

Department of peace

By [David Heim](#)

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In mid-February, budget slashers in Congress unexpectedly [took the ax](#) to the U. S. Institute of Peace. Forty Democrats joined the Republican majority in the House to cut off all funding for the USIP--a potentially devastating blow to the bipartisan institute that was started under President Reagan and funded mostly by Congress. It is up to the Senate to salvage the work of this institute.

The USIP's \$44 million annual operating budget is dwarfed by the State Department's \$54 billion--not to mention the \$583 billion that goes each year to the Department of Defense. But the small cost of the USIP pays great dividends. The USIP directly benefits American troops in places like Afghanistan by helping resolve conflicts, and it is active in Baghdad and other hot spots around the world. It's been estimated that the entire budget of the USIP amounts to the cost of keeping 40 soldiers in Afghanistan for one year.

As was [reported](#) in the *Century*, USIP staff have been especially skilled in recognizing how religious faith can be a source of reconciliation, not just conflict. The USIP exemplifies the best sort of leadership that the U.S. can offer the world--a leadership based not on weapons but on a deep understanding of the sources of conflict. The nation's budget-cutting is foolish and indiscriminate if it erases the work of the USIP.