

The U.S. Institute of Peace, a small, anomalous “think-and-do tank” that Congress set up in 1984, is winning plaudits from both parties, and from experts worldwide, for its efforts to give peace a chance.

Peace Work

■ By Corine Hegland

If you sit on the upper steps of the Lincoln Memorial today you take in an assortment of memorials to the men who led wars and the men and women who died in them. To the left are the dark and silent names of Vietnam; to the right are the upright steely men of Korea. Farther out are the small, columned bandstand commemorating the First World War and the mighty pillars remembering the Second. Around the Tidal Basin meander the waters and walkways of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s calming memorial, and then the classical columns and paeans to freedom of Thomas Jefferson’s. Towering over all of them is George Washington’s monument, the obelisk honoring the man who was America’s first military and first civilian leader.



The institute sponsored a seminar in Khartoum, Sudan, in 2007 (above) to develop a curriculum on democracy skills. The institute’s new building (next page) near the National Mall will have a roofline shaped like a dove’s wings.



■ With just 142 employees, the institute is an amazingly **effective and ubiquitous** influence in a host of foreign crises.

■ The institute's independence allows it to work on **issues that don't fit into standard diplomatic channels**, and that the State Department won't tackle.

■ The institute operates in the increasingly **hazy no man's land between war and peace** that defines 21st-century conflicts.

Commentators often describe his parting address to the nation as a warning against foreign entanglements, but his actual words were far more prescient: If the nation remained independent of foreign intrigue, he said, it would soon have enough strength to “choose peace or war, as our interest, guided by justice, shall counsel.”

Seven years into the war in Afghanistan and the war against Al Qaeda and five years into the war in Iraq—or seven years into the whole jumble that constitutes the “long war” against “violent extremists,” as the Bush administration now calls it—the line between war and peace is looking hazy. Technically speaking, we are not in a state of war with Afghanistan, Iraq, the Horn of Africa, Pakistan, the Philippines, Colombia, or any other country where American troops are deployed, although American soldiers are fighting and dying in the first two and helping local combatants fight and die in the others. The term “long war” may not survive the transition to a new administration, but this odd state of affairs, of fighting wars in countries with which we are officially at peace, seems likely to endure.

“For years to come, America will be grappling with a range of challenges to the international system and to our own security—from global terrorism to ethnic conflicts, to rogue nations and rising powers,” Defense Secretary Robert Gates said at an April 15 House Armed Services Committee hearing. Most of these challenges will “emerge from within countries with which we are not at war. They cannot be overcome by military means alone.”

“There are no longer neat categories between war and peace,” Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said a few moments later. “We are facing a continuum between war and peace; countries with which we are not at war but which we must make capable of waging counter-terrorism operations, countries that have emerged from war but are not yet in a position in which they are stable, and in which we are still helping them to fight terrorists or insurgencies in their midst.”

It is fitting then that in June, ground will be broken at the corner of 23rd Street NW and Constitution Avenue for the new home of an obscure, 24-year-old government agency that spends more time in the growing no man's land between war and peace than does any other government-sponsored institution. When the building is finished, it will join the National

Mall's grand garden of war memorials and house the headquarters and public education center of the United States Institute of Peace. Its roof will be white and shaped like the wings of a dove.

Beyond Foggy Bottom

The 142 employees of the United States Institute of Peace, or USIP, call it a “think-and-do tank” or, occasionally, a “think-do-teach tank.” Its \$39 million budget, funded entirely by Congress and transfers from government agencies, and up sharply from just \$16 million, adjusted for inflation, in 2000, underwrites papers, books, conferences, and meetings; funds grants and staff fieldwork in conflict zones; and conducts a \$7.3 million training program for employees of the government, non-governmental organizations, teachers, and locals in other countries.

Each year, institute staff members hold a brainstorming session to look at world conflicts and decide which ones to focus on. They organize their subsequent work according to three roughly defined stages of conflict—prevention, resolution, and post-conflict peace and stability.

This structure allows people who work on Iraq, for example, to sit side by side with people who have worked in the Balkans and Sudan. And macro-political concerns tend to take a backseat to mundane but important issues such as who sits where at a mediation conference.

The institute's current location, on the second floor of the National Restaurant Association building, occasionally bewilders visitors. Eugene Martin, a former State Department Foreign Service officer who spent four years at the institute pursuing a peace deal in the Philippines, said that Filipino visitors were always skeptical when they arrived in Washington and he told them to go to the restaurant building. “And who do you work for?” they would ask him suspiciously. “Not the CIA,” he would reply.

Martin's Philippines project is a good example of the institute's diplomatic niche. As a government-funded agency that answers to a Senate-confirmed bipartisan board of directors rather than to the White House, it can take risks and build relationships that the State Department, the official face of the United States, cannot.

