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Attacks Fail to Derail Afghan Aid

After a series of attacks killed and injured several USAID expatriate and Afghan contractors in Afghanistan's troubled southern provinces of Kandahar and Helmand, Agency officials reassured Afghan officials that U.S. aid programs would not be curtailed and that reconstruction and development assistance would continue in both the Afghan and American national interests.

"We owe it to our development implementing partners to work with them and our Afghan, U.S., and other NATO security agencies to work even harder to help protect against such attacks. But we and our partners are not walking away from this just because there are risks," said Jim Bever, head of the USAID Afghanistan/Pakistan Task Force. "These are heinous attacks on highly committed development aid workers. Such attacks are equally condemned by both the Afghan government and the Afghan people."

In mid-April, USAID's director in Afghanistan, William Frej, flew on the day after one of the attacks to meet with Kandahar

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Marja Farmers Clean Canals and Get Pumps After Fighting Ends

MARJA, Hilmand Province, Afghanistan—Only a month after the end of Operation Moshtarak, the U.S. and Afghan military push to evict Taliban fighters from this southern region, new District Governor Hajji Zaher has already met with elders.

Zaher invited them to join a USAID program that aims to stabilize the region, now that the Taliban have been defeated, by providing jobs, irrigation, and better seeds.

The governor explained to the local elders how the program—Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture (AVIPA) Plus—works.

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importance to the United States.

In Kabul, Shah met with U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, and top U.S. military and aid officials. He also held "all hands" meetings with USAID staff in Kabul and Islamabad, according to USAID's senior deputy director of the Afghanistan/Pakistan Task Force, Charles North, who accompanied Shah.

From Kabul, Shah flew April 9 to the volatile southern city of Kandahar to meet U.S. and local officials. He then flew to a forward operating base at Arghandab that was the scene of intense fighting last year before a change in U.S. tactics.

Previously, the U.S., NATO, and Afghan military had attacked and driven out Taliban insurgents, leaving the civilian aid team to follow up. Now, the transition from military to civilian stabilization activities are coordinated earlier on, North said.

Shah then went by armored vehicle to visit a USAID-funded project called AVIPA Plus, which is operated by International Relief & Development. It gives farmers vouchers for agriculture products, provides cash-for-work projects, and awards small grants to agribusinesses and community associations. (See article, "Marja Farmers Clean Canals and Get Pumps After Fighting Ends," this page.)

"Shah spent a lot of time talking directly to the farmers about seed varieties, pricing, and agriculture practices," North recalled.



Administrator Rajiv Shah visited the Afghan Technical Vocational Institute in Kabul, Afghanistan, April 10. Here he watches as women learn to tie rebar for a career in the construction trade.

Photo by Bruce Huffman, USAID

Shah talked to other Afghans about the AVIPA Plus program, especially the cash-for-work component that created hundreds of jobs clearing canals and building roads. He also spoke with farmers about the project spraying a soapy solution on pomegranates to kill harmful insects.

Back in Kabul, Shah visited a vocational training institute and a government media center to meet journalists.

In Islamabad April 11, Shah met with the U.S. Ambassador Anne Patterson, Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari, Punjab Gov. Salmaan Taseer, and Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif. He spoke of a long-term strategy for a U.S.-Pakistan partnership to develop the country, which has been beset with violence in recent months in tribal areas on the Afghan border as well as attacks in its major cities.

Some Pakistani officials raised concerns that U.S. drone attacks had killed civilians or

violated Pakistani sovereignty. They also accused U.S. aid programs of spending too much money on U.S. consultants. However, Shah assuaged their concerns by focusing on the need for a long-term strategic partnership to address Pakistan's priorities in energy, water, agriculture, and social services.

"Dr. Shah emphasized that USAID needs to change the way we work, to be a more effective and better partner with Pakistan, and do more with and through the Pakistani government—and to do so accountably," North said.

The Administrator also spoke about the importance of technology and innovation and how to rebuild the Agency. In addition, during his "all hands" meeting with mission staff in Islamabad, he stressed the importance of the Foreign Service Nationals or FSNs, saying that they are a major asset to USAID.

Shah told Pakistani reporters that U.S. aid would create jobs, especially in tribal areas. He noted that the quality of

education would be improved through teachers' training in Southern Punjab and other critical areas.

Shah, a medical doctor and former leader of health programs at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, said USAID would assist the health sector by building up professional institutions and by training women health workers, paramedical staff, and physicians. He also said that the Agency would invest in research at key agricultural universities and improve training of farmers.

The Administrator said that "President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton have launched a new strategic dialogue with Pakistan to make sure that our relationship is a broad and deep partnership defined by mutual respect and cooperation in a broad range of areas, especially energy, water, agriculture, education, and health sectors that are very important for development."★ — *B.B.*

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“Development projects have always been soft targets for insurgents throughout Afghanistan,” said deputy director Rebecca Black.

Provincial Gov. Tooryalai Wesa who said he was pleased the Agency would continue its development programs. New security measures would be put in place, Frej said.

“Development projects have always been soft targets for insurgents throughout Afghanistan,” said deputy director Rebecca Black. “We join President Karzai in condemning these senseless acts of violence, and extend our condolences to the victims and their families.”

