



June 23, 2010

The Honorable Richard Holbrooke
Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Subject: Open letter #4, Adequate staffing of the development assistance program in Pakistan¹

Dear Ambassador Holbrooke,

This is the fourth in our series of open letters on U.S. foreign assistance and development programs in Pakistan. As with our [previous letters](#), our aims are two-fold. We hope to assist a variety of audiences—in Congress, the policy and research community, and the general public both here and in Pakistan—to better understand the challenges the United States faces in supporting effective development programs in Pakistan. We also hope to make constructive suggestions on the planning and implementation of U.S. aid programs, to help you and your team in your critical work.

In this letter, I address the need for USAID to be strengthened in its staff capacity to design and deploy an effective development strategy. USAID is in the midst of a substantial build-up of personnel in both Afghanistan and in Pakistan. By the end of this fiscal year, USAID will have 245 staff on the ground in Pakistan—up 60 percent from this March—of which 53 will be American direct hires. However, we understand that the current plan is for the overwhelming majority of newly hired employees in Pakistan to be contract officers, tasked with monitoring and administering the increased spending levels in the country. We understand the need to guard against waste and corruption, as you emphasized in [your recent letter to Senator Kerry](#). However, we hope that with the shift towards a greater reliance on Pakistani institutions, more of the increase in USAID staffing can be concentrated on deployment of policy and program experts with substantial experience working in developing countries (including in close dialogue with recipient governments), and that as many of them as possible would have past experience in Pakistan itself.

Members of the CGD study group on a U.S. Development Strategy in Pakistan have several additional concerns about and suggestions for maximizing the benefits of the ongoing staffing surge.

1. To support the administration's new approach to promoting development in Pakistan, USAID-Pakistan needs an adequate number of on-site personnel with the sectoral expertise and sufficient in-country experience needed to engage in regular and substantive contacts with their Pakistani counterparts. To attract and retain these staff, moreover, they should be given real decision-making authority regarding policy and strategic as well as

¹ This open letter will be published on the Center for Global Development website (www.cgdev.org) and disseminated to relevant officials in the administration and Congress.

implementation issues. Ongoing policy dialogue and decision-making must not be jobs reserved solely for teams of expert visitors from Washington. To develop a cadre of officers with the deep, local knowledge critical in these positions, **we urge the creation of a formal long-term rotation of five years for USAID officers in Pakistan, similar to the Pentagon's Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands program.** It could be split into three 18 month tours—two in the field, one at headquarters—and would include significant investments in local language and cultural training. To allow AID officers to take on this long-term commitment, additional special allowances might be considered.² As is often repeated, the United States has made a long-term commitment in Pakistan. Now is the time to begin a serious investment in the staff expertise needed to deliver on that commitment.

In the short term, we understand it will be necessary to rely on personal services contractors to bridge the current gaps in USAID's local experience and expertise. These contracts are a means for the United States to tap into the large cohort of development professionals with experience in Pakistan outside of USAID. However, these contracts are a stopgap measure and are issued for only 6–12 months and capped at two years. Though they are not meant to substitute for the permanent staff USAID needs—in Pakistan and elsewhere—we wonder whether the administration should consider on a case-by-case basis relaxing the restrictions on the maximum duration of these contracts, to the extent some hires as personal services contractors could contribute in Pakistan to a greater degree of staff continuity.

2. Given the many constraints on USAID staffing, including one-year posts and limitations on mobility due to security concerns, the role of Locally Employed Staff is especially important. Pakistani nationals with technical expertise can provide needed continuity to the USAID mission, and can help maintain the relationships with Pakistani public officials needed to effectively support complex policy reforms. Because they have fewer limitations on movement within Pakistan, Locally Employed Staff can also help expand the geographical reach of the USAID mission and strengthen its monitoring capacity. **The administration should take immediate steps to address the constraints on USAID's ability to attract and retain highly qualified Pakistani staff, and to provide them with adequate opportunities for career development.** USAID should have greater flexibility to hire foreign national staff at higher levels and with more competitive salaries, to invest in their training, and to offer them attractive opportunities for career advancement.
3. Study group members are concerned that the current staffing of your team, which reasonably includes senior staff with a combination of security, diplomatic and development experience, is simply not adequate on the development side, especially when it comes to Pakistan. This is the case not only with respect to the daunting challenge of implementing a strategy on the ground, but especially with respect to the overall strategy itself, and the need to continually revisit and adjust that strategy in concert with the political leadership in Pakistan. We note as two examples that your one senior development advisor from USAID devoted solely to Pakistan has been deployed to the field and has not yet been replaced, and that neither of your two deputies has development expertise. **In discussions of U.S. strategy in Pakistan, a strong voice representing the development perspective—independent of security issues, and focused only on Pakistan, not Afghanistan—could be enormously helpful to you. A**

² As one example, we encourage USAID to move forward with the idea of regional support hubs where the families of AID officers deployed to non-accompanied postings could be based, as has been done in the past for dangerous assignments.

senior official in this role would ideally be a USAID officer, with prior experience in the field as well as in Washington on policy and strategic issues.

4. Finally, in my [second open letter to you](#), I suggested that you initiate regular forums on U.S. policy in Pakistan, perhaps modeled on the Pentagon's weekly Pakistan-Afghanistan Federation Forum. This would help to increase public understanding of U.S. strategy in Pakistan and might help temper unreasonable expectations of what our development spending can be expected to accomplish. I would only add now that such forums **would also serve as a valuable focal point for staff throughout the various agencies that work on our development programs in Pakistan to share information with each other and benefit from an open dialogue with outside experts.**³ In these forums, it is important to establish ground rules that ensure that development strategy in Pakistan is not lost in a sea of other pressing concerns. If this forum is to cover both Afghanistan and Pakistan issues, I suggest that every other session be solely on Pakistan and that at least every other Pakistan session focus solely on the strategy for and deployment of U.S. development assistance.

In short, the administration's staffing policy must catch up to the ambitious goals and the new approach to delivering aid contained in its assistance plans. The U.S. approach to aid in Pakistan is undergoing a fundamental shift—moving from contract administration to a more active partnership with Pakistani policymakers and private-sector stakeholders. It is vitally important to understand the ways in which this new strategy will require capacities from USAID that depart from what it has been asked to do in the recent past. In Pakistan and in Washington, the solution is not simply more people, but the right people supported by the right policies.

Sincerely,



Nancy Birdsall
President, Center for Global Development

Attachment: CGD Study Group on a U.S. Development Strategy in Pakistan

³ As we understand it, other established gatherings designed to foster interagency communication, such as weekly Monday evening 'shuras' and the Pakistan Afghanistan Federation Forum itself, are largely dominated by discussions of security policy and of Afghanistan.

CGD STUDY GROUP ON A U.S. DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY IN PAKISTAN*

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** Study group members serve in their individual capacity; their affiliations are shown for identification purposes only. While the open letter draws heavily on the views expressed in the working group meeting, individual members do not necessarily endorse all policy recommendations contained in the open letter.*