“We can fail,” said Daniel Serwer, who joined USIP in 1998 after a Foreign Service career and now runs its Center for Post-Conflict Peace and Stability Operations. “A failure if you’re working for State can be calamitous: People put it in the newspapers. We don’t like to fail, but we can take risks that you couldn’t take in State.”

The institute is careful to avoid stepping on the State Department’s toes: It doesn’t do anything in another country without permission from Foggy Bottom. Usually, though, it uses its not-government but not-not-government status to work on issues that don’t fit into standard diplomatic channels.

In 2003, for example, the State Department was nervous about Al Qaeda’s inroads in the Philippines and wanted to see a peace deal struck between President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo’s government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, a Muslim group based on the southern islands of Mindanao that had waged a 30-year insurgency after centuries of discrimination and a deliberate encroachment on their lands by government-resettled Christians.

But the United States has its own bloody military history in Mindanao, dating back to its early-20th-century occupation of the islands, and strong relations with President Arroyo’s government. As a result, the American government was “not necessarily the optimal candidate for a brokering or mediating role,” said Matthew Daley, who was then the deputy assistant secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific affairs and now serves as the president of the U.S.-ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Business Council.

Daley knew the staff at the U.S. Institute of Peace, whose president, Richard Solomon, had negotiated the Cambodia peace accord of 1991 and served as the U.S. ambassador to the Philippines in 1992 and 1993. He suggested that the State Department tap USIP to handle the issue.

Success and Failure

Armed with \$3 million from State to underwrite the Philippines project, Solomon assembled a group of former ambassadors to Manila, and retired Marine Corps Gen. Anthony Zinni, to advise the effort. He also pulled in Martin, who had spent six years in the Philippines at the U.S. Embassy, to direct it. Because the formal negotiations were being handled by Malaysia, which rejected an American presence at the talks, Martin focused on building relationships with both sides and finding ways to support the Malaysia-led talks. He sponsored education campaigns across the islands, produced a video and national radio broadcasts on the history of the conflict, and held training workshops for journalists and Philippine military officers.

One key Moro demand was for a semi-autonomous government, which the front wanted to model on Native American sovereignty in North America. In response, USIP organized a three-day workshop on ancestral domain negotiations, in which negotiators and scholars from similar conflicts discussed their experiences. After learning about the many broken Indian

■ Mediation in Nigeria



RICHARD A. BLOOM

The institute’s David Smock helped Nigerian Christians and Muslims reach an agreement to end a flare-up of sectarian violence in 2004.

treaties in the United States, the Moros decided that a generally respected 1993 agreement between the Inuits and the Canadian government was a better model than U.S. treaties. Canada then sent Canadian government and Inuit officials to the Philippines to share their experiences in more depth.

The project’s funding ran out last year, and the Malaysia-hosted peace talks are now stalled. Technically, then, USIP’s Philippines project falls into the “failure” category: Its tools and experts couldn’t end the conflict.

But peace is rarely linear. Ending ethnic and religious conflicts requires the will of not just the leaders but the people, too, and building a constituency for peace takes years. Francis Deng, currently the U.N. secretary-general’s special adviser for the prevention of genocide

and mass atrocities, started working with USIP to end the wars of his native Sudan in 1988. Seventeen years later, they saw the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, whose outlines followed suggestions first floated at a USIP conference. “It is a long process with a cumulative effect,” Deng said.

Sometimes, though, with the right people and tools, peace can come quickly. In November 2004, after nearly 1,000 people had been killed in several months of fighting between Christians and Muslims around the Nigerian town of Yelwa-Nshar, the institute’s David Smock, who directs its Center for Mediation and Conflict Resolution and its Religion and Peacemaking Program, watched the two sides reach an agreement in just five days.

Pastor James Wuye and Imam Mohammed Ashafa, two Nigerians who had fought in rival religious militias in the early 1990s before forming an alliance in 1995, led the process. Smock met the men, who established an Inter-Faith Mediation Center in Kaduna, Nigeria, five years ago, and he started funneling grants in their direction.

In Yelwa-Nshar, Wuye and Ashafa brought Christian and Muslim leaders together for their first meeting since the massacres. On the fourth day of a tense, five-day workshop, the two sides agreed on the nature of their disputes. The Christians accused the Muslims, who were newcomers to the area, of not respecting their local traditions and leaders. The Muslims agreed with the accusation, apologized, and asked for forgiveness; the Christians, accused of similarly failing to respect Muslim traditions, did the same. On the fifth day, they wrote a peace agreement.

