

United States Institute of Peace Brings Simulation Technology to Iraq and Poland

The United States Institute of Peace (www.usip.org) has a long history of working with simulations. While most of this history has focused on the traditional paper-based simulations, recent developments in technology have lowered the barriers to entry in the modeling world and created new opportunities to develop complex computer-based simulations. One of the simulations that the Institute currently deploys is the Strategic Economic Needs and Security Exercise (SENSE).

SENSE, which was originally developed by the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) for use in Bosnia, is a computer-based simulation that focuses on negotiations and decision-making in a post-conflict environment, and simulates the resource allocation challenges confronting national and international decision-makers. The sophisticated computer program provides participants with rapid feedback on the results of their time-sensitive decisions aimed at building political stability, social justice, and a foundation for economic progress. That said, the primary activity in SENSE is negotiation between and among those participating in the simulation. SENSE has been used by USIP in the U.S. as well as the Balkans, the Caucasus, Iraq and Poland.

In 2004, USIP contracted with IDA to modify the simulation in order to make it even more applicable to Iraq. Over the next two years, USIP trained 258 Iraqis (most of them officials from key ministries) by using the SENSE simulation. In late 2005, USIP transferred the SENSE capability to an Iraqi NGO. They have since conducted several SENSE sessions for Iraq's Transitional National Authority, members of Parliament, Kurdish authorities, and the Baghdad Provincial Council. Most recently, USIP's Iraqi partner conducted a SENSE program August 20-24, 2007, for representatives from Iraq's 18 provincial councils. The participants were enthusiastic and USIP's Baghdad Office (which provided essential administrative and logistical support) rated it as a great success. The training package included an opening session on conflict resolution conducted by a USIP-trained facilitator, followed by the SENSE simulation itself. As with earlier SENSE events in Iraq, this one generated intense interest by the Iraqis in having similar training workshops across their country.

In 2006, USIP successfully transferred to the Polish Academy of National Defense the capability of administering the SENSE simulation. By doing so, USIP was able to permit civil society and government leaders in countries that were once part of the Soviet Union or Warsaw Pact to benefit from this important conflict management tool. For their part, the Poles are expanding the use of the SENSE simulation to the Belarusians and intend to reach into the Caucasus by offering SENSE training to participants in Georgia in September and in Azerbaijan in October.

For more information on USIP's use of the SENSE simulation, visit:
http://www.usip.org/training/dynamic/program_list.php?id=30.