

GAO

Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee
on Near Eastern and South and Central
Asian Affairs, Committee on Foreign
Relations, U.S. Senate

May 2013

PAKISTAN

Reporting on Visa Delays That Disrupt U.S. Assistance Could Be Improved



Highlights of [GAO-13-427](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Pakistan is a key U.S. partner in the effort to combat terrorism and violent extremism. In fiscal years 2002 through 2012, Pakistan received more than \$26 billion in U.S. funding. To travel to Pakistan to implement and oversee programs, U.S. officials are required to obtain a Pakistani visa and, depending on the length of their stay, may need to apply for a visa extension once in Pakistan. U.S. officials have expressed concerns about delays in obtaining Pakistani visas. Congress has also expressed interest in receiving information on Pakistani visa delays, such as requiring that State and DOD certify information regarding timely issuance of visas to officials before providing or reimbursing certain funding for Pakistan.

GAO was asked to review issues related to visa delays. This report examines (1) the extent to which U.S. officials experience delays obtaining Pakistani visas and the effects of these delays and (2) steps U.S. agencies have taken to address Pakistani visa delays. GAO analyzed data on visa wait times, reviewed planning documents, and met with officials from DOD, DHS, DOJ, State, and USAID.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that State consult with U.S. agencies engaged in providing assistance to Pakistan to obtain information on visa delays and include this information in its reporting to Congress. State partially concurred, citing challenges with interagency coordination, but noted that GAO's report has prompted State to improve its tracking of visa applications to Pakistan government-wide.

View [GAO-13-427](#). For more information, contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr. at (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov.

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Reporting on Visa Delays That Disrupt U.S. Assistance Could Be Improved

What GAO Found

U.S. officials have experienced delays in obtaining Pakistani visas that disrupt the delivery and oversight of U.S. assistance to Pakistan. According to Pakistani Consular Services, and as confirmed by the Department of State (State), the goal of the embassy of Pakistan is to issue visas for U.S. officials within 6 weeks. GAO's analysis of data provided by State, the Departments of Defense (DOD) and Justice (DOJ), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) found that U.S. officials experience delays in the issuance of both visas to travel to Pakistan and visa extensions. For instance, GAO found that of about 4,000 issued visas, approximately 18 percent took more than 6 weeks, with approximately 3 percent taking 16 weeks or longer. Moreover, of approximately 2,200 visa extensions, about 59 percent took longer than 6 weeks to be issued, with approximately 5 percent taking 16 weeks or longer. U.S. officials stated that they receive little specific information from Pakistan on the reasons for visa delays, but they noted that visa delays disrupt the effective implementation and oversight of U.S. programs and efficient use of resources in Pakistan. Visa delays also have created staffing gaps for critical embassy positions, such as Regional Security Officers and Marine Security Guards, and have necessitated the cancellation of training to assist the Pakistani government in areas such as antiterrorism, counternarcotics, and law enforcement assistance.

Agencies have taken various steps to address Pakistani visa delays, but reporting to Congress does not provide comprehensive information on the risk of visa delays government-wide. The Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009 requires State to identify and report to Congress on a semiannual basis about risks to effective use and oversight of U.S. funds to Pakistan, such as any shortfall in U.S. human resources. In addition, federal standards for internal control state that once agencies identify a risk to their programs, they should collect and analyze information to allow them to develop better approaches to manage it. According to officials, agencies have taken various steps to manage visa delays and their effects. For instance, State has conducted high-level discussions with the Pakistani government regarding visa delays and has reprogrammed \$10 million budgeted for antiterrorism trainings in Pakistan, which were canceled due to visa delays, toward other priority initiatives. However, GAO found that State's reporting does not include comprehensive information on the risks of visa delays government-wide. State has reported to Congress that visa delays create challenges to the implementation of its programs in Pakistan. However, State's reports do not include information regarding the risks of visa delays to the human resources of other agencies, although components of DOD, DOJ, and USAID told GAO that they experience staffing gaps caused by visa delays. Reporting comprehensive information about the risks of visa delays could provide a more complete picture of the challenges that the United States faces in managing and overseeing U.S. assistance to Pakistan. More comprehensive reporting may also help to better inform any potential diplomatic discussions between the United States and Pakistan regarding visa delays.

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Abbreviations

DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DOD	Department of Defense
DOJ	Department of Justice
State	Department of State
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

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GAO

Accountability * Integrity * Reliability

United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

May 7, 2013

The Honorable Robert P. Casey, Jr.
Chairman
Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Pakistan is a key partner in U.S. efforts to combat terrorism and violent extremism, including efforts to defeat al Qaeda and other terrorist groups that have used Pakistan to plan attacks on the U.S. homeland and against U.S. and NATO personnel in Afghanistan. In fiscal years 2002 through 2012, Pakistan received more than \$26 billion in U.S. funding, including assistance to help the government overcome economic and security challenges that threaten its stability. However, U.S. officials implementing this assistance report encountering delays in obtaining visas to travel to Pakistan. For example, in May 2012, we reported that difficulties in obtaining visas for U.S. officials to travel to Pakistan had resulted in delays and cancellations of training classes on countering improvised explosive devices.¹ That same month, the Department of State (State) Office of Inspector General reported that U.S. officials operating in Pakistan were subjected to government-initiated obstructionism and harassment including delayed visa issuances.²

You requested that we review issues related to Pakistani visa delays, including their extent and implications. This report examines (1) the extent to which U.S. officials experience delays obtaining Pakistani visas and the effects of these delays and (2) steps U.S. agencies have taken to address Pakistani visa delays.

¹GAO, *Combating Terrorism: State Should Enhance Its Performance Measures for Assessing Efforts in Pakistan to Counter Improvised Explosive Devices*, [GAO-12-614](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 15, 2012).

²U.S. Department of State and Broadcasting Board of Governors Office of Inspector General, *Compliance Followup Review of Embassy Islamabad and Constituent Posts, Pakistan* (Washington, D.C.: May 2012).

