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## THE U.S. INSTITUTE OF PEACE: A HANDS-ON APPROACH TO RESOLVING CONFLICT

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*The approach of the United States Institute of Peace is “to go a step further” than a traditional think tank, and “climb into the trenches with those trying to bring peace to their parts of the world and work directly with them,” says USIP President Richard H. Solomon. In this endeavor, he says, the Institute — which was created by the U.S. Congress — brings with it “a growing wealth of knowledge and expertise in the techniques of managing conflict and building peace.”*

**T**he United States Institute of Peace is a unique entity in the increasingly crowded Washington foreign policy “think tank” community.

Perhaps the most obvious aspect of our uniqueness is that we are a creation of the U.S. Congress. We are an independent federal entity. However, its most salient aspect is that we take a hands-on, pro-active approach to fulfilling our mission of promoting the peaceful resolution of international conflicts. Some of our staff-members, in fact, like to refer to us as a “think-and-do tank.” I’ll come back to that idea, after a brief explanation of the origins and mission of the Institute.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s — the aftermath of the Vietnam War — there was a lively debate in the United States about the value of establishing a national “peace academy” to train professionals in the skills of peacemaking, as a complement to the educational mission of the nation’s three government-run military academies. The result of that debate was that the U.S. Congress decided in 1984 to establish “an independent non-profit, national institute 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.”

Thus was born the United States Institute of Peace. Funded annually by Congress and overseen by a presidentially-appointed, bipartisan, Senate-confirmed board of directors, the Institute focuses its

efforts on education, training, policy development, and practical programs of conflict management, all in the pursuit of international peace — in the Middle East, in the Balkans, in Afghanistan, in sub-Saharan Africa — indeed in any part of the world where violent conflict threatens or rages.

While we approach our mission in some of the ways that a traditional, non-governmental think tank would — through research, studies, grant-making, public events, and publishing — we also have practical programs that are more applied than the work of a traditional think tank. As I said at the outset, we like to describe ourselves as a think-and-do tank. So, what is the “do” part of the equation?

It is, in large part, training and education. We are very active in training the peacemakers of today and educating those of tomorrow. In the training realm, for example, the Institute of Peace, through a cooperative arrangement with the U.S. State Department, trains American police officers who have volunteered to go overseas to serve as on-the-ground, specially-trained peacekeepers in post-conflict areas such as the Balkans and East Timor. There are hundreds of such civilian police now serving overseas, and many of them have passed through our Training Program before shipping out.

The Training Program operates not just in Washington, but worldwide. Its trainees include diplomats, government officials, civic leaders, non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives,

and military personnel from the United States and dozens of other countries. They are trained to handle all phases of conflict, from preventive action to post-conflict stabilization and reconciliation.

A recent example of the program's work is a two-week, interactive trust- and team-building course for about 30 young NGO leaders from Serbia and Kosovo. The program had four components: a day-long course consisting of various outdoor challenges requiring collaborative planning and teamwork; a second day of negotiation and mediation discussions and exercises; an intensive, three-day, computer-driven simulation involving negotiation and policy-making; and a day of dialogue with Washington policy-makers. During the simulation, the participants were challenged to address, in a highly-pressured environment, the problems of a fictitious country wrestling with the post-conflict challenges of ethnic tensions, high unemployment, environmental degradation, and an HIV/AIDS epidemic. In the three days, they "made policy" through a computer simulation that enabled them to track the effects of their policy decisions on the country's economy and society over a 10-year period.

Our Education Program works to prepare American youth for the difficult work of making peace in conflict-ridden countries and stimulates emerging generations of leaders to pursue careers in international conflict management. It does this by producing teaching guides and conducting workshops and seminars for American teachers at the high school and college levels who want to incorporate conflict-resolution studies into their curricula.

The program also works with educators in zones of conflict abroad, convening workshops and seminars on conflict analysis and management and the role that educators can play promoting reconciliation and tolerance in those areas. Since September 11, 2001, these efforts have been focused mainly in countries and regions with large Muslim populations.