The attacks come as U.S., NATO, and Afghan leaders agree that an expanded civilian aid program—paired with military success on the ground—is critical to prevent Taliban insurgents from reasserting control over the south, near the Pakistan border.

Attacks on civilian aid workers have become a hallmark of the Al Qaeda and Taliban insurgencies since 9/11. But the spate of recent attacks appears to

signal an effort to target the aid community, which works most closely with Afghans, and to isolate foreign aid efforts.

“It’s reflective of the viciousness of the anti-government and anti-democratic forces in the country and those who do not respect the rule of law and the constitution,” said Bever.

“As a result of the attacks, USAID is working diligently with other U.S. and Afghan government agencies to coordinate better and prevent such attacks in the future on our development partners.

“This also shows the real-world pragmatic need for our contractors and grantees to have, when necessary, their own security services until the Afghan national army and police can provide it.”

He said that contractors and grantees needing access to funds for security should ask USAID and “we will help them.” ★ —B.B.

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AVIPA promotes cooperation between farmers and government representatives, using agriculture to stabilize conflict-ridden areas.

Marja’s farmland is divided by canals—built by USAID in the 1950s—into areas that each have their own local council, or *shura*, and a community leader.

At the first meeting, the district governor told the elders that USAID will soon deliver 4,000 mobile water pumps through the program. The elders were asked to meet with their communities and to sign up participants.

“We are happy with the government,” said one of the elders as he sat in the *shura* tent outside the Marja District Center after the meeting. “We need these pumps to increase irrigation capacity. The district governor is asking us to take responsibility for this process.”

The 4,000 mobile water pumps will help farmers irrigate their fields using water from existing canals. The first distribution is set to begin towards the end of April once all registration

lists have been vetted by the district governor and the elders’ *shura*.

The governor also approved a number of AVIPA canal cleaning projects that will employ up to 4,000 laborers over the next several weeks.

“The security situation is still difficult,” said the governor. “But if we start with 100 laborers in a few blocks, other people will see this and they’ll want to participate. More and more will join each day.”

“In Marja, we have canals. We need to get them opened and water flowing. The pumps will ensure we are able to flood our fields more efficiently. Providing employment, seed, and fertilizer is the right way to start,” a *shura* member said.

Farmers are also being encouraged to form cooperatives through the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock to receive grants of farm tools.

“The fact that we are willing to come to the district center to listen to the governor,” an elder said, “shows we already feel things are getting better.” ★

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A farmer fetches corn from a mud silo at Janjori-Kukuo in Ghana. With USAID support, farmers in Ghana have improved their crop production as climate change puts additional stress on agricultural systems in Africa.

The Agency provides information to help prepare for the effects of climate change such as rising seas, storm surges, droughts, and unpredictable rain patterns.

“We are making our projects and activities more resilient to climate change,” Breed said.

Some crops, for example, may no longer be able to get the rain they need, or the rain may fall during flowering periods, which reduces fertilization. So experts are helping farmers breed crops that can thrive in new conditions such as heat, drought, and flooding. They also show farmers how to harvest water by building small structures to catch and hold water.

“The question one asks is if a place is going to be habitable in 10 or 15 years,” said Breed. A community may require a change in crops or practices, or even that people move away to survive.

Breed suggested looking at Phoenix, Ariz., in the southwestern United States where the water table fell from 6 feet to 400 feet below the surface in some areas as aquifers were tapped to supply a growing population. In the U.S. case, ample power allows lifting of water to meet needs, but even

here limits are increasingly apparent.

To help anticipate climate changes, USAID has set up geospatial observation centers with NASA and developing country institutions in Africa and Central America. The centers analyze satellite observations, historical data, local environmental information, and forecasts to help figure out how to adapt, manage the environment, and prepare for disasters.

The centers monitor changes in forests and land cover, greenhouse gas emissions, and red tides. They give advance warnings of thunderstorms, and identify places likely to be flooded.

The climate change experts also see an opportunity to “build settlements better” with improved drainage that can prevent flooding and water damage.

USAID also helps countries promote clean energy and make their utility sectors more profitable. Electricity is often subsidized in developing countries, which doesn’t make economic sense since it is typically the rich, with the highest rate of consumption, who reap the benefits.

“Over the next 50 years we need to cut emissions [of

greenhouse gases] by 50 percent from current levels,” said Breed. “We need ...clean technology. Although we need electricity, efficiency and conservation are part of the picture.”

USAID plans to help countries attract investment for clean development and enable their participation in carbon markets. The Agency is also working on pilot projects on carbon finance—paying people to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or increase carbon storage.

Protecting forests is a major factor in reducing climate change. In East Africa, USAID worked with 35,000 small-scale farmers to plant 4 million trees for carbon trapping, environmental benefits, and personal use. Farmers are paid for the carbon their trees take in and store.

U.S. funding for core international climate change efforts has grown from \$316 million in 2009 to more than \$1 billion in 2010 and reaches nearly \$1.4 billion in the administration request for 2011. USAID, the State Department, and the Treasury Department use this money to meet the challenges that come with a changing climate. ★