To evaluate the extent to which U.S. officials experience delays in obtaining Pakistani visas, and the effects of these delays, we collected available data on processing times for official and diplomatic visa applications to Pakistan in fiscal years 2010 through 2012 from components of State; the Departments of Defense (DOD), Homeland Security (DHS), and Justice (DOJ); and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). To assess the reliability of these data, we interviewed agency officials responsible for compiling these data and performed basic reasonableness checks of the data for obvious inconsistency errors and completeness. When we found discrepancies, we brought them to the attention of relevant agency officials and worked with the officials to correct the discrepancies before conducting our analyses. According to agency officials, these data may not include all visa applications to Pakistan, because U.S. officials may not have always involved agency travel offices in processing their applications. Despite these limitations, we determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purpose of making broad statements about Pakistan's visa processing times for U.S. officials. We determined visa processing times by comparing the date of each visa application with the date the agency received the visa. We defined a delay as a processing time exceeding 6 weeks, because, according to the embassy of Pakistan, the stated processing time for visas for U.S. officials is within 6 weeks of their application date. Further, to discuss the effects of Pakistani visa delays on the delivery and oversight of U.S. assistance in Pakistan, including assistance implemented by U.S. contractors, we examined agency planning, budget, and oversight documents discussing visa delays and interviewed DOD, DHS, DOJ, State, and USAID officials. To examine the steps U.S. agencies have taken to address Pakistani visa delays, we reviewed relevant documents from DOD, DHS, DOJ, State, and USAID, including planning and budget documents, available data on visa processing times, and letters of agreement. We also conducted interviews with knowledgeable officials to determine the steps agencies had taken to address the visa delays that they had identified. We compared these steps with risk assessment standards in our *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*.³ In addition, we examined semiannual reports that were prepared by State and submitted to Congress in compliance with the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act

³GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 1, 1999).

of 2009,⁴ to determine the extent to which these reports include information regarding the risks of visa delays affecting U.S. assistance to Pakistan. The government of Pakistan did not respond to our requests to discuss visa delays for U.S. officials. See appendix I for a complete description of our scope and methodology.

We conducted this performance audit from August 2012 to May 2013 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

U.S. Assistance to Pakistan	Pakistan is central to U.S. efforts to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and deny its resurgence in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. The United States has sought to secure these interests through counterterrorism and counterinsurgency cooperation with Pakistan as well as through a long-term partnership anchored, in part, by civilian and military assistance. In fiscal years 2002 through 2012, the U.S. government provided the Pakistani government more than \$26 billion in assistance and reimbursements toward these goals. ⁵ To achieve U.S. goals, multiple U.S. agencies provide assistance to Pakistan. Table 1 summarizes example activities of key U.S. agencies providing this assistance.
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⁴Pub. L. No. 111-73 (Oct. 15, 2009).

⁵The \$26 billion provided to Pakistan in fiscal years 2002 through 2012 includes about \$15 billion in U.S. assistance and about \$11 billion in reimbursements for Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts in direct support of U.S. military operations.

Table 1: Key U.S. Agencies' Roles and Activities in Pakistan

U.S. agency	Roles and example activities
State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads the U.S. mission in Pakistan. Provides economic, humanitarian, and security assistance to Pakistan, including activities such as aviation and counternarcotics programs, police assistance and training programs in partnership with DOJ, and antiterrorism assistance training programs.
DOD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staffs the Office of the Defense Representative Pakistan, which promotes U.S. security goals by assisting counterinsurgency efforts by the Pakistani military, conducting security cooperation and assistance activities, and maintaining relationships with the Pakistani military.
DHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducts border management and customs investigation training.
DOJ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assists with counternarcotics and police training programs, with staff from the Drug Enforcement Administration and International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program, respectively. Liaises with principal law enforcement and security services to conduct its responsibilities in combating criminal matters, such as international terrorism. Provides training opportunities for prosecutors.
USAID	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducts a variety of assistance programs focused on improving energy management, enhancing economic growth, stabilizing communities, expanding education, and improving health and well-being. USAID also works to enhance accountable governance and gender equity in Pakistan.

Source: GAO analysis of agency documents and interviews.

We have previously reported on U.S. assistance to Pakistan, including certification requirements and oversight of civilian assistance.⁶ For more information, please see the list of related GAO products at the end of this report.

Process of Obtaining a Pakistani Visa or Visa Extension for U.S. Officials

To enter and exit Pakistan, U.S. citizens—including U.S. government personnel traveling on official business—must hold a valid passport and a valid Pakistani visa. Visas must be obtained at a Pakistani embassy or consulate prior to entry into Pakistan. According to State, those arriving in Pakistan without a valid passport or visa are subject to fine, arrest, incarceration, or deportation.

According to State, to obtain a visa for official and diplomatic travel to Pakistan, U.S. government personnel must complete a visa application form issued by the government of Pakistan and obtain a visa request

⁶See GAO, *Pakistan Assistance: Relatively Little of the \$3 Billion in Requested Assistance Is Subject to State's Certification of Pakistan's Progress on Nonproliferation and Counterterrorism Issues*, [GAO-11-786R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jul. 19, 2011); and *Department of State's Report to Congress and U.S. Oversight of Civilian Assistance to Pakistan Can Be Further Enhanced*, [GAO-11-310R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 17, 2011).

letter. The visa application form requests information on an applicant's reasons for visiting Pakistan, employment and family background, and passport details, among other information.⁷ The visa request letter, issued by State or the applicant's sponsoring agency, includes information such as the applicant's full name, dates of travel, and purpose of travel, among other information. Additionally, U.S. government personnel must have a valid official or diplomatic passport and provide passport photos. Some U.S. government officials are also required to provide additional documentation. For instance, U.S. military personnel must submit, with their application package, documentation from the Pakistani government, known as either a non-objection certificate or a letter of invitation, acknowledging their travel.⁸

U.S. agencies have various components that assist U.S. government personnel with obtaining a visa for travel to Pakistan. These components may assist U.S. officials by reviewing their visa applications for errors and submitting completed visa applications to the Pakistani embassy on the applicants' behalf. Table 2 provides information on the principal components that assist U.S. officials in obtaining Pakistani visas.

⁷Other information on the visa application includes the duration of the applicant's stay in Pakistan, the applicant's travel history, and the applicant's address and contact details.

⁸According to DOD's Foreign Clearance Guide for travel to Pakistan, non-objection certificates are issued by the Pakistani agency or organization hosting the U.S. military official, while letters of invitation are issued by the Joint Pakistani Staff Headquarters.

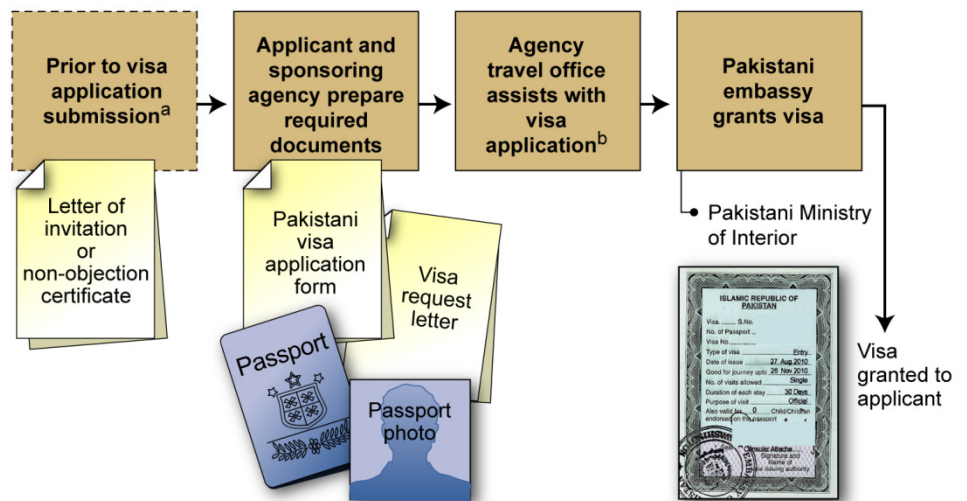
Table 2: Principal U.S. Agency Components That Assist U.S. Officials in Obtaining Pakistani Visas

