also to the government’s capacity to respond more effectively to the needs of Iraq’s people.

The Institute also informs U.S. and Iraqi policymaking with its regular research and analysis on issues of conflict resolution in Iraq, and through convening of government officials and nongovernment experts.

**USIP’s work in Iraq includes:**

**Developing the capacity for peacebuilding and reconciliation.** USIP provides technical and financial support to Sanad, an Iraqi civic organization that offers expertise in mediating communal disputes that pose a risk of violence. USIP, Sanad and NIF have worked to mend sectarian and inter-tribal cleavages in communities torn by extremist violence including Tikrit, Hawija, Bartella, Yathrib and Tal Afar. Through strategic and technical assistance, USIP further supports and partners with government institutions such as the Iraqi High Standing Committee on Coexistence and Social Peace and the Kurdistan Regional Government Department of Foreign Relations.

**Support for Iraqi minorities.** USIP’s work led to the creation of the Alliance of Iraqi Minorities (AIM) to advocate peacefully for the rights and interests of Christians, Yazidis (Ezidis), Sabean-Mandaeans, Shabak, and other minorities. Their activism led Iraq’s Education Ministry to recognize religious minorities for the first time in national school textbooks with the team continuing to work on increasing minority representation within the Iraqi school syllabus.

AIM members have helped document ISIS crimes against Yazidi women, and advised Iraq’s legislature and the international community about minority needs. It advocates for reparations to minority communities harmed by ISIS violence, and works with government agencies to help displaced minority communities return to their homes in Nineveh Plain, Sinjar and elsewhere in northern Iraq. They also have worked with the parliament of the Kurdistan Region, contributing to a law on minorities’ rights and a draft constitution. USIP, Sanad, NIF, and AIM are carrying out an initiative in the Nineveh region to mediate Christian-Shabak tensions and help facilitate the IDP returns process.

**Support for conflict-affected women and youth.** USIP is working directly with civil society partners in Anbar, Basra, and Karbala on local initiatives to prevent the radicalization of women and youth in areas affected by the ISIS crisis and facilitate their reintegration into society.

**Reconciliation and rule of law in Anbar and Basra.** USIP supports a locally driven research and training initiative to address the drivers of community-based conflicts, mitigate violence and strengthen stabilization efforts through facilitated dialogues. USIP also works on examining and broadening tribal practices to act as catalysts for promoting peace and strengthening state institutions.