



AFGHANISTAN

The Current Situation

Eight years after the international intervention in Afghanistan, the country faces considerable obstacles to stability. The year 2009 was the most violent on record for Afghans and international forces since 2001, and Afghan and international public confidence is diminishing. National elections held in August 2009 were marred by massive fraud, reinforcing a widespread perception of corrupt and unaccountable governance. President Hamid Karzai, who was inaugurated for a second term on November 19, 2009 with weakened legitimacy, has pledged to clean up government and assert Afghan leadership for security over the next few years.

On December 1, 2009, calling our engagement there a “vital national interest,” President Obama announced that the U.S. would commit 30,000 more soldiers to Afghanistan, adding to the 65,000 U.S. forces and 40,000 allied forces already in theater. He also pledged to “work with our partners, the United Nations, and the Afghan people to pursue a more effective civilian strategy.” The U.S. will continue providing resources to Afghanistan in a variety of areas, including building effective Afghan security forces, governance and capacity-building, and agriculture and infrastructure projects. The U.S. will also support Afghan led efforts to achieve political reconciliation and reintegrate insurgents.

Going Forward

To ensure long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan, sustained action in several key areas must be taken. Security concerns need to be addressed, as reconstruction efforts cannot succeed if security continues to deteriorate. Good governance and the rule of law must be strengthened, as Afghanistan cannot move forward without efficient state institutions and an effective judicial system. Investments in public education and civil society initiatives should include programs that develop indigenous dispute resolution and local capacities for peacebuilding. Public awareness of and dialogue about the challenges facing Afghan society are equally important within the international community of experts and policymakers. USIP is actively addressing these issues through four interrelated goals: strengthening peaceful reconciliation and capacity to mitigate conflict; enhancing the rule of law; improving cooperation for peace, security, and economic development; and increasing understanding and effectiveness of operations in Afghanistan.

Strengthening Peaceful Reconciliation and Capacity to Mitigate Conflict

Afghanistan Reconciliation Support Program

The Afghan government and the international community have consistently paid too little attention to reconciliation efforts. With insufficient support for this vital process, too few Afghans live in peace. USIP is conducting a special assessment led by reconciliation experts with deep knowledge of and experience with Afghanistan’s history and culture to identify areas in the country that could be “ripe” for targeted dialogue and reconciliation efforts. This assessment includes discussions with both national government and local stakeholders.

Network of Afghan Conflict Facilitators

In provinces suffering from crushing poverty, low literacy, widespread corruption, and broad cultural divides, USIP is training a Network of Afghan Facilitators (NAF) is showing significant progress in preventing violence and mediating tribal and community-level conflicts, mending cleavages that if allowed to fester become ripe for exploitation by the Taliban, warlords, and other anti-governmental forces. Formed and trained by Senior Program Officers from the Institute's Educational and Training Center/International, the network and the Afghan nationals who comprise it have also resolved family-level disputes involving substantial abuse of women, and have helped set up or been involved in active community organizations, such as the Khost Conflict Resolution Commission, consisting of national leaders, intellectuals, and traditional leaders.

Micro-Grants to the Network of Afghan Facilitators

Replicating the highly successful micro-grant program that USIP continues to operate in Iraq, Senior Program Officers will provide micro-grant funding to members of our Network of Afghan Facilitators for local training, conflict resolution, and problem solving efforts in Afghanistan.

Training of Governors' Office Staff

In line with the objectives of the reconciliation support program, USIP provides conflict resolution training to select members of staffs from the offices of governors in six southeastern provinces. Senior USIP Program Officers and members of USIP's Network of Afghan Facilitators will conduct the training program focused on conflict analysis, communication, negotiation, third-party mediation, and collaborative problem solving. In follow-up sessions, guided and monitored by the USIP, the Network of Facilitators will work with local government officials to bring this training to a broad range of local communities, while supporting local efforts to resolve conflicts and solve problems.

Mediation and Peacebuilding Training for Afghan Religious Leaders

In recognition of the critical role spiritual leaders play in the peacebuilding process, the Institute convened 50 Afghan ulama and religious scholars for two workshops on conflict resolution and peacemaking. Religious leaders were taught peacemaking practices, mediation skills, approaches for using Islamic principles of nonviolence, and ways of helping communities confront histories of violence. An international summit on reconciliation will be held in Kabul in summer 2010. This gathering of religious scholars from Afghanistan, Egypt, Jordan, and Pakistan will focus on peacebuilding in the Muslim tradition and the responsibilities of mullahs in 21st century.

Enhancing the Rule of Law

Enhancing Capabilities for Transitional Justice in Afghanistan

USIP is undertaking a series of interrelated initiatives to promote justice and accountability for serious abuses, including: developing a comprehensive documentation database framework to organize information on past crimes and human rights violations; supporting electoral and administrative vetting processes; and sponsoring a dialogue among Islamic and legal scholars to address the compatibility of Islamic and Western approaches to post-conflict justice.

Relations Between Formal and Informal Justice Systems

At present, some 80-90% of all legal cases in Afghanistan, criminal and civil, are resolved outside the formal legal system in community forums. Such forums are generally deemed more accessible, cheaper, less corrupt, and more legitimate than the formal courts. Yet these informal mechanisms can also fail to protect basic rights, and the formal system has an important role to play going forward. Therefore, USIP has been working since 2003 to establish positive relations between the two systems. USIP is working with the Ministry of Justice and other institutions to create a draft national policy on relations between the formal and informal justice systems. USIP, in collaboration with two implementing partners, has also launched pilot projects in four districts of Afghanistan with a focus on establishing concrete relationships between the formal and informal systems. The

program will help develop models for collaboration between the two systems to improve the delivery of justice, resolve disputes, and protect rights.