U.S. agency	Component	Description
State	Orientation and In-Processing Center	Processes visa applications for U.S. officials filling an assigned position in Pakistan for greater than 6 months or those traveling under orders funded by State's Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs.
	Pakistan Desk, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs	Assists in processing visa applications for selected State officials traveling to Pakistan. May assist in drafting visa request letters for applicants.
	Special Issuance Agency	Processes visas applications for State personnel and facilitates visa applications for U.S. officials from across the U.S. government.
	U.S. embassy in Islamabad	Processes applications for visa extensions for U.S. officials posted to Pakistan who are accredited to the U.S. mission.
DOD	Passport Matters	Works with the Liaison Office of the Office of Defense Representative Pakistan to assist in processing visa applications for DOD personnel.
DHS	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations	Offices of International Affairs in these components process visa applications for DHS personnel.
	U.S. Customs and Border Protection	
DOJ	Drug Enforcement Administration	Headquarters staff from these components process visa applications for DOJ personnel.
	Federal Bureau of Investigation	
	International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program	
	Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training	
USAID	Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs	Processes visa applications for USAID personnel traveling to Pakistan.

Source: GAO analysis of agency interviews and documents.

Completed visa applications are submitted to the Pakistani embassy. According to State, the Pakistani embassy in Washington, D.C., issues visas for U.S. government personnel traveling to Pakistan based on clearances obtained from the Pakistani Ministry of Interior. Figure 1 provides an overview of the visa application process.

Figure 1: Process of Applying for a Pakistani Visa



Source: GAO analysis of agency documents and interviews; Nova Development (clip art).

^aLetter of invitation or non-objection certificate is required only for some U.S. government personnel, such as U.S. military personnel.

^bAgencies provide assistance when requested; however, agency officials told us that U.S. government personnel traveling to Pakistan may not always involve agency travel offices in processing their applications.

Visas provided to U.S. officials specify, among other things, the expiration date of the visa as well as the number of entries into Pakistan, and the length of each stay that the visa allows. For instance, a visa may allow a U.S. official a single entry into Pakistan over a period of 30 days; the U.S. official using this visa could make one entry at any time during the 30 days covered by the visa. Alternatively, a visa may allow a U.S. official multiple entries into Pakistan for 1 year, with a maximum stay of 90 days at a time. The U.S. official using this visa could enter and exit Pakistan multiple times during the 1 year period but could not stay longer than 90 days on any visit. Figure 2 shows Pakistani visas for various numbers of visits and durations of stays.

Figure 2: Official Pakistani Visas



Source: GAO documents.

Once in Pakistan, U.S. government personnel must monitor their visa status to ensure that they are in compliance with Pakistani immigration regulations. Depending on the type of visa they receive, U.S. government personnel may need to seek a visa extension once in Pakistan. According to State, the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs grants the visa extension, which authorizes a U.S. official to legally extend his or her stay in Pakistan. The U.S. embassy in Islamabad assists U.S. government personnel in Pakistan in submitting requests for visa extensions.

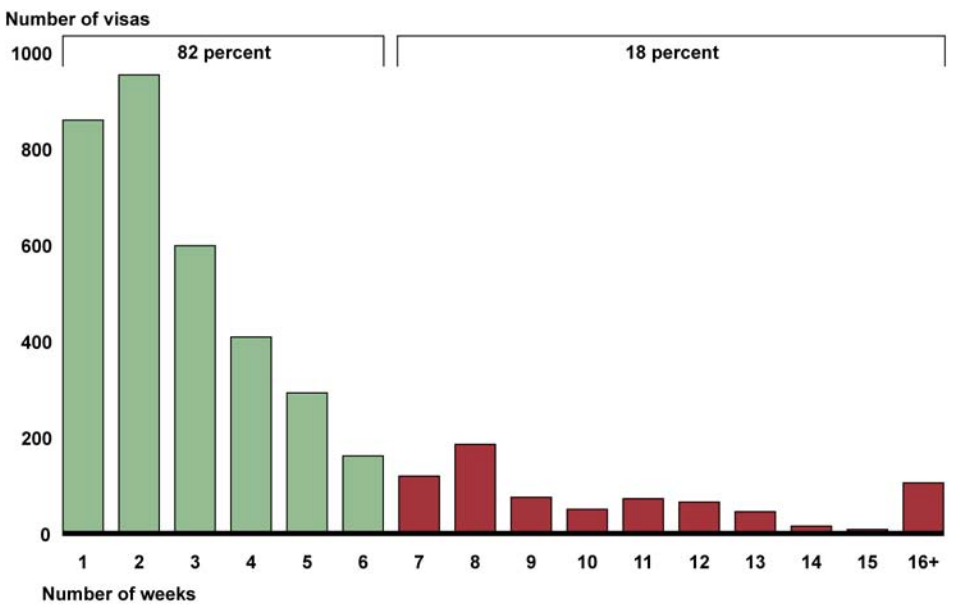
U.S. Officials Experience Delays in Obtaining Pakistani Visas, Which Disrupt Implementation and Oversight of U.S. Assistance to Pakistan

Available agency data show that U.S. officials experience delays in the issuance of both visas for travel to Pakistan and visa extensions, which have affected the implementation and oversight of U.S. assistance to Pakistan. Agencies reported that these delays affect the implementation of U.S. programs in multiple ways—for example, creating staffing gaps for critical embassy positions and necessitating the cancellation of training to assist the Pakistani government in areas such as antiterrorism and counternarcotics.

Data Show Delays in the Issuance of Pakistani Visas to U.S. Officials

Our analysis of available agency data shows that U.S. officials have experienced delays in obtaining Pakistani visas. According to the Pakistani embassy, and as reported by State, the embassy’s policy is to issue visas for U.S. officials within 6 weeks of their application date. We obtained data from components of DOD, DOJ, State, and USAID on processing times for U.S. officials’ applications for official or diplomatic Pakistani visas in fiscal years 2010 through 2012.⁹ Our analysis of these data shows that approximately 82 percent of visas for U.S. officials were issued within 6 weeks or less. However, about 18 percent of the visas took longer than 6 weeks to be issued, with approximately 3 percent taking 16 weeks or longer. See figure 3 for more information.

Figure 3: Processing Times for U.S. Officials’ Applications for Pakistani Visas, Fiscal Years 2010-2012



Source: GAO analysis of data from components of DOD, DOJ, State, and USAID.

