

Conversation with Steve Riskin on November 26, 2013

Participants

- Steve Riskin, Senior Program Officer, United States Institute of Peace
- Alexander Berger, Senior Research Analyst, GiveWell

Note: This set of notes was compiled by GiveWell and gives an overview of the major points made by Steve Riskin.

Summary

Steve Riskin is a Senior Program Officer for Grants at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). As part of its investigation of the philanthropic field around peace and security, GiveWell talked to Riskin about USIP's peace and security grantmaking, some particularly impactful USIP grants, and other funders of peace and security work.

USIP's peace and security grantmaking

USIP works to promote the peaceful resolution of international conflict. The institute works across the full “life cycle” or continuum of conflict—from prevention and early warning to management, mediation, and negotiation, through to post-conflict peacebuilding.

Conflict prevention and early warning

USIP has funded research by scholars as well as projects undertaken by NGOs to understand and address the sources and indicators of conflict in order to enhance conflict prevention. Such work has included field research by in-country or foreign scholars and policy specialists examining countries that have emerged from violent conflict and whether the country is likely to experience renewed conflict in the future. Although USIP does not fund general monitoring, reporting and advocacy work concerning human rights violations, it has funded projects on early detection, whether through field research or using modern technology such as satellite imagery. USIP has also funded work to analyze flows of weaponry and to enhance understanding about relations between ethnic, religious or political groups within some countries to try to anticipate and prevent conflict.

USIP also works to improve relationships and help facilitate the resolution of disputes between different ethnic, religious, or political groups in an effort to prevent violent conflict. This work includes formal and informal education and helping groups to understand each other. For example, USIP-supported documentary films helped actual or potential parties to violent conflict to understand how peoples in other settings have worked through similar conflicts. In addition, USIP funds (and implements) programs to train NGOs, and international civil servants and others to undertake conflict prevention and early warning efforts.

USIP funds training and education efforts around peace and security issues, including those related to gender-based violence, in many places around the world, including Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Europe.

Conflict mediation and negotiation

USIP has funded training programs engaging government and military personnel, NGO staff and those from regional and international organizations to better address and diffuse conflict situations. USIP has also funded a body of research to improve the effectiveness of negotiation. This includes a series of studies on cross-cultural negotiation that explores the negotiating styles of key countries around the world including Russia, China, Pakistan, France, Germany, Iran and the United States. In addition, The Institute supported a study that resulted in *Engaging Extremists: Trade-Offs, Timing, and Diplomacy*, edited by I. William Zartman and Guy Olivier Faure, a book that probes the complex issue of engaging with extremist groups—whether to negotiate, and, if so, how, when and under what conditions.

USIP funds informal (Track II) diplomatic efforts involving academics, policy specialists and government officials as well as people-to-people dialogues and related programs. For example, USIP funded an initiative that brought together American and Iranian experts to address issues associated with the challenges to implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In addition, USIP funds research to identify characteristics and drivers of conflicts that inform and guide how those conflicts can best be managed and resolved.

Post-conflict peacebuilding

The rate at which countries, having emerged from intense civil strife, revert to violent conflict is very high, so assisting countries in peacebuilding after violence has ceased is critical. It is crucial to reestablish or strengthen the rule of law, solidify personal security, rebuild economies, and heal society. To those ends, USIP has funded and implemented a broad array of programs, including transitional justice projects and work associated with truth and reconciliation commissions and other international mechanisms, including efforts to develop best practices as well as programs focusing on Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants, including children. USIP has also underwritten educational projects that examine ways in which education about past conflict can help heal societal wounds.

USIP provided funding to produce a documentary film, *State of Fear: The Truth about Terrorism*. Inspired by the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the film focuses on the political violence in Peru and the challenges for democracies in fighting extremist violence-- providing lessons for those in other countries who are struggling to move beyond violent conflict and promote justice and peace.

In sub-Saharan Africa, USIP:

- Funded a public education effort on the details of a peace accord in Burundi
- Worked to prevent the recurrence of election violence in Kenya
- Funded a film about a courageous female human rights advocate in Zimbabwe

Other impactful USIP grantmaking

USIP funded:

- The Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies (CANVAS's) handbook, *Non-Violent Struggle – 50 Crucial Points*. The guide has been translated into several languages and has been disseminated and used by practitioners, via the internet, in many countries around the world.
- *Force More Powerful*, a documentary film that focuses on the use of strategic non-violence conflict in the 20th century, exploring the context, decision-making, strategies, and problems associated with the use of such tactics in several cases during the 20th century, including those in India, Poland and South Africa. It has been translated into over a dozen languages, aired in over 30 countries and used by practitioners in over 60 countries.
- A conference at Oxford that brought together nonviolent activists, government officials who were in a position to respond to the nonviolent actions, journalists who were covering the situation, and scholars engaged in studying the cases of non-violent social movements worldwide. The conference, that focused on almost two dozen cases of nonviolent resistance, resulted in *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-Violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*, a book edited by Sir Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash and published by Oxford University Press.

Regarding training, USIP has made many other grants over the years to local, national and international groups to deliver a wide range of context-specific training on conflict resolution and peacebuilding—a key form of capacity building. Even if trainees leave on organization or if the organization closes, they often remain active in the peacebuilding field and continue to make important contributions, utilizing the skills they have acquired. USIP has also supported many programs that have educated and informed American audiences about key conflicts, providing a deeper understand of the complexity of violent conflict and the challenges and approaches to preventing, managing and resolving it.

Funders

In the US, various funding mechanisms within USAID and the US Department of State focus on peace and security, including such entities as the Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

The Congressionally-funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED) supports the work of nongovernmental organizations around the world seeking to promote and strengthen democracy—work that is central to advancing peace and security in conflict zones and in

countries emerging from conflict. NED also provides major funding to a small number of US-based grantees, including the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, the International Republican Institute, and the Center for International Private Enterprise.

The Peace and Security Funders Group is an association of foundations and other grantmaking organizations funding to advance peace and global security.

Many foreign governmental and quasi-governmental agencies, particularly those in Europe and Canada, fund programs under the peace and security rubric or in closely allied fields. In addition to analogues to USAID, there are government-funded agencies, some akin to USIP, such as Oxfam Novib and Cordaid in the Netherlands, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Authority and Denmark's Danida. Whether focusing on poverty alleviation, justice, human rights or other development work, these kinds of donors support directly or indirectly the advancement of peace and security.

Some organizations associated with European political parties also fund projects on or related to peace and security. Such donor agencies include several German Stiftungs, including the Hanns Seidel Foundation, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Heinrich Boll in Germany.

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