

**Statement of James A. Bever
Director, Afghanistan-Pakistan Task Force
U.S. Agency for International Development
Before The
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs**

**“Afghanistan and Pakistan: Resourcing the Civilian Surge.”
Tuesday, May 19, 2009**

Chairman Tierney, Ranking Member Flake, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today. I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this timely forum and to describe to you the United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID) plans to increase our civilian presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, USAID plays an important role in the Administration’s new, comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan by providing vital economic, development, and humanitarian assistance to the people in these two countries. Our current effort to add staff in both countries is essential to advance critical development goals that support the new strategy.

Today, I would like to detail USAID’s plan for resourcing the influx of civilian talent and experience to critical assignments in each country – from USAID’s mission offices in Kabul and Islamabad to the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) throughout Afghanistan and our FATA office in Peshawar, Pakistan. I will also describe how we will continue to integrate our work with other agencies, including the military, in order to achieve optimal results through our coordinated efforts.

USAID’s Plan for Resourcing an Increased Presence

USAID’s staffing plan reflects the resources that will be required to help implement the Administration’s new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, which definitively links U.S. policy for Afghanistan and Pakistan together in order to “disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country.”

USAID's additional staff will be stepping into assignments in a dangerous part of the world. We fully recognize the special challenges this situation presents, in terms of attracting and retaining qualified candidates, ensuring a safe and secure environment, and preparing new hires for the rigors of their assignments. Nevertheless, the civilians we are sending to these challenging positions are qualified individuals with extensive experience for their positions.

In Afghanistan, USAID has pledged to provide an additional 150 American staff. Of these, 45 will be located in Kabul, with the remainder deployed to directly support PRTs and expand reach into the district and provincial level. This will bring our total staffing level to the authorized level of 721 personnel in-country, including U.S. citizens and locally employed staff. The President's FY 2009 supplemental request includes \$100 million in Operating Expense (OE) funding to resource this staffing surge. We must fill these positions quickly with strong candidates to correspond with the new wave of 17,000 U.S. troops arriving in Afghanistan.

In Pakistan, USAID's program has grown from a \$200 million dollar a year cash transfer in Fiscal Year 2002 to an over \$1 billion dollar request in Fiscal Year 2010. To meet the demands of such a large program, USAID's approved U.S. and Foreign Service National staffing ceiling in Pakistan increased twice in the past year: once in July 2008 from 114 to 162 and again in January 2009, from 162 to the new level of 243. The President's FY 2009 supplemental request includes the support costs of these additional staff. Parallel to recruiting for these positions, we are pursuing the construction of additional office buildings to address space constraints.

We are well on our way to fulfilling our civilian staffing goals in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Additionally, I would also like to note that we are working to increase the numbers of locally employed staff. Serving at great personal risk to themselves and their families, these individuals provide critical support to our ongoing activities and serve as the institutional memory of USAID's Missions in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

USAID's overall staffing plans for Afghanistan and Pakistan are supported with a combination of Economic Support Funds (ESF) and OE funds enacted in the Fiscal Year 2009 Omnibus and requested in the President's the FY 2009 Supplemental..

Attracting and Recruiting Skilled Personnel

Mr. Chairman, we take the need for additional USAID staff in Afghanistan and Pakistan extremely seriously. This is why our plan for increasing civilian staff levels includes a variety of provisions to encourage service in these countries. We have announced to our entire Agency headquarters staff as well as all USAID missions worldwide that we are prepared to break or curtail assignments to allow current USAID foreign and civil service staff to serve in Afghanistan or Pakistan.

We have also put forward a wide array of incentives in our 2010 budget that we believe will help us attract the best candidates to these difficult assignments. These incentives include “priority consideration” for onward assignments, danger and hardship pay, leave for R&R (rest and recuperation), and a regional rest break. USAID also supports our employees in these difficult assignments by providing a hotline for assistance with problems ranging from mental health to financial troubles. In Afghanistan USAID employs an ombudsperson who can assist staff with issues regarding their service.

For positions that cannot be filled internally, we are taking a proactive approach to advertising open positions in order to attract and hire personnel with appropriate skill sets and experience. We have placed open and continuous job announcements on the FedBizOpps and USAJOBS websites for Personal Services Contractors and Foreign Service Limited employees. We recruit former Peace Corps Volunteers and former military – especially civil affairs specialists -- through their formal and informal publications and associations. Finally, we are reaching out to our Foreign Service and Civil Service retirees through alumni networks. The FY 2010 budget includes annuity waiver authority to help with the recruitment of our retirees to fill positions in these critical countries.

Thus far, in Afghanistan, we have been successful at identifying many American staff who have relevant experience and are familiar with Afghan culture and language. Fully 85 percent of our current PRT staff have had prior professional experience in Afghanistan or elsewhere in the Muslim world. Ten percent of our field program officers are proficient in an Afghan language.