Note: Not all agency components provided data for the entire period of fiscal years 2010 through 2012. Please see Appendix I for more information on our objectives, scope, and methodology.

Processing time for issued visas varies depending on the agency or component submitting applications. For instance, for visas issued by the

⁹See appendix I for additional information about our analysis.

Pakistani embassy, processing took more than 6 weeks for about 4 percent of applications submitted by USAID's Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs, compared with approximately 33 percent of applications submitted by State's Orientation and In-Processing Center.

Moreover, according to U.S. officials, an analysis of issued visas may underestimate the extent of visa delays. First, it may exclude cases in which a visa was not issued, including cases where (1) an individual withdrew a visa application because the visa was not received prior to the planned departure date or (2) a visa application that had taken longer than 6 weeks to process was still pending at the Pakistani embassy at the time of our analysis.¹⁰ For instance, from November 2009 to June 2012, State's Special Issuance Agency pulled about 180 passports—representing approximately 10 percent of the Pakistani visa applications that it submitted during this period—from the Pakistani embassy without visa issuance, including approximately 140 passports that the agency pulled after a visa was not issued prior to the individual's planned departure date.¹¹ Further, an analysis of visa processing time may not include delays that certain DOD officials face in obtaining non-objection certificates and letters of invitation required for their visa applications. For instance, DOD officials told us that obtaining this documentation takes approximately 6 weeks and that visa applications for DOD personnel are submitted only after a non-objection certificate or letter of invitation has been obtained. Therefore, visa delays that DOD personnel may experience are in addition to the wait time to obtain a non-objection certificate or letter of invitation. For instance, DOD officials told us that in addition to waiting 4 to 6 weeks to obtain a Pakistani visa, some DOD travelers have waited months for the documentation that must accompany the visa application.

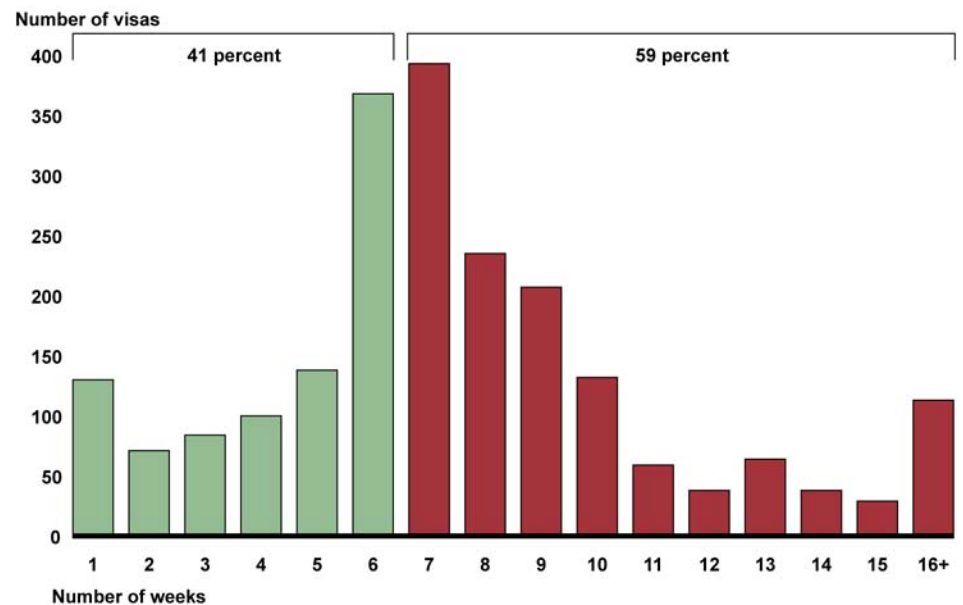
U.S. officials also experience delays in obtaining visa extensions after arrival in Pakistan. The U.S. embassy in Islamabad monitors the visa status of U.S. officials accredited to the U.S. mission in Pakistan and processes applications for any required visa extensions for these officials.

¹⁰Officials from State and DOD told us that the Pakistani embassy does not deny visas in practice, but may take no action on issuing a visa to the extent that a traveler may request the return of his or her passport.

¹¹Officials from State's Special Issuance Agency cautioned that they do not record the reason that a passport was pulled and that it is not possible to conclude that visas would not have been issued in all cases.

According to State, visa extensions are granted by the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Between 2010 and 2012, the U.S. embassy processed applications for approximately 2,200 visa extensions for U.S. officials in Pakistan. Approximately 59 percent of these visa extensions took longer than 6 weeks to be issued, with approximately 5 percent taking 16 weeks or longer. See figure 4 for more information.

Figure 4: Processing Times for Pakistani Visa Extensions Issued to U.S. Officials, 2010-2012



Source: GAO analysis of data from U.S. Embassy Islamabad.

Additionally, data from the U.S. embassy in Islamabad show that it never received approximately 50 visa extensions for which it had applied. U.S. officials told us that in some of these cases, the applicants experienced such a lengthy delay in receiving their visa extensions that they decided to leave Pakistan rather than overstay their initial visa while waiting for the extension.

In addition to reporting delays related to obtaining visas for U.S. officials, agencies noted challenges in obtaining visas for contractors assisting in

implementing programs for U.S. agencies in Pakistan.¹² For instance, State's Antiterrorism Assistance Program and DOJ's International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program rely on contractor staff to provide training to Pakistani law enforcement personnel. However, both agencies noted delays in obtaining visas for these instructors. For example, State reported that it applied for approximately 40 instructor visas for its Antiterrorism Assistance Program between October and December 2012 but that no instructors received visas in time to provide instruction as planned. Similarly, officials of DOJ International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program told us that they have experienced delays in obtaining visas for their contractor staff. According to State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Office of Aviation for Pakistan, it has experienced delays in obtaining contractor visas, including one visa that it applied for in October 2010 and that was still pending as of January 2013. In addition, as of February 2013, State told us it had experienced visa wait times of longer than 6 weeks for approximately 30 facilities maintenance contractors overseeing reconstruction of the U.S. embassy in Islamabad.

Reasons for the delays in processing Pakistani visas are not well understood. Officials from DOD, DOJ, State, USAID, and the U.S. embassy in Islamabad said that they receive little specific information from Pakistan on the reasons for visa delays. Officials from those agencies stated that factors in the bilateral relationship between the United States and Pakistan appear to affect the length of visa processing.

Agencies Have Reported Multiple Effects of Visa Delays on Program Implementation and Oversight in Pakistan

Agencies have identified visa delays as a risk to effective implementation of U.S. programs in Pakistan. Agencies noted that visa delays cause staffing gaps, limit opportunities to train Pakistani security personnel, constrain oversight and monitoring of U.S. programs, and complicate program planning and implementation.