“The State Department would never have touched that project,” Smock said. “It’s religious, it’s local, and the Nigerians would have objected.” He’s now working on a DVD to teach others about Wuye and Ashafa’s work, and the institute is sending the two leaders to Kenya and Sudan to share their methodologies.

New Forms of War

When Gen. Zinni went to Somalia in 1992 as the director of operations for the Unified Task Force there, he was struck by the destroyed Soviet and American airplanes and tanks that

littered the countryside. Over the preceding decades, the Somali government, like other authoritarian regimes, had received millions of dollars in aid from the Soviets and the West. “We bought off a lot of problems,” Zinni said. During that time, the international community didn’t always try to solve conflicts, lest the West or the Soviets gain an advantage in the zero-sum Cold War. Instead, conflicts were either frozen, as in Korea and Berlin, or contained through proxy fights, as in Angola, Mozambique, and Somalia.

With the Cold War ended, the West was no longer interested in the financial and human-rights costs of buying off local problems. As a result, all of the tribal and ethnic conflicts that had been tamped down during the Cold War exploded, causing carnage in Algeria, the Balkans, Burundi, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Somalia, among other places.

But tribal and ethnic conflicts weren’t the only things frozen by the Cold War: The world’s multilateral institutions, created at the end of the Second World War, had been paralyzed, too, and the U.S.-Soviet thaw made possible a new type of collective action. George Washington’s 1796 Farewell Address advised the nation to choose peace or war “as our interest, guided by justice, shall counsel.” The international humanitarian intervention, in which nations turn that precept on its head by going to war as *counseled* by justice and *guided* by their interest, did not really exist before Somalia.

Before, “you didn’t have situations in which the international community had an agreed-upon vision of the ending [to a conflict] and imposed it,” said James Dobbins, the director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at Rand who headed the nation-building missions in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. “With the end of the Cold War, that became possible, and effort was made not to sustain or freeze conflicts but to bring them to an end.”

Given the results in Somalia, where 18 American soldiers were killed in 1993 after the military redirected its traditional humanitarian-relief role to active nation-building, it is somewhat stunning that the international humanitarian intervention survived at all. It almost didn’t. The global community sat out the 1994 Rwanda genocide and waited through three years of “ethnic cleansing,” massacres, and mass rapes in the Balkans before sending in NATO bombers in 1995.

But the global response was quicker by the time of the Kosovo and East Timor crises. Through the decade’s various challenges, U.N. and American peacekeepers learned, albeit in fits and starts, to broaden their mission from patrolling cease-fire lines to ending combat, disarming armies, holding elections, buttressing economies, and building democracies. “It’s a completely different mission from what they used to do,” Dobbins said.

The events of September 11, 2001, flipped George Washington’s precept once again, sending it back to the notion of a just

■ A Department of Peace

When most people think of a government peace agency, they think of Rep. Dennis Kucinich, D-Ohio, who made the notion of a Peace Department a centerpiece of his 2004 and 2008 runs for the White House. With 68 co-sponsors in the House and none in the Senate, Kucinich’s Peace Department proposal isn’t likely to become law any time soon. The idea does, however, have the enthusiastic support of a grassroots campaign called the Peace Alliance.

As Kucinich and the Peace Alliance see it, the secretary of Peace and his or her department should put peacemaking principles to work domestically, on such subjects as violence in the home, child abuse, gangs, and education, and internationally, on conflicts, human rights, and the like.

Peace Department advocates, like the Peace Academy promoters of the 1970s and 1980s before them, like to

say that the idea of a government peace office has been around since the Republic’s founding. Technically, they are correct: George Washington called for a “proper peace establishment,” and Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, suggested a Peace Office to operate alongside the nation’s War Office.

But the advocates don’t talk much about the details of the two men’s proposals. Washington spelled out his thoughts on a government peace establishment in a letter to the Confederation Congress in 1783. It would, he wrote, consist of “a regular and standing force,” “a well-organized militia,” “arsenals of all kinds of military stores,” and “academies, one or more for the Instruction of the Art [of the] Military.”

Rush published his proposal in Benjamin Banneker’s 1793 Almanac. It called for hanging a sign reading, “An

Office for Butchering the Human Species” on the door of the War Office and for furnishing the new Peace Office with a collection of swords beaten into plowshares and a group of young ladies who would gather each day, clad in white, to sing odes and hymns to peace.

Within 20 years, the nation basically enacted Washington’s peace establishment in the form of a fledgling national army, state militias, and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, although it took another century for these to evolve into the modern Army and National Guard.

Rush’s plan, alas, never got off the ground. —C.H.

war, with a twist: Any conflict, anywhere, could now grow to affect America's interest.

