

Local Conflict Prevention & Peacebuilding Strategies for Iraq

The Bush Administration's 2006 National Security Strategy details a 3D approach including development, diplomacy, and defense. Current US investments in Iraq focus almost exclusively on defense strategies by the U.S. military and the Iraqi security forces. Diplomacy and development assistance can reduce violence, particularly when military options are of limited use in creating stability and sustainable peace. Conflict prevention analysts widely agree with the Iraq Study Group (ISG) and International Crisis Group (ICG) reports that a military victory is unlikely and that robust regional diplomacy including Iran, Syria, and other neighboring countries has a greater chance of addressing the root causes of civil violence and creating sustainable political solutions for the region. Supplementing the ISG and ICG recommendations for regional diplomacy and development strategies, the 3D Security Initiative is promoting local conflict prevention and peacebuilding options in Iraq. This Policy Brief was developed in collaboration with conflict prevention experts and humanitarian organizations working in Iraq. The US Congress, State Department and the US Institute of Peace could work with US and international NGO conflict prevention experts to further discuss and fund these recommendations.

Local Development Sector Recommendations

- **Address Humanitarian Needs by Supporting Local NGOs.** Development groups based in Iraq report that unmet humanitarian needs undermine security by increasing the sense of desperation. Specifically, it is critical that the US, in partnership with the international community, financially support local reconstruction efforts (i.e. provision of water, electricity, roads, bridges, schools, and hospitals) and the needs of internally displaced peoples. Long-term continued funding of USAID's highly effective Community Action Program engages Iraqi civil society in the reconstruction process is essential. Funding local NGOs to manage humanitarian efforts, instead of using military personnel, increases the chances the projects will not be targeted for destruction and increases local ownership.
- **Secure Humanitarian Corridors.** Create specific corridors, passageways, routes that would serve as temporary ceasefire zones through which critical humanitarian supplies could be transported or disseminated. Further expand corridors and passageways, when possible, into broader humanitarian pauses in the fighting to allow temporary medical and relief units to implement relief agenda.
- **Foster Reconciliation through Joint Development Projects.** Humanitarian, development, and reconstruction efforts offer opportunities for building diplomatic channels for democratic decision-making on community priorities. Building schools or water wells, for example, can engage Shia and Sunni community members in projects that offer benefits across the lines of conflict and foster reconciliation between ethnic and religious groups.
- **Generate Local Employment.** Invest in micro-lending programs for Iraqi entrepreneurs and local industries and factories in order to bolster a sustainable local Iraqi infrastructure and provide employment for local communities. Stability in Iraq requires lowering the unemployment rate which is currently between 50-70% in many cities in Iraq. High unemployment rates correlate closely with high public violence levels and undermine security.

Local Diplomatic Sector Recommendations

- **Coordinate Parallel Negotiation Training.** Work with local Sunni and Shia leaders to coordinate concurrent internal negotiation trainings. Simultaneous trainings provide a face-saving mechanism for each group to signal to opposing groups that they are willing to negotiate. Parallel negotiation trainings will help disparate Sunni and Shia communities develop common expectations of a negotiation process, common approaches and a common vocabulary. Parallel training is also a good venue for improving internal negotiation dynamics within each group. The willingness and ability of groups to negotiate internal conflicts is a prerequisite for external negotiations.
- **Develop Regional Conflict Prevention Taskforces.** Following parallel negotiation training, bring together mid-level political, religious, business and academic leaders with the aim of conducting, in workshop format, a joint analysis of the challenges to and opportunities for a sustainable political solution. These “Track II” unofficial diplomatic taskforces have a successful history of developing creative political solutions that are viable, representative and equitable—e.g. N. Ireland, Indonesia.
- **Develop Confidence-Building Measures.** Bring together local government officials, community leaders and combatants to consider feasible confidence-building steps capable of building goodwill. These could include hostage exchanges, rules of engagement, removing barriers to movement, and re-opening communication channels. Confidence-building measures build trust for more substantial negotiations and disadvantage spoilers invested in continuing violence. Create opportunities for leaders to commit to a common task with tangible success indicators such as securing the delivery of humanitarian supplies. Small agreements can build confidence more quickly than a commitment to wholesale compliance with a broader ceasefire, for example, which has a higher risk of failure.
- **Establish Training Programs for Provincial Reconstruction Teams.** Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) operating within Iraq—comprised of US and coalition partner civil-military forces—are stationed throughout Iraq and tasked with the mission of enabling and fostering local systems of governance. In order to maximize PRT’s ability to foster democratic structures for community decision-making, training programs in conflict resolution skills should be undertaken immediately.
- **Support Symbolic Reconciliation Efforts.** Addressing trauma and loss are important elements in slowing the cycle of revenge and support for armed groups. Constructing public memorials, rebuilding mosques or orchestrating symbolic gestures, e.g. mosque visits between Sunni-Shia clerics, could de-escalate tensions as they have in other crisis regions. US funding for appropriately-timed symbolic reconciliation efforts owned and directed by local Iraqi leaders can bolster security.

Local Defense Sector Options

- **Establish Humanitarian Rules of Engagement.** Even in the midst of civil violence, armed groups in other war zones have made agreements to ban the use of certain types of weapons, targets, modes of attack or to establish peace zones which allow a wider array of economic and social activity in specific places and/or at specific times. These efforts can expand to general regional ceasefires.
- **Expand Community Policing.** In lieu of a “clear and hold” tactic which has fuelled rather than quelled civil violence in parts of Iraq, revisit a community policing approach. This tactic has successfully reduced gang/militia violence in many conflict zones by working with community and civil society organizations to enlist their ideas for and help in reducing violence. Initially, community policing was successfully used in Fallujah, though later abandoned for a more conventional military strategy, which fuelled rather than quelled insurgent activities.
- **Crisis Management.** Establish local and regional communications systems so that leaders can communicate directly before and during crisis situations to diffuse rumors and to plan joint efforts to deescalate tensions. Working with local officials and civil society organizations, create media linkages to ensure unfettered communication channels for internal and external usage.