First, according to DOD, DHS, DOJ, State, and USAID officials, visa delays cause staffing gaps for positions at the U.S. embassy in Islamabad, including those providing security and law enforcement assistance to Pakistan. For example, DOD officials told us that visas for

¹²U.S. officials told us that contractors generally travel to Pakistan using personal passports rather than official or diplomatic passports.

key positions have been significantly delayed. Specifically, DOD officials noted that the visa for the training officer for the International Military Training and Education program in Pakistan was delayed for several months, during which the position was vacant.¹³ Additionally, they told us that two individuals scheduled to staff the Defense Attaché Office waited approximately 8 months for their visas and were ultimately reassigned because of the delays. State officials also noted staffing gaps due to delays in obtaining visas for security staff and staff managing counternarcotics and law enforcement programs. According to State officials, visa delays particularly affect Regional Security Office and Marine Security Guard staff, who provide protection for the U.S. embassy in Islamabad. State noted that visas for approximately 40 Regional Security Officers and Marine Security Guards were significantly delayed, some for as long as 9 months. Officials told us that such delays can lead to staffing gaps and that these gaps cannot always be filled by obtaining personnel on temporary assignment. Moreover, because embassy staffing plans are designed to align the number of staff with U.S. foreign policy priorities, security concerns, and other constraints, staffing gaps can undermine this alignment. See table 3 for additional examples of staffing gaps at the U.S. embassy in Islamabad that have resulted from visa delays.

¹³The International Military Education and Training program was established to provide military education and training to foreign security forces, see GAO, *International Military Education and Training: Agencies Should Emphasize Human Rights Training and Improve Evaluations*, [GAO-12-123](#), (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 27, 2011).

Table 3: Examples of Staffing Gaps at U.S. Embassy in Islamabad Resulting from Visa Delays

U.S. agency	Types of positions where staffing gaps have occurred	Position description
State	Regional Security Office staff	Advises ambassador or chief of mission on all security issues and coordinates all aspects of mission's security program. Develops and implements security programs to protect U.S. employees from terrorist, criminal, and technical attacks.
	Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Counternarcotics Advisor • Corrections Advisor • Police Advisor for Sindh province 	Oversees criminal justice programs to support the government of Pakistan's efforts to improve law enforcement, rule-of-law, corrections, and counternarcotics sectors.
DOD	Marine Security Guard staff	Works with State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security to protect U.S. mission in Pakistan. Stands duty at U.S. embassy and ensures emergency communications are properly routed during times of emergency or heightened alert.
	Office of the Defense Representative Pakistan Security Assistance Office staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Military Education and Training Recruitment Officer 	Guides and implements U.S. security assistance in Pakistan and conducts military exchange programs that enable Pakistan's military officers to study temporarily at U.S. military schools.
	Defense Attaché Office staff	Maintains military-to-military contact with Pakistani counterparts.
DOJ	Resident Legal Advisor	Represents DOJ in establishing and maintaining relationships with Pakistani law enforcement and government officials, including prosecutors and judges. Works with State to help develop and implement tailored criminal justice assistance programs in Pakistan.
DHS	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Homeland Security Investigations Attaché	Serves as DHS liaison to Pakistani government. Coordinates investigations with Pakistani law enforcement, and provides training and capacity building.
USAID	USAID Office of Inspector General staff	Conducts investigations and audits of USAID assistance programs in Pakistan.

Source: GAO interviews with officials and analysis of documents from State, DOD, DOJ, DHS, and USAID.

In addition, according to agency officials, visa delays and related staffing gaps have limited their opportunities to train Pakistani security personnel. The officials said that the delays in obtaining visas for instructors scheduled to train Pakistani officials have caused agencies to postpone or cancel training in a variety of areas, including antiterrorism, counternarcotics and law enforcement, use and maintenance of military equipment, and countering improvised explosive devices. For example, in the first quarter of fiscal year 2013, State's Antiterrorism Assistance program canceled 14 of 31 classes on critical management topics, such as tactical, negotiation, and investigation skills in combating terrorism, because of delays in obtaining visas for instructors. In addition, State continued to operate and maintain its training facility in Pakistan for the

Antiterrorism Assistance program, although the classrooms were empty because of canceled trainings. Moreover, officials at State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs told us that visa delays have disrupted the delivery of law enforcement and rule-of-law assistance to Pakistan's criminal justice sector. According to these officials, the bureau has provided Pakistan with 17 aircraft for counternarcotics assistance at a value of \$50 million. However, officials at the bureau's Office of Aviation for Pakistan told us that in June 2010 and November 2012, respectively, the office placed three C-208 aircraft and six Huey-II helicopters in storage owing to a shortage of personnel in Pakistan that had resulted from visa delays. According to these officials, this personnel shortage limited the office's ability to train Pakistanis and perform aircraft inspections and repairs necessary for the proper use of the equipment.¹⁴ In addition, State officials noted that they had canceled police and rule-of-law training because of visa delays. DOD officials noted similar cancellations of counternarcotics training, and several agencies noted cancellation of training on countering improvised explosive devices. DOJ International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program officials told us that delays in obtaining visas for instructors were so pervasive that the program would be forced to reduce training after March 2013, unless it receives new visas for its instructor staff.

Moreover, visa delays have reportedly constrained oversight and monitoring of U.S. programs in Pakistan. Officials from Inspectors General for USAID, State, and DOD's U.S. Central Command stated that visa delays have disrupted inspections and audits. State and USAID officials also noted that visa delays create challenges for conducting monitoring and evaluation of program assistance, including monitoring and evaluation of antiterrorism and development programs. For instance, according to State officials, an assessment and evaluation of the Pakistan Antiterrorism Assistance program in June 2012 was delayed when several team members were unable to participate in the trip because their visas were not issued in a timely manner. DHS officials also told us that because of visa delays, DHS cannot conduct an audit of the inventory of supplies or replace outdated nonintrusive inspection technology used for the Secure Freight Initiative in Pakistan, which captures data on

¹⁴According to officials from State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, the backlog of Air Wing visas was resolved after three months of consultation with the Pakistani Ministry of Interior.

containers bound for the United States and alerts U.S. and Pakistani officials of security risks.

Further, even when visa delays do not lead to staffing gaps, the delays complicate program planning and implementation, according to agency officials. Regarding planning, DOD, State, and USAID officials noted that visa delays create challenges planning travel to Pakistan, as it is not unusual for U.S. officials to receive visas very close to the day of their planned departure. Visa delays also slow program implementation. USAID officials stated that visa delays can affect programs in Pakistan by slowing the arrival of technical experts needed to assist with project design and implementation. Similarly, DOJ International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program officials told us that visa delays make it very challenging for them to plan courses and training schedules.