The Education Program also works directly with American high school students by sponsoring an annual National Peace Essay Contest. All U.S. high school students are eligible — and encouraged — to participate by submitting an essay on a given peace-related subject. This year's topic is the justification

for war, i.e., is it possible to have a "just" war? Thousands of students throughout the country participate in the contest. Each state chooses a local winner who gets college scholarship money and a trip to the Institute in Washington, where three national winners are chosen and given additional scholarship support.

Our Rule of Law Program also takes a hands-on and pro-active approach to its mission. People tend to think of democracy as consisting of two elements: elections and freedom of speech, expression and thought. But a fully-functioning democracy consists of many more components, one of the most important being adherence to the rule of law. Research strongly suggests that societies that uphold the rule of law are less likely to be aggressors and more likely to contribute to international peace.

Rule of Law Program staff frequently travel to countries in transition from totalitarianism to democracy to offer guidance on implementing commonly-accepted rule of law principles. At the request of the Israeli and Palestinian ministers of justice, for example, Rule of Law Program staff have organized a special initiative on Palestinian-Israeli legal dialogue. The goal is to build professional relationships between the two legal communities and enable them to jointly explore a range of common problems — a process they had not been able to start without outside facilitation and which no other international party had undertaken. Through roundtable discussions and working groups in Israel and the Palestinian territories, members of the two legal communities and foreign experts discuss practical legal issues affecting the daily interaction of their two systems, consider relevant examples of legal relations between neighboring countries around the world, and develop proposed solutions to common problems. More than 120 members of the two legal communities have participated to date. Agenda topics range from traffic accidents between Israelis and Palestinians to intellectual property rights and representation in each other's courts.

In addition to our issues-oriented programs, we have programs that focus — again in a hands-on, pro-active fashion — on particular regions that are facing violent conflict or recovering from a period of

violence. One of those programs addresses the Balkans — an area that is well into the recovery phase after years of ethnic violence. Another focuses on a region that is larger, less easily defined, and where the conflicts are historical, current and potential — the diverse Muslim World.

The Institute's Balkans Program is deeply involved in helping the states, communities, and ethnic groups of the former Yugoslavia emerge from the wreckage of a decade of violent and deadly conflict and rebuild their societies. Its director, Daniel Serwer, has been extremely active in the region and has convened numerous workshops for Balkans community leaders and government officials in the Balkans to help them plan for the peaceful co-existence of various ethnic and religious communities that have traditionally been enemies.

Our newest program, and a vitally important one, is the Special Initiative on the Muslim World. One fact made painfully clear by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 is that Americans and other Westerners are woefully ignorant of the customs, cultures and beliefs that prevail in a large and important segment of the world's population — the more than 1 billion Muslims who populate a broad swath of geography stretching from West Africa to East Asia.

Under the direction of former U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan Richard Kauzlarich, the Muslim World initiative explores ways of promoting understanding and tolerance between the Western and Islamic

worlds, focusing initially on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, then on Iraq and developments in South and Southeast Asia. It also supports related Institute activities under the Rule of Law, Religion, and Peacemaking, Education, and Training programs.

While a great deal of attention has been paid to the role of religion in fomenting violent conflict, there are few think tanks that address its role in the making of peace. The Institute of Peace's Religion and Peacemaking Initiative works to enhance the capacity of faith-based communities to be forces for peace. The Initiative organizes interfaith dialogues and workshops in the Balkans, the Middle East, and the United States.

These are but some of our programs. We have others that focus on the effects of new telecommunications technologies, such as the Internet and satellite technology, on modern diplomacy, and on the more traditional think-tank functions, such as policy-oriented research and publishing. But the operational programs I've described here are the ones that make us truly unique in a growing world of foreign policy think tanks. The usual modus operandi in that world is to devise new policy options and offer them to officials and practitioners to apply at the negotiating table or in the field. Our approach is to go a step further — to climb into the trenches with those trying to bring peace to their parts of the world and work directly with them, bringing with us a growing wealth of knowledge and expertise in the techniques of managing conflict and building peace. ●