"It all washes up on our shores," Zinni said. "States harbor extremist groups that carry out terrorist attacks, an environment for growing poppies comes back as drug smuggling, conflicts cause illegal migration that generates diasporas across the world—it took 15 to 20 years to realize that you don't do this from a sense of altruism, you do it from necessity. Unstable parts of the world affect the whole planet."

New Kinds of Peace

The somewhat radical notion underlying USIP's creation was that the science of peace could be studied, refined, and taught in much the same manner as military skills and strategies had been consciously honed for centuries. Originally conceived as a degree-granting academy akin to the military's war colleges, it instead received a sweeping charter to "*Serve the people and the Government through the widest possible range of education and training, basic and applied research opportunities, and peace information services on the means to promote international peace and the resolution of conflicts among the nations and peoples of the world, without recourse to violence.*"

Initially, the institute focused on basic peace research. In the early 1990s, though, as a changed world admitted a host of new nonstate actors, USIP followed its charter and plunged into applied research on current conflicts. In 1992, for example, at the request of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Smock organized a Sudan peace conference for the ostensible purpose of surveying prospects for peace but actually hoping to reconcile behind closed doors two rival southern leaders who were both battling the official government based in the North, in the capital of Khartoum. Neil Kritz, who heads the institute's Rule of Law Program, provided support and advice to the Rwanda genocide trials and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He also wrote a 1,500-page three-volume book of case studies in transitional justice that remains the primary manual of the field.

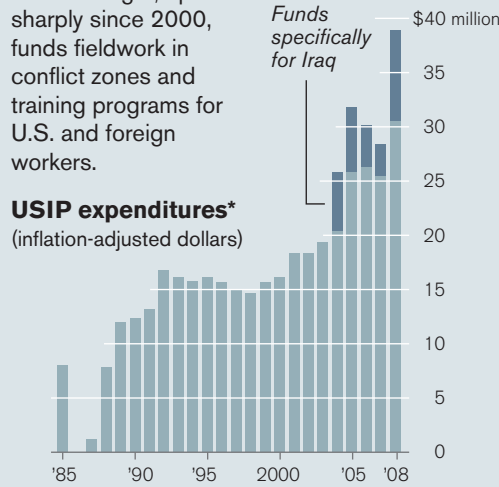
After the 1995 Dayton Accords were signed, the institute, at the suggestion of its board of directors, took all of its analytical work and applied it to a single goal, to make one peace deal stick. "We took the Balkans apart and put it on the operating table, looked at it from every possible dimension, and came up with a state-of-the-art analysis on what had happened and what it would take to stitch a country back together again," said Chester Crocker, who chaired the institute's board from 1992 to 2004. That effort, in turn, led to an overhaul of the agency's programs. It moved away from the abstract research that marked its first years and toward the practical, applied research that it conducts today.

"They started looking not at what should take place in the Middle East and in NATO expansion, but at actual studies on

A Growing Agency

The institute's \$39 million budget, up sharply since 2000, funds fieldwork in conflict zones and training programs for U.S. and foreign workers.

USIP expenditures*
(inflation-adjusted dollars)



*Includes base appropriation plus additional funds from supplemental appropriations and agency transfers.

SOURCE: USIP

what has taken place," said Kenneth Adelman, a member of the institute's first board and director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency under President Reagan. He singled out a series of books that the institute published on the negotiating techniques of different countries and its studies of conflict policing and called it "news you can use." "I was a real skeptic when I was on the board," Adelman said, "and I became kind of a believer now that I'm off of it."

Working case by case and problem by problem, the institute gradually assembled one of the world's top rosters of hands-on peace experts. "You would have thought that because it is funded by Congress, it is seen as just supporting U.S. policy, but that is not my sense at all," said the U.N.'s Deng. "They come across as very credibly nonpartisan, nonideological, and respected, worldwide."

Objective and Respected

When the Bush administration, after reviewing its disastrous attempts to win the peace in Afghanistan and Iraq, started trying to improve the government's response to modern conflicts, the institute rapidly became a key player not just in gathering lessons learned overseas but also in applying lessons learned in Washington. "The Defense Department has a huge budget for external research and analysis; the State Department basically has none; and USIP, to some extent, helps compensate for that," Dobbins said.

Oddly enough, the institute hasn't made any enemies in the course of taking on a greater role. "USIP is a phenomenal organization. They are doing so many different things, and it's all for good," said Col. John Agoglia, director of the U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, who has been involved in much of the group's interagency work. "They're seen as impartial by all the key players, and so they can provide connectivity to all the key players."