Additionally, officials told us that the issuance of visas with travel restrictions can also create challenges and increase project costs. For instance, according to officials from USAID, various types of visas received by U.S. officials create challenges for staff once they are in Pakistan, as they must constantly monitor their visa status and may have to leave Pakistan to reset their visas in compliance with Pakistani immigration regulation. For example, U.S. officials in Pakistan with visas that allow multiple entries for 1 year, with a maximum stay of 90 days at a time, must exit Pakistan every 90 days to reset their visas. USAID's Office of Inspector General estimated that it has spent approximately \$25,000 in additional travel costs due to delays in receiving visa extensions for staff traveling on visas that require a reset every 90 days. In addition, State officials told us that they have experienced challenges in obtaining 1-year multi-entry visas for staff providing oversight of construction on the U.S. embassy compound in Islamabad. According to State, the need for staff to reset their short-term visas limits the efficiency of embassy construction and adds to the cost of the project. For instance, State reported in May 2012 that these disruptions added approximately \$2 million to the project's overall cost.

Agencies Have Taken Various Steps to Address Pakistani Visa Delays, but Reporting on These Delays Could Be Improved

Agencies have taken various steps to address Pakistani visa delays, but reporting to Congress does not provide comprehensive information on the risk of visa delays government-wide. The Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009 requires State, in consultation with DOD, to identify and report to Congress about risks to effective use and oversight of U.S. funds, including any shortfall in U.S. human resources, among other things. In addition, according to federal standards for internal control, analyzing information on identified risks could help agencies better manage such risks. According to officials, agencies have taken various steps to manage visa delays and their effects. For instance, State has conducted high-level discussions with the Pakistani government regarding visa delays, and agencies affected by Pakistani visa delays have shifted training to other countries. However, State's reporting to Congress does not provide comprehensive information on the risk of visa delays government-wide. State has reported visa delays as a challenge to the implementation of its programs. However, State's reports do not include information regarding the risks of visa delays to the human resources of other agencies, although components of DOD, DOJ, and USAID told us that they had experienced staffing gaps caused by visa delays. Reporting comprehensive information about the risks of visa delays could provide a more complete picture of the challenges to implementing U.S. assistance and better inform any potential diplomatic discussions between the United States and Pakistan regarding delays.

Agencies Have Taken Steps to Address Visa Delays

Agencies have taken steps to address the effects of delays on their operations, including reprogramming funds for other priority initiatives, shifting training to other countries, and tracking information on the status of obtaining Pakistani visas and visa extensions. According to federal standards for internal control, analyzing information on identified risks could help agencies better manage such risks. See table 4 for more examples of steps that agencies reported having taken to address the effects of visa delays on their operations.

Table 4: Examples of Steps Agencies Reported They Have Taken to Address Effects of Visa Delays

Mitigation step	Agency example
Track staff's visa wait times and visa status ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DOD's Office of the Defense Representative Pakistan analyzed information on staff's processing times for obtaining non-objection certificates, letters of invitation, and Pakistani visas, to calculate total average wait times that staff should anticipate. DOJ's International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program tracks instructors' visa status to determine instructors' availability to travel to Pakistan and to ensure that they do not overstay their visas once in Pakistan.
Provide additional guidance or assistance to applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State's Orientation and In-Processing Center advises Foreign Service and Diplomatic Security staff to apply for a Pakistani visa 4 and 6 months, respectively, before their scheduled date of departure to Pakistan. DOD's Office of the Defense Representative Pakistan advises staff to apply for a Pakistani visa more than 2 months earlier than guidance from the Pakistani embassy recommends.
Reprogram funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In fiscal year 2011, State reprogrammed \$10 million of \$20 million in Antiterrorism Assistance training funds intended for Pakistan, to support other initiatives such as counterterrorism in Somalia and law enforcement in Tunisia.
Relocate training to another country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2012, DOD relocated counternarcotics training to Bahrain. In 2012, DOJ Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training relocated training to Dubai.
Rely on local Pakistanis to help implement activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Locally employed staff in Pakistan assist State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs in the delivery and monitoring of its programs.

Source: GAO interviews with officials and analysis of documents from State, DOD, and DOJ.

^aDOJ's International Criminal Investigative and Training Assistance Program tracks the status of contractors' visas.

In addition to taking steps to address the effects of visa delays, officials at State—the agency responsible for conducting diplomatic discussions with Pakistan—told us that they had engaged in high-level discussions with Pakistani officials in an attempt to expedite visa processing times for U.S. officials. State officials noted that mission leadership in Pakistan have raised the issue of visa delays, and particular staffing gaps at the U.S. embassy that have resulted from delays, with Pakistani ministerial personnel. The U.S. Secretary of State has also discussed visa delays with the Pakistani Foreign Minister to try to resolve the issue. State officials told us State will continue to discuss these issues with Pakistan as warranted by events.

While operations generally continue, agencies noted that their mitigation actions do not fully resolve the effects of visa delays and that they cannot implement programs as effectively or efficiently. Staff from the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs said that although they take steps to deliver assistance despite visa delays, the difficulty in maintaining the continuous presence of in-country staff reduces readily

available subject matter expertise, slows interaction with Pakistani officials, and lessens the ability to quickly increase staff to address emerging needs. Regarding efficiency, DOD staff said that shifting training to third-country locations raises costs significantly, including costs for airlifting Pakistani personnel and providing funds for insurance and other incidental needs, and results in the training of fewer Pakistani personnel. DOJ's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training staff similarly noted that although relocating training has had a positive outcome, it has incurred higher costs for the U.S. government.

**Reporting to Congress
Does Not Provide
Comprehensive
Information on the Risks
of Pakistani Visa Delays
Government-wide**

In reporting to Congress, State has not provided comprehensive information on the risks of Pakistani visa delays government-wide. The Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009 requires State, in consultation with DOD, to identify and report on a semiannual basis to Congress about risks to effective use and oversight of U.S. funds to Pakistan, including any shortfall in U.S. human resources, among other things. In compliance with the act, State has produced semiannual monitoring reports describing the assistance provided to Pakistan during the preceding 180-day period. State's report for the period of March 2010 to December 2010 did not cite visa delays as a risk to its programs. In its reports covering January 2011 to November 2011 and December 2011 to June 2012, State broadly cited challenges to program implementation due to visa delays, and in the latter report, State included the example of disruptions to its antiterrorism training efforts in Pakistan caused by visa delays. However, State's reports do not include information regarding the risks of Pakistani visa delays affecting U.S. human resources for other State programs and for agencies other than State, although officials from components of DOD, USAID, and DOJ reported to us that such delays had caused staffing gaps during this time period. For instance, DOD experienced visa delays that created staffing gaps affecting its security assistance office, including a vacancy in the position of the officer responsible for coordinating military exchange programs, while DOJ experienced a staffing gap for its Resident Legal Advisor. Information from DOD, USAID, and DOJ components could be included in State's reports, given that officials from these agencies told us that they track information related to visa delays. Officials of other agency components, such as DOJ's Drug Enforcement Administration and DHS's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, told us that they do not retain data about visa processing times although they maintain information on their staff's ability to travel to Pakistan.