Constitutional Interpretation and Implementation

Ultimately, Afghanistan's success as a stable constitutional democratic state depends on the ability of legitimate Afghan authorities to establish and adhere to the rule of law. A new constitution was ratified in 2004, but fundamental problems remain concerning the interpretation and implementation of the constitution. USIP is now establishing a new Center on Constitutional Law and aims to provide technical support to the Supreme Court, the Commission for the Supervision of the Implementation of the Constitution, as well as other independent bodies, including the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC).

International Network to Promote the Rule of Law - Afghanistan

It is essential that rule of law professionals working in Afghanistan are linked to each other and to outside resources that can help with the difficult challenges they face. USIP supports the rule of law community in Afghanistan through its International Network to Promote the Rule of Law (INPROL). Specifically, USIP has created a clearinghouse of documents related to rule of law challenges in Afghanistan that serves as a read-ahead and an ongoing resource to deploying practitioners, and as a means to create virtual handovers in a high-turnover environment. It also allows for members to post rule of law queries online, accessing a pool of 1200 fellow members from around the world, as well as an expert facilitator and research team.

Priority Grant Competition: Rule of Law

USIP invests in civil society through grants that promote efforts to protect rights, educate the public, and create access to justice. USIP is working on a project with the Tribal Liaison Office (TLO) on strengthening a key conflict mediation mechanism, the Commissions on Conflict Mediation (CCM). USIP is also working with the Afghanistan Justice Project (AJP), an organization that holds some of the most extensive documentation of past war crimes in the country. This project aims to update the holdings of the AJP database and to make material from the database and ongoing research available to transitional justice initiatives. In addition, USIP is working with Equal Access International (EAI) to develop a nationally broadcast radio series featuring recordings from roundtables with elected provincial officials, religious, and community leaders on issues related to justice, the rule of law, and governance.

Improving Cooperation for Peace, Security, and Economic Development

Peacebuilding Across Borders

In partnership with Afghan and Pakistani civil society organizations, USIP is working to initiate a series of dialogues among key actors from both sides of the border to generate confidence building, trust, and a common agenda for peace and security cooperation. The dialogue group participants will receive training in conflict resolution, negotiation and mediation from USIP experts. The project will eventually organize two conferences, one in Islamabad and one in Kabul, to develop recommendations for further steps to be taken.

Increasing Understanding and Effectiveness of Operations in Afghanistan

Support to Peacebuilding in Higher Education

The Institute, in partnership with Kabul University and the Center for Policy and Human Development (CPHD) in Kabul, helped create Afghanistan's first international peer-reviewed academic research journal, published in Dari, Pashto and English. After the success of last year's "Teaching Peacebuilding" workshop in Kabul for university teachers from all over Afghanistan, USIP is sponsoring a series of similar workshops in the provinces. These workshops are being carried out with our partner, Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU), a prominent think-tank widely recognized as Afghanistan's leading research institution in the area of conflict resolution. USIP is sponsoring a

Peace Fellow at UPEACE Costa Rica in a masters program for the academic year 2009/2010, who will return to work on peace studies and human development in Afghanistan. Finally, USIP is sponsoring the identification and translation of key materials used for the teaching of peacebuilding and human development by our partners at the University of Kabul.

Priority Grant Competition: Civil Society Capacity Building for Dialogue and Conflict Resolution

Through its Priority Grant Competition, USIP is helping strengthen the capacity of local communities to analyze and resolve conflicts through peaceful means, integrating best- practice in negotiation and mediation with traditional means of conflict resolution. Women Activities & Social Services Association (WASSA), which recently concluded its workshop series for a USIP sponsored project “Dialogue and Conflict Resolution Program Through Negotiation and Mediation Training,” is witnessing an overall decline in conflict cases in communities where project participants work. In the Northern city of Kunduz, USIP is supporting a peace education project in partnership with CPAU. USIP is also funding a media capacity building project with the Killid Group that will enhance the capacity of local journalists to report on human rights violations and war crimes.

Afghan Fellowship

USIP fellowships support the work of outstanding scholars, policymakers, journalists, and practitioners. The Jennings Randolph Senior Fellowship Program recruits high quality candidates for fellowships through an extensive process of consultation with the USIP Afghanistan working group, the Afghanistan team lead, and others. Past and current fellows include Mr. Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai, an adviser to Afghan President Hamid Karzai, and Ms. Palwasha Hassan, Country Director for Rights & Democracy in Afghanistan.

External Expert Afghanistan Working Group

USIP’s Afghanistan Working Group serves as a hub for top experts and US government personnel working on Afghanistan. The Working Group hosts meetings on current critical issues, disseminates information, and creates an informal space for interagency and intergroup communication and collaboration, which ultimately leads to improved approaches and strategies in Afghanistan.

The Future of Afghanistan

In January 2009, the Future of Afghanistan Project, directed by J Alexander Thier, launched a book of essays, "The Future Of Afghanistan." The volume identifies weaknesses of early approaches and outlines a vision for success going forward. USIP experts continue to advise local and international audiences, government officials, and media personnel on the ongoing situation in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan, Pakistan, and their Neighbors

Afghanistan’s future is tied closely to the future of the broader region and similarly a secure and functioning Pakistan has lasting implications for regional stability. This initiative, in conjunction with the World Bank and New York University’s Center on International Cooperation, will entail an examination of the relationship between Afghanistan, Pakistan and neighboring states, and the influence of U.S. policy in regional dynamics will also be considered. The Institute will commission a series of essays from some of the world’s top regional experts, and an edited volume and series of special reports will be published.



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