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## USDA chief plans for Afghanistan trip

By Jerry Hagstrom | *CongressDaily* | January 8, 2010

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack is planning a trip to Afghanistan as USDA ramps up efforts to promote agricultural development in the country.

At a news conference Thursday with U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Rajiv Shah and Richard Holbrooke, the special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Vilsack said agriculture development is the Obama administration's top nonmilitary priority in Afghanistan, with local officials leading the effort. He declined to give details on timing of the trip, but said it would be "soon."

"We will align our assistance and our help with the agricultural framework that has been recently announced by the Afghan government," Vilsack said.

Holbrooke emphasized that Afghanistan is dangerous for Vilsack and for civilians working there. "Civilians are not in the same environment as the military," he added. "They have to get out [of the protected zone] to do their work."

Vilsack said USDA has 54 people in Afghanistan, with 10 more on the way, and a budget of \$300 million per year. Many of them are paired with Afghan Agriculture Ministry officials, while others are working on projects ranging from improving crop productivity and export systems to saving watersheds and planting trees, he added.

Holbrooke noted the Obama administration has shifted strategy from poppy eradication to agricultural development. One hectare could generate \$2,500 in opium sales for an Afghan farmer, but the same land could bring \$3,000 to \$4,000 from apples and \$18,000 from table grapes, Vilsack said.

Vilsack, Shah and Holbrooke did not discuss whether USDA might be usurping USAID's traditional development role and undertaking the Afghan reconstruction effort at the expense of the USDA Foreign Agriculture Service's traditional mandate to sell U.S. products abroad.

FAS Administrator Michael Michener had been in charge of the U.S. effort, but after longtime agency officials criticized him for neglecting the agency's traditional work, he was reassigned in December to the U.S. embassy to the United Nations food agencies in Rome.



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Vilsack, Shah and Holbrooke emphasized that even though three civilian agencies -- State, USAID and USDA -- and the military are involved in the agriculture effort, they are taking a "one team, one mission" approach.

Holbrooke said USDA and USAID personnel in Afghanistan have been asked to keep their agency identification under wraps in part for that purpose. Both USDA and USAID leaders report to Ambassador Tony Wayne, who is "the senior director of operations," Holbrooke said.

At a separate event Friday, Holbrooke told the [Women's Foreign Policy Group](#) that the Obama administration plans to begin removing troops from Afghanistan in July 2011 as part of "a responsible transition" and that agricultural development will be a key determinant in whether Afghanistan can handle its security on its own.

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## US envoy says Afghanistan 'more than Karzai'

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Jan 8, 2010

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The US pointman on Afghanistan on Friday played down tensions with President Hamid Karzai, saying that the problems in the war-torn nation involved more than one man.

Richard Holbrooke, the special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, said he wanted to "get us away from the idea that there's this one-stop solution for an immensely complicated country."

"Let's not expect one man to solve the problems for the country. Historically Afghanistan, even in peacetime conditions, was not governed centrally," Holbrooke told a luncheon in Washington.

Holbrooke and other members of President Barack Obama's administration have had tense relations with Karzai and pressed him when he won a disputed election last year to crack down on what US officials saw as rampant corruption.

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AFP | AFP | US special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke speaks during an address to the [Women's Foreign Policy Gr...](#)

Holbrooke said Karzai pledged to do better but added that the leader could not "personally end corruption" in Afghanistan.

"What other leader in the world is held to the standard, including our own, of eliminating corruption because you're the head of the government? Corruption is a huge problem in Afghanistan," Holbrooke said.

"I understand why all of us focus on Hamid Karzai -- he speaks excellent English, he's charismatic, he's been in full American view now for eight years," he said. "But the government is a lot more than Hamid Karzai."

Holbrooke insisted he had a solid working relationship with Karzai, saying he had "great respect" for him and believed he was the legitimately elected president of Afghanistan.

But Holbrooke acknowledged the relationship was soured by opinion articles the veteran US diplomat wrote before Obama's election criticizing Karzai's record.

Karzai and Holbrooke had a widely recounted altercation during last year's election over US concerns about ballot-stuffing.

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## Team Obama scuttles the term "AfPak"

Posted by Josh Rogin ■ Wednesday, January 20, 2010 - 3:26 PM ■ [Share](#)



Haven't heard the term "AfPak" coming from senior administration officials lately? There's a good reason for that. The Obama team has jettisoned the term due to Pakistani ire, according to special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan **Richard Holbrooke**.

"We can't use it anymore because it does not please people in Pakistan, for understandable reasons," **Holbrooke told the Women's Foreign Policy Group** Jan. 8.

Those reasons apparently weren't all that understandable when Holbrooke coined the term and pushed its usage to government types and reporters alike. Also at the WFPO event, the *New York Times*' **Helene Cooper** explained how Holbrooke had advocated for the phrase that the government is now abandoning.

"Ambassador Holbrooke takes great pride in having invented the word 'AfPak,' Cooper said. "A few years ago, I was interviewing him for a piece I was working on in Afghanistan, and he kept going on, 'AfPak, AfPak, AfPak.' And it was just sort of like white noise, and I kept ignoring it, and I was like, 'Yeah, whatever.' I got off the phone and the next day he called me before my story had run, and he said, 'Your story really needs to use the word AfPak.' And I said, 'What are you going on about?' And he said, 'No, seriously: AfPak is going to be big.'"

And it was big. The joining of Afghanistan and Pakistan into "AfPak" was a main take-away of the Obama administration's first major policy review in March, which was run by Holbrooke, along with Under Secretary of Defense **Michèle Flournoy**, and former NSC staffer **Bruce Riedel**.

But Pakistanis hated the term from day one and griped about it in public and private.

"The Af-Pak terminology is disliked and has received strong criticism across Pakistan," the Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs **wrote in a recent report** on Pakistan. "The Pakistani intelligentsia is not pleased with a de-hyphenation of the Indo-Pak equation and the hyphenation of the Pak-Afghan calculus. The issue is not only one of national pride; there is a genuine concern among the strategic enclave that the permanence of the threat from India has not eroded... There is objectively no interest for Pakistan to be fully involved in what is happening outside its borders, namely in Afghanistan."

So I guess we can add "AfPak" to the growing list of terms the Obama administration won't likely be using in the near future, including the "Global War on Terror," "strategic reassurance," "honest budgeting," and maybe "comprehensive health-care reform." (Too soon?)

Holbrooke was in India Tuesday as part of his **whirlwind tour** of South Asia, where he said that Indian participation is crucial to the success of the region. The Indians **have made clear** that they don't want Holbrooke to have India in his portfolio, so don't expect the term "Af-Ind" to surface anytime soon.

AFP/Getty Images

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Josh Rogin reports on national security and foreign policy from the Pentagon to Foggy Bottom, the White House to Embassy Row, for *The Cable*.

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Fri Jan 8, 3:37 PM ET

US special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke speaks during an address to the [Women's Foreign Policy Group's](#) Luncheon at a hotel in Washington. Holbrooke on Friday played down tensions with President Hamid Karzai, saying that the problems in the war-torn nation involved more than one man.

(AFP/Mandel Ngan)