Donald Steinberg, who was director of the State Department's Joint Policy Council through late 2004 and then spent a year as a USIP fellow before becoming deputy president for policy at the International Crisis Group, says that the institute is home to experts recognized around the world. "Bob Perito [coordinator of USIP's Peacekeeping Lessons Learned Project] is the guru on civilian policing around the world. If you want to get a program going to support internal-security programs, you've got to talk to Bob. If you want to talk about transitional justice, you'd better talk to Neil Kritz. If you want to talk about ethnic divisions and religious conflicts and civilizations and clashes, you've got to talk to David Smock."

Carlos Pascual, who in 2004 became the State Department's first coordinator for reconstruction and stabilization and who now heads the Foreign Policy Program at the Brookings Institution, said, "It's a center of excellence on best practices in dealing with conflict."

Among the first problems that Pascual faced as coordinator were rising tensions between humanitarian groups and the military during crisis operations around the world. The aid groups were furious about Defense Department practices in Afghanistan that put their own employees at risk, such as dressing soldiers in civilian clothes when they delivered humanitarian assistance. But the Pentagon had rebuffed the groups' requests to discuss the matter. They asked Pascual for help. He, in turn, enlisted USIP, which hosted a two-year dialogue between the aid groups and their professional association, InterAction, and the Defense Department. The talks resulted in a 2007 joint release of guidelines on civil-military relationships in hostile environments.

Similarly, Pascual's successor, Ambassador John Herbst, asked the institute to help his office review \$100 million worth of annual projects overseen by the State Department but funded by the Defense Department.

Congress, for its part, asked the institute to host the Iraq Study Group in 2006. "I was looking for a place where both sides could meet in an objective location," said Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., who suggested the idea, "and I knew USIP's objectivity."

In the final 2008 appropriations bill, Wolf and Rep. Christopher Shays, R-Conn., asked the institute to reconstitute the study group, which they would like to see issue another report on the way forward in Iraq after the 2008 elections. The institute's Serwer has maintained the expert working groups that advised the original effort and periodically issue Iraq updates, and

he is now waiting for the study group's co-chairs, James Baker and Lee Hamilton, to indicate whether they're willing to again lead a formal commission.

Rethinking Peace

When the institute's five-story, \$186 million headquarters and public education center opens, its distinctive white roof and glass atrium will be one of the first landmarks that people see when crossing the Theodore Roosevelt or the Arlington Memorial bridges into Washington. Congress provided \$100 million for the building and amended the institute's charter to allow it to raise the remaining amount from private sources.

Two parts of the institute's work will change with the move. First, the new public education center, which an observer might call a peace museum, will attract tourists and school groups with its interactive exhibits on conflicts and peace-building.

Second, the Navy, which owns the hillside acreage behind the institute's new home, agreed in December 2007 to give the institute two buildings to expand its training and education center into a joint program for employees from government, the military, private relief groups, and international organizations.

Otherwise, though, USIP expects to stay the same size and to continue the same mission that it has today. It's not America's face abroad. It's not the lead actor in any given conflict, and it's never going to replace the State or Defense Department. Instead, the institute is testing, documenting, and teaching new

■ USIP's Origins

In 1978, a grassroots campaign for a National Peace Academy propelled a bill backed by then-Sens. Jennings Randolph, D-W.Va., Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., and Spark Matsunaga, D-Hawaii, to establish a U.S. Commission on Proposals for the National Academy of Peace and Conflict Resolution.

Matsunaga chaired the commission, which held 12 hearings across the country and heard from more than 300 witnesses. Peace research, the commission concluded in its 1981 report, was a substantive, pragmatic field with scientifically testable theories and hypotheses, but its "translation into readily usable form has been inadequate."

The three senators introduced a peace academy bill and then-Rep. Dan Glickman, D-Kan., prompted by Menonites in his district, proposed its counterpart in the House. The lawmakers' timing, however, was less than ideal. The nuclear freeze movement had taken off with Ronald Reagan's elec-

tion to the White House, and the peace politics of the time tended to turn on whether Reagan or his Soviet counterparts were most likely to plunge the world into an inferno.

The peace academy proposal went nowhere until 1984, when then-House Foreign Affairs Chairman Dante Fascell, D-Fla., persuaded the Senate Armed Services Committee to include it in the Defense authorization bill. Because Fascell and other academy champions were supporters of Cold War items then on the national security agenda—including missile defense and aid for the Nicaraguan Contras—the Reagan administration mostly held its nose and confined its formal objection to a note saying it opposed the academy on budgetary grounds.

When Congress created and funded the U.S. Institute of Peace anyway, Reagan deferred the money, let pass a 1985 deadline for submitting names for a board of directors to lawmakers,

and proposed a slew of changes designed to emasculate the organization. Congress reinstated the funding, reminded the president of his duty to appoint directors, and rejected the administration's changes, at which point Reagan bowed to the inevitable, albeit in his own style. "In the real world," he pointedly told the institute's directors at their first meeting in February 1986, "peace through strength must be our motto."