In addition, since passage of the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act in October 2009, Congress has expressed continued interest in receiving information on visa delays. For instance, in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2012, Congress required State to certify requested information about the timeliness of issuance of Pakistani visas to U.S. officials before certain funding for Pakistan could be provided. State waived the certification requirements for fiscal year 2012 as allowed in the act.¹⁵ DOD's fiscal year 2013 appropriation requires a similar certification from the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Secretary of State, before funds may be reimbursed to Pakistan for support provided to U.S. military operations. Without comprehensive reporting about the risks of visa delays and related staffing gaps, State's reporting to Congress may not provide a complete picture of the challenges the United States faces in managing and overseeing U.S. assistance to Pakistan, and agencies may lack information that could help them manage such risks.

Conclusions

Although the United States invested more than \$26 billion in fiscal years 2002 through 2012 to assist the government of Pakistan, U.S. officials applying for Pakistani visas continue to face delays that they have identified as disrupting their efforts to provide assistance. Despite identifying these disruptions as a risk, State does not report comprehensive information on the extent of visa delays across the U.S. government. Complete and consistent reporting of such information could help the United States diagnose problems related to visa delays, enhance planning, and improve decision making to address the effects of such delays. In addition, tracking information on the risks of visa delays could help State provide more complete information in response to congressional reporting requirements and may help to inform future diplomatic negotiations between the United States and Pakistan to resolve this issue.

Recommendation for Executive Action

To improve the information provided to Congress and to inform potential diplomatic discussions, we recommend that the Secretary of State consult with U.S. agencies engaged in providing assistance to Pakistan to obtain information on Pakistani visa delays and include this information in State's future reporting to Congress.

¹⁵The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2012, allows the Secretary of State to waive the limitations on assistance if the Secretary determines that it is important to the national security interests of the United States to do so.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to State, DOD, DHS, DOJ, and USAID for their review and comment. State and DOD provided written comments, which we have reprinted in appendixes II and III, respectively. State and DOJ also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. DHS and USAID had no comments.

In commenting on our report, State partially concurred with our recommendation that it should consult with U.S. agencies engaged in providing assistance to Pakistan to obtain information on visa delays and include this information in its future reporting to Congress. State noted that interagency coordination regarding Pakistani visa applications can be difficult and additional staff would be required for State to coordinate all U.S. government Pakistani visa applications. In addition, according to State, it is important to note that certain visa applicants, such as U.S. officials traveling to Pakistan on short-term assignments and military or security personnel, experience longer wait times than other applicants. State noted that reporting to Congress that differentiates between these applicants would be more effective. However, State stated that our report prompted State and Embassy Islamabad to improve coordination procedures to better track visa applications within State and, to the extent possible, throughout the interagency.

We maintain that reporting of more comprehensive information by State on the risks of visa delays could better inform Congress regarding the challenges of implementing U.S. assistance in Pakistan. While we acknowledge that interagency coordination can be challenging, officials from various agencies—including DOD, DHS, DOJ, and USAID—told us they track or maintain information related to visa delays, which could facilitate State's efforts to obtain and report such information. Moreover, our recommendation would not require State to "coordinate all U.S. government visa applications for Pakistan," but rather recommends that State consult with other agencies to obtain information these agencies already collect regarding visa delays to Pakistan. In addition, we are encouraged that our report prompted State to develop new procedures to enhance its tracking of visa applications government-wide. We agree with State that certain visa applicants may experience longer wait times than other applicants, including, as we note in our report, those providing security and law enforcement assistance to Pakistan. We believe that our recommendation is consistent with State identifying and reporting on which visa applicants experience longer wait times, and that such reporting could better inform Congress.

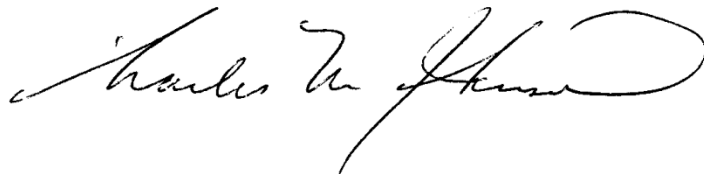
In commenting on our report, DOD agreed with the report's findings and observations. DOD also noted that Pakistani officials experience delays

obtaining visas to travel to the United States, which “feed the narrative that the Pakistanis treat us no differently than we treat them,” undermining requests for process improvements. While DOD notes that visa delays experienced by Pakistani officials may affect processing of visas for U.S. officials, we could not verify whether this has been a contributing cause because the government of Pakistan did not respond to our requests to discuss visa delays.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of State, and officials at DOD, DHS, DOJ, and USAID. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff members have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix IV.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles M. Johnson, Jr.", with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Charles Michael Johnson, Jr.
Director, International Affairs and Trade

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

This report reviews issues related to visa delays, including their extent and implications. Specifically, we examined (1) the extent to which U.S. officials experience delays obtaining Pakistani visas and the effects of these delays and (2) steps U.S. agencies have taken to address Pakistani visa delays.

Our work focused on Pakistani visa applications of the Departments of Defense (DOD), Homeland Security (DHS), Justice (DOJ), State (State), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). We met with officials from relevant components of these agencies, including DOD's Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Office of the Defense Representative Pakistan, U.S. Central Command, and DOD Passport Matters; DHS's U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement; DOJ's Drug Enforcement Administration, Federal Bureau of Investigation, International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program, and Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training; State's Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, and Office of Inspector General; and USAID's Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs and Office of Inspector General. We focused on these agencies and components because personnel of these agencies constituted 99 percent of U.S. officials stationed in Pakistan as of May 2012.

To evaluate the extent to which U.S. officials experience delays obtaining Pakistani visas, and the effects of these delays, we collected available data on processing times for official and diplomatic visa applications to Pakistan in fiscal years 2010 through 2012 from DOD's Office of the Defense Representative Pakistan, DOJ's Federal Bureau of Investigation, State's Special Issuance Agency and Orientation and In-Processing Center, and USAID's Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs. Not all components had data available for the entire period of fiscal years 2010 through 2012. Although DOJ's Federal Bureau of Investigation provided data for the entire period, DOD's Office of the Defense Representative Pakistan provided data for December 2009 through September 2012, State's Special Issuance Agency provided data for November 2009 through September 2012, State's Orientation and In-Processing Center provided data for March 2010 through September 2012, and USAID's Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs provided data for December 2010 through September 2012. We also obtained data for January 2010 through December 2012 from the U.S. embassy in Islamabad on processing times for visa extensions for U.S. officials in Pakistan. We

determined visa processing times by examining the date of a visa application and the date the visa was received by the agency. We defined a delay as a processing time exceeding 6 weeks, because, according to the embassy of Pakistan, the stated processing time for visas for U.S. officials is within 6 weeks of their application date. To determine the extent of delays, we grouped processing times into categories by week. The category “1 week” includes processing times of 0 to 7 days, the category “2 weeks” includes processing times of 8 to 14 days, and the category “3 weeks” includes processing times of 15 to 21 days. Categories continue sequentially in this manner until the “16+ week” category, which includes processing times of 106 to 440 days. Additionally, we obtained data on visa processing times for contractors from DOJ’s International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program and State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. However, because contractors are not U.S. officials, we did not combine these data with the data on visa processing times for U.S. officials. Further, to discuss the effects of Pakistani visa delays on the delivery and oversight of U.S. assistance in Pakistan, including the implementation of such assistance by contractors, we examined agency planning, budget, and oversight documents discussing visa delays, including mission strategic resource plans and quarterly progress and oversight reports on the civilian assistance program in Pakistan from 2010 to 2012. Additionally, we interviewed officials from DOD, DHS, DOJ, State, and USAID to discuss the effects of visa delays on program delivery and oversight. The government of Pakistan did not respond to our requests to discuss visa delays for U.S. officials.