Over the long term, USAID is aggressively increasing the capacity of its Foreign Service Officer corps (FSOs) through the Development Leadership Initiative (DLI). The FY 2009 enacted Omnibus included 300 new FSOs

under this initiative and the President's FY 2010 request includes an additional 350 Foreign Service positions through the DLI. A limited number of these new officers are already sufficiently experienced with USAID to take on the challenges of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and several have done so already; the remainder, by taking positions in other countries, will free up other, more seasoned officers to serve in these priority countries. In addition, new staff hired under the DLI will acquire the necessary training and experience over the next several years to assume these more challenging assignments in the future.

Concurrent with USAID's internal staffing increase, the Agency has a great force multiplier in the thousands of U.S. and other expatriate and local employees of our implementing partners and grantees in Afghanistan and Pakistan. These men and women, at great personal risk, provide a great service to USAID and to the multitude of ministries and non-governmental organizations with which they work.

Retention of Qualified Staff

Our plan for increasing USAID's presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan acknowledges that retaining qualified staff in difficult, stressful, and dangerous work environments can be a challenge. Over the years in Afghanistan, however, we have had limited success in recruiting tandem couples and in identifying Eligible Family Member (EFM) positions at post. We have also implemented provisions allowing USAID employees transferring to Afghanistan from an overseas post to keep their families at that post, minimizing disruptive moves. Thus far, this latter measure has contributed to a high rate of extension: nearly 75 percent of employees in Afghan PRTs elect to extend their assignments at least an additional six months. In addition, the FY 2010 budget includes language allowing the Agency to provide incentive pay for retention of staff in these countries.

Also under discussion is the development of support hubs in nearby countries, where certain staff may be able to be based. Ultimately, families of staff working in Afghanistan and Pakistan may be encouraged to reside in one of these hubs, which would be just a short flight away from post, and would create additional incentives for officers to serve two year tours. This model was followed during the Vietnam War.

Pre-Deployment Training for New Employees

As we carry out our plan to expand our USAID workforce in Afghanistan and Pakistan, it is important for new staff, especially staff newly hired to the USG, to receive common pre-deployment training. All USAID employees assigned to Afghanistan and Pakistan are required to attend the State Department's Foreign Affairs Counter Threat (FACT) course. From this training, employees are better positioned to anticipate and address security threats. New hires also participate in a one-week Afghanistan Familiarization Orientation Course. Finally, USAID direct hire employees must also complete the Serving Abroad for Families and Employees (S.A.F.E.) course, which includes relevant elements of two Department of State courses, the "Security Overseas Seminar (SOS)" and "Working in a U.S. Embassy."

A key lesson we learned from our experience in Iraq was the importance of joint training and orientation programs for PRT staff in order to provide the best possible preparation for new PRT employees so they can be effective members of their PRT teams from the first day of deployment. Consequently, if USAID staff assignments for Afghan PRTs coincide with certain military unit deployments, these staff have participated in the military's three-week predeployment training, which is offered at Camp Atterbury in Edinburg, Indiana. In addition, upon arrival in Afghanistan, our PRT staff and some Kabul-based staff from our technical support offices, are placed in the "COIN Academy," a one-week joint training program involving the U.S., Coalition, and Afghan militaries, NGOs, and others that emphasizes best practices in counterinsurgency. Finally, USAID staff assigned to PRTs also participate in Afghanistan PRT Orientation, a newly designed course delivered at the Foreign Service Institute, which focuses on sub-national governance in Afghanistan.

Interagency Coordination

The successful execution of USAID's plan to increase its presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan will require seamless coordination with not only the Department of State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security, but also our military colleagues to find security and mobility solutions that allow civilian and military personnel to carry out their missions. On that note, I would like to thank our Defense Department colleagues for the military's expert assistance thus far, and for their active support for increased civilian deployments throughout the country.

Areas for greater coordination with the military include: (1) integration of military and civilian missions where appropriate; (2) some re-prioritization of current activities; and (3) the allocation of additional security/mobility assets. USAID is working closely with our military and State Department colleagues to determine additional staff protection requirements and availability, and what will be necessary to allow civilians to effectively do their jobs, especially in highly kinetic environments such as Regional Commands South and East.

We support and are active participants in the civilian-military planning process facilitated by the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, with the help of S/CRS, through the Integrated Civilian-Military Action Group (ICMAG), which is integrating civil and military campaign plans for the country in order to facilitate the creation of a national plan that is focused on counter-insurgency.

Finally, I would like to point out that the increase in civilian staffing in Afghanistan is happening throughout the USG. Our colleagues with the Departments of State, Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Treasury, Justice and others have identified the need for increased civilian presence to support their respective missions in Afghanistan and are currently working to fill those positions. We have good collaboration among such civilian agencies. We are particularly engaged with the office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, under Ambassador Holbrooke's leadership. In addition, we look forward to working with our Inspector General, the Government Accountability Office, and the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, as appropriate.

I hope that this brief description of USAID's plan to increase our civilian staffing in Afghanistan and Pakistan has been helpful. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.