Glickman, who now heads the Motion Picture Association of America, said he worried at the time that Reagan's selection of a board, and their choice of a staff, would subvert the institute's peace agenda. Today, Glickman says, he looks at the institute's legacy and "likes to think that's somewhere where I may have done something to make the world a better place."

—C.H.

Philippines Talks



Eugene Martin (left) headed the institute's project that tried to facilitate peace between the Manila government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the southern islands.

ways of coping with circumstances that are neither war nor peace. "We're trying to shape the way people conceptualize conflict and the many ways it can be managed at different stages of its life-cycle," Crocker said. "We're offering an antidote to people who say Sudan or the Middle East or Pakistan or wherever is hopeless. It's not. It depends on people knowing what they should be doing."

The State and Defense departments understand Crocker's point, and at a time when Secretaries Gates and Rice and their aides are knee-deep in interagency talks about how to get better at handling the increasingly vague line between war and peace, both departments are listening to institute experts. The Pentagon tapped the institute to run an interagency study on existing

and needed training and education in the government, and the State Department's Political-Military Affairs Bureau worked with USIP to organize a 2004 conference on conflict policing that led to the G-8's creation of the Center of Excellence for Stability Police Units in Italy later that year. Indeed, in just the past few weeks, odd spectacles have appeared: the Defense secretary pleading with Congress to direct additional funds toward State so it can improve the civilian aspects of rebuilding countries post-conflict, and the secretary of State pleading with Congress to direct traditional State Department activities, such as training and equipping foreign militaries, toward the Pentagon.

"We got it wrong after 9/11," said Patricia Thomson, USIP's executive vice president. "We restructured our homeland-security institutions, but we should have restructured our foreign-policy institutions."

Finding the political will to carry out such a restructuring is difficult, and it may not happen right away. In the meantime, Congress, State, and Defense will continue nibbling around the edges of the problem with such initiatives as the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization at Foggy Bottom; Bush's proposed civilian response corps, which is like a Federal Emergency Management Agency, only it would be deployed to foreign hot spots; the new stability operations doctrine that the U.S. military has written; and the new interagency doctrine on foreign reconstruction under

development through State. The Institute of Peace is advising and participating in many of these efforts.

According to Secretary Rice's April testimony to the House Armed Services Committee, this nibbling at reforms is not necessarily bad: "People look at a cause or a problem. They experiment with forms. And if those forms are successful, they grow legs and they become institutionalized."

The Institute of Peace, as the government's most flexible experimental agency with two decades of experience institutionalizing good practices across the world, will have work for years to come. ■

chegland@nationaljournal.com

Rule of Law



RICHARD A. BLOOM

The institute's Neil Kritz provided support and advice to the Rwanda genocide trials and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

A USIP Project in Iraq

Foreign
Affairs

■ FIELDWORK

How Institute of Peace facilitators **helped bring some peace** to the district of Mahmoudiya, south of Baghdad.

■ By Corine Hegland

In August 2006, the 2nd Brigade Combat Team of the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division arrived in Mahmoudiya, a city and district of half a million people just south of Baghdad. In good times, Mahmoudiya is known as the Gateway to Baghdad. In bad times, such as 2006, it's part of the Triangle of Death.

The city itself is mostly Shiite, while the outlying rural areas are largely Sunni. Before 2003 its only real industries were a weapons factory and a weapons storage facility, both of which were picked clean soon after the U.S. invasion. Extremists in both religious sects were fighting each other and the Americans, and the brigade would suffer one of the highest casualty rates in Iraq over the next 15 months: Fifty-two of its 3,500 members died during the deployment.

Lt. Col. John Laganelli, the brigade's deputy commander, said that although he and his troops had to focus on the short-term requirements of the shooting war that they were waging with insurgents every day, he kept his eye on the longer-term goal of increasing overall security in the area, with the aim of restoring commerce and returning life to normal. "But you can't increase security without those people who are threatening you, Sunni and Shiite, deciding to work with you," he said.

The mayor of Mahmoudiya, a Shiite, wanted to bring about some sort of reconciliation, but he faced two problems. First, any perceived alliance with the Iraqi government or the Americans was an invitation to assassination. Second, the pivotal Sunni sheiks had taken refuge in Jordan, and no deal would work in Mahmoudiya without their support. "The sheiks were sending one son to a reconciliation meeting and another son to an Al Qaeda in Iraq meeting, just to cover their bases," said Lt. Col. Joseph Cantlin, deputy head of the provincial reconstruction team embedded with the brigade. The PRT's representative from the U.S. Agency for International Development suggested that the team ask the U.S. Institute of Peace for help.

