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In Iraq, US Soldiers and USIP Learned How to Win the Peace. Is America About to Forget?

By [*The United States Institute of Peace*](#)

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United States Institute of Peace

Former U.S. military commanders in Iraq describe the U.S. Institute of Peace as a cost-effective “combat multiplier” with capabilities they “could not get elsewhere,” in an article published today in *The National Interest*. As U.S.-backed forces in Iraq make headway against ISIS, journalist Zach Abels writes of the need for “civilian agencies that consolidate combat success into political victory,” to prevent a re-emergence of an even more-potent extremist group in the future.

Citing former Army General David Petraeus, Colonels John Nagl, Peter Mansoor and Michael M. Kershaw, and others, Abels’s 8,500-word [article](#) includes two cases in which USIP worked with local officials, tribal leaders and USIP-supported Iraqi mediators to reconcile warring sides and end cycles of violence. One occurred in 2007 in Mahmoudiya, south of Baghdad, in an area known at the time as the “Triangle of Death.” The other unfolded in 2015 to prevent violence in revenge for a 2014 massacre of 1,700 Iraqi Shia military cadets near the northern city of Tikrit.

The article emphasizes the relevance of such experience and of civilian agencies such as the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development and USIP to the [upcoming efforts to stabilize Mosul](#). Iraqi troops, backed by a U.S.-led coalition, have been steadily recapturing Mosul, the country’s second-largest city, and its region from ISIS.

“Mosul will fall. What happens the day after?” Abels writes, echoing a question [discussed by USIP experts](#): the need for reconciliation and the evidence that it can work. “Sunni and Shia, Arab and Kurd, are unlikely to find peace overnight,” Abels writes. “Without a concerted strategy of security, diplomacy and development, popular passions will once again engulf Iraq. Déjà vu of the worst kind—the kind that sucks American soldiers and dollars right back in.”

The article cites a memo by Petraeus to the Office of Management and Budget in February 2009 praising USIP’s work on Mahmoudiya as “a striking success.” And Nagl considers USIP a “combat multiplier,” because its experts “understand cultures and tribal and local politics more deeply and more instinctually than anyone but the very best and rare American soldiers.” Mansoor, who led the 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division in [Iraq](#) after the 2003 invasion, “lauded the institute’s ‘staying power,’” Abels writes. USIP’s long-term commitment “allows it to accumulate relationships and granular expertise.”...

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About the Author



The United States Institute of Peace

The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) works to prevent, mitigate, and resolve violent conflict around the world. USIP does this by engaging directly in conflict zones and by providing analysis, education, and resources to those working for peace. Created by Congress in 1984 as an independent, nonpartisan, federally funded organization, USIP's more than 300 staff work at the Institute's D.C. headquarters, and on the ground in the world's most dangerous regions.

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