USIP has 10 employees in Iraq, some American and some Iraqi, plus a network of 18 trained Iraqi facilitators that it hopes to increase to 118. It's the institute's first immersion project since its 1990s efforts in the Balkans. USIP staffers had briefly considered doing a full-blown Balkans-like project in Afghanistan in 2001 but decided against it after realizing that most of the people they would need to work with there were illiterate

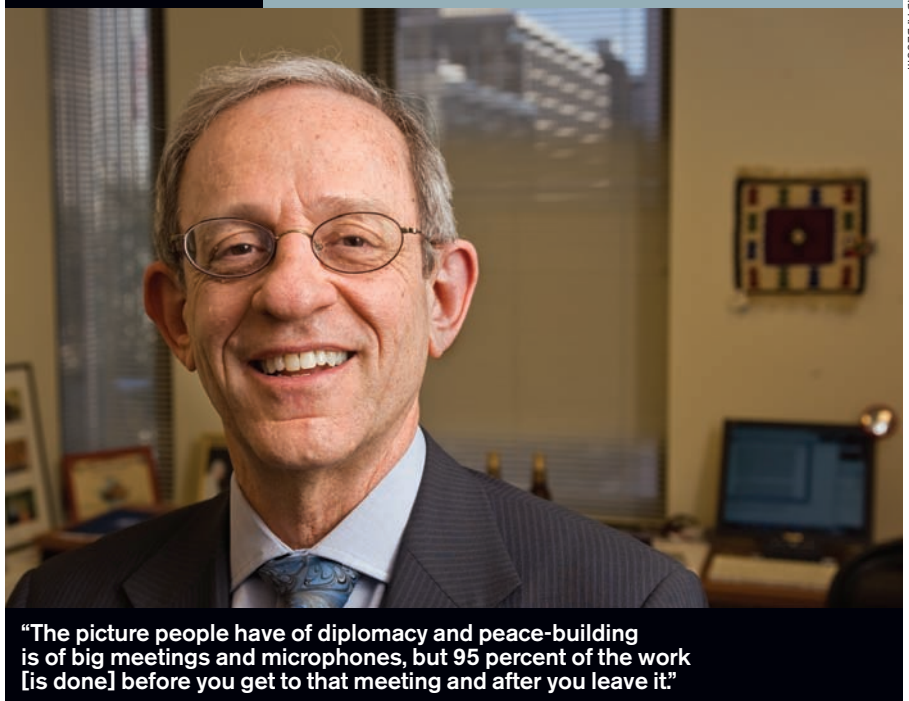
warlords. The institute has no problem working with warlords, but most of its tools are based on written texts.

Iraq, however, has an educated, literate society. USIP staff members had worked on Iraq before the invasion, writing prescient briefs outlining deficiencies in the Bush administration's postwar plans and helping the State Department with its Future of Iraq project, which was ultimately ignored. In February 2003, Robert Perito, a specialist in civilian policing, gave a presentation to the Defense Department's Advisory Board on the breakdown in order and the looting that would occur in Baghdad without a police presence. When the situation fell apart as predicted, USIP decided to see what it could do in Iraq.

At the time, the institute had a \$16 million budget. It asked Congress for an additional \$10 million over two years for its Iraq program. Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, a longtime appropriations champion of USIP's, and Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, then-chairman of the Appropriations Committee, supported the request. By early 2004, the institute had its Baghdad office, where it started training the Iraqi facilitators and mediators, and creating education materials. USIP also provided nearly 800 Iraqi officials with a decision-making training program that it had developed in the Balkans.

In 2007, Cantlin asked Rusty Barber, USIP's chief of party in Baghdad, for help in Mahmoudiya. According to Cantlin and

■ Daniel Serwer



RICHARD A. BLOOM

"The picture people have of diplomacy and peace-building is of big meetings and microphones, but 95 percent of the work [is done] before you get to that meeting and after you leave it."

Laganelli, the institute was a known quantity there because of its work in the Balkans. “The Iraqi senior leaders in Mahmoudiya knew about [USIP’s] work after the Dayton Accords,” Cantlin said.

Barber met with the mayor and other local Iraqis, including a Sunni shopkeeper who had lost his livelihood to Shiite extremists and was grimly determined to find an end to the violence. The group decided that it needed to meet with the sheiks who were living in Jordan to enlist their support. The mayor formed a delegation of Sunnis and Shiites composed of civilians, sheiks, and representatives from the Iraqi government and military. USIP, which underwrote the trip and sent four of its staffers along, helped cut through the red tape: The institute set up a meeting for the mayor with the Iraqi ministry of dialogue and reconciliation, and got the American Embassy to intervene with Jordan when Amman declined to issue visas.

At the recommendation of Daniel Serwer, who runs USIP’s Center for Post-Conflict Peace and Stability Operations, the delegation decided against a group meeting with the Iraqi sheiks in Jordan in favor of individual sessions. “I just thought it was going to be a hell of a lot easier to win these people over one by one than if they had to expose themselves in front of others,” Serwer said. “The picture people have of diplomacy and peace-building is of big meetings and microphones, but 95 percent of the work [is done] before you get to that meeting and after you leave it.”

As a result, the sheiks agreed to return to Iraq for a three-day reconciliation meeting slated for October 2007. The 2nd Brigade Combat Team provided funding, logistics, and security for the conference. USIP worked with local Iraqis to draw up an agenda and participant list; established an American support team composed of embassy staff, members of the Baghdad Provincial Reconstruction Team, and U.S. military officers from coalition headquarters; and briefed a close aide to Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki.

When the conference took place, however, American Embassy personnel and military officials stayed away until the last day while USIP-trained facilitators ran the show.

Normally, Iraqi tribal meetings involve sheiks taking turns making speeches. Not this one: Before the meeting began, USIP, its facilitator teams, and the Mahmoudiya locals studied the sheiks—18 Sunnis and 13 Shiites—individually and assigned them to working groups focused on governance, security, economic development, social well-being, rule-of-law, and society. The point of the groups was to get the power brokers to set goals and figure out how to achieve them.

On the first day, for example, the security working group’s facilitator, a former Iraqi army officer named Raid, asked each member to identify three security problems in Mahmoudiya. On the second day, he asked each attendee to describe what he wanted Mahmoudiya to look like in three years. The facilitator then listed the security problems on one side of a wall and the

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visions of the future on the other, and asked the group how to reconcile the two. At the end of the day, the working groups discussed their findings with one another and developed a final statement of goals and actions acceptable to everyone. On the third day, the media and American and Iraqi government officials were invited in to observe the final working-group presentations and the signing of the statement.

“Conflict was inevitable,” Barber’s final report noted drily. At one meeting, two sheiks got into a shouting match after one accused the other of murdering members of his tribe; facilitators and other sheiks separated the men, who settled back down to work soon after. Later, an Iraqi general grabbed the microphone and threatened to arrest the sheiks immediately if they didn’t start cooperating with the government. An American Army officer intervened, and the facilitators were able to get the discussion back on track.

After the conference, two Shiite sheiks stepped forward to offer safe passage home for two displaced Sunni tribes, and Sunni sheiks agreed to rebuild a Shiite mosque destroyed by violence. A group of Sunni and Shiite sheiks staged a walk-through of downtown Mahmoudiya to demonstrate that it was safe and to encourage residents to return. And the Iraqi High Judicial Council agreed to send a circuit judge to the district to hear a backlog of cases.

Participants say that USIP’s involvement was critical for several reasons. First, its people knew what needed to be done and how to do it. “USIP brought in a level of expertise and experience in this type of thing,” Laganelli said. “They did it a lot better than we could.”

Second, USIP had access to American and Iraqi government officials that the brigade combat team and provincial reconstruction team didn’t have. Third, it presented a neutral civilian face. “Just the fact that they were coming to the table helped,” Cantlin said. “They were seen as impartial, not representing the U.S. government agenda but seen as wanting to help the peace.”

And fourth, the institute worked through local Iraqis first. “They’re not U.S. government and not the government of Iraq,” said Denise Marsh, head of governance for the Baghdad PRT. “They seem to best represent the voice of the grassroots folk.”

PRTs in other parts of Iraq have asked Barber to try to replicate the Mahmoudiya model in their areas; he’s visiting them now to see what USIP can do.

Raid and the other USIP-trained facilitators are working together on their own reconciliation projects both with and without the institute’s help. “The provincial reconstruction teams and the embassies are dealing with just the political parties, with people you can say are working in important organizations,” Raid said. “But USIP is dealing with normal people, maybe with authority, maybe not.”

Raid asked to be quoted using his full name, but *National Journal* declined out of concern for his security. “I cannot wait until the terrorists and bad guys give me permission to work for my country,” he said. “I have kids. I need them to see the future.”

He’s terrified that America will leave Iraq soon, Raid said. As the interview ended, he asked if he could add a message: “We’re just starting now. Don’t leave us alone. We are afraid that one day we will learn through the media that the Americans have decided to leave. We are just starting now. We need you to give your hand and help us move for the future.” ■

chegland@nationaljournal.com