To examine the steps U.S. agencies have taken to address Pakistani visa delays, including steps to address associated risks that they had identified, we reviewed relevant agency documents, including planning and budget documents and available data on visa processing times, and conducted interviews with knowledgeable officials. We compared these steps with risk assessment standards in our *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*.¹ We also examined semiannual monitoring reports that State had provided to Congress in compliance with the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009.

¹GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#), (Washington, D.C.: Nov.1999).

To assess the reliability of visa processing data, we (1) interviewed agency officials responsible for compiling these data and (2) performed basic reasonableness checks of the data for obvious inconsistency errors and completeness. When we found discrepancies, we brought them to the attention of relevant agency officials and worked with officials to correct the discrepancies before conducting our analyses. According to agency officials, these data may not include all visa applications to Pakistan, because U.S. officials may not always involve agency travel offices in processing their applications. Furthermore, as we report, our analysis of issued visas may understate processing time because it excludes cases in which a visa was not issued, such as cases in which (1) an individual withdrew a visa application because the visa was not received prior to the individual's planned departure date or (2) a visa application that had taken longer than 6 weeks to process was still pending at the Pakistani embassy at the time of our analysis. In addition, our analysis covers only visa processing time and does not include wait times to obtain non-objection certificates or letters of invitation. Despite these limitations, we determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purpose of making broad statements about processing times for completed visas. We also make a recommendation to address existing limitations in reporting of visa delays across agencies.

We conducted this performance audit from August 2012 to May 2013 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of State



United States Department of State
Comptroller
1969 Dyess Avenue
Charleston, SC 29405

APR 22 2013

Dr. Loren Yager
Managing Director
International Affairs and Trade
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548-0001

Dear Dr. Yager:

We appreciate the opportunity to review your draft report, "PAKISTAN: Reporting on Visa Delays that Disrupt U.S. Assistance Could Be Improved" GAO Job Code 320938.

The enclosed Department of State comments are provided for incorporation with this letter as an appendix to the final report.

If you have any questions concerning this response, please contact Susan Riggs, Pakistan Desk Officer, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs at (202) 647-9198.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James L. Millette".

James L. Millette

cc: GAO – Charles M. Johnson, Jr.
SCA – Robert O. Blake
SSRAP – Katherine Fernandez
State/OIG – Evelyn Klemstine

Department of State Comments on GAO Draft Report

**PAKISTAN: Reporting on Visa Delays that Disrupt
U.S. Assistance Could Be Improved**
(GAO-13-427, GAO Code 320938)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft report entitled *Pakistan: Reporting on Visa Delays that Disrupt U.S. Assistance Could Be Improved*. The Department of State welcomes the report and partially concurs with the recommendation that State should 1) Consult with U.S. agencies engaged in providing assistance to Pakistan to obtain information on visa delays and 2) Include this information in State's future reporting to Congress. Interagency coordination, especially with agencies that employ third-party contractors, can be difficult. For State to coordinate all U.S. government visa applications for Pakistan would require additional personnel solely dedicated to monitoring the application process; however, the GAO report has prompted the Pakistan Desk at State and Embassy Islamabad to develop a coordination procedure to better track visa applications throughout the Department, and as much as possible throughout the interagency.

The Department acknowledges the difficulties U.S. government officials experience in obtaining Pakistani visas, but would like to differentiate between the types of visas and applicants that have the most problems and those who have the fewest problems. U.S. officials traveling to Pakistan for temporary assignment (TDY: temporary duty) tend to experience the greatest delays in obtaining Pakistani visas. U.S. government employees who receive orders to work in Pakistan for at least a year (PCS: Permanent Change of Station) and list an identifiable predecessor tend to receive their visas within the allotted six-week standard set by the Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Those U.S. government employees who deliver assistance are typically assigned to the Mission in Pakistan, while those who review assistance programs travel to Pakistan on a short-term assignment. In addition, officials involved in politically-sensitive assistance programs or U.S. personnel who have a current or former military/security background experience greater delays than those assigned to consular duties or economic reporting. The issues and challenges differ between these types of visas applicants, and the additional reporting recommended by the GAO would be more effective if it differentiated between them.

Appendix III: Comments from the Department of Defense



ASIAN AND PACIFIC
SECURITY AFFAIRS

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
2700 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2700

APR 19 2013

Charles Michael Johnson, Jr.
Director International Affairs and Trade
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Johnson,

This is the Department of Defense (DOD) response to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) Draft Report, GAO-13-427, "Pakistan: Reporting on Visa Delays that Disrupt U.S. Assistance Could Be Improved."

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your Draft Report. The Department agrees with the report and observations. However, a complete study of the effects of visa delays on U.S. assistance should also focus on U.S. delays providing visas to Pakistani officials, in addition to Pakistani delays providing visas to U.S. officials. Delays providing the Pakistanis with visas have a disruptive effect on efforts to train and partner with Pakistani officials. Furthermore, our delays feed the narrative that the Pakistanis treat us no differently than we treat them, undermining our requests for process improvements.

Sincerely,

David Sedney
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia



Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Charles Michael Johnson, Jr., (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the individual named above, Hynek Kalkus (Assistant Director), Lina Khan, Lisa Reijula, and Biza Repko made key contributions to this report. Ashley Alley, Jenny Chanley, Karen Deans, Carol E. Finkler, Rebecca Gambler, and Mary Moutsos provided additional support.

Related GAO Products

Counterterrorism: U.S. Agencies Face Challenges Countering the Use of Improvised Explosive Devices in the Afghanistan/Pakistan Region. [GAO-12-907T](#). Washington, D.C.: July 12, 2012.

Combating Terrorism: State Should Enhance Its Performance Measures for Assessing Efforts in Pakistan to Counter Improvised Explosive Devices. [GAO-12-614](#). Washington, D.C.: May 15, 2012.

Pakistan Assistance: Relatively Little of the \$3 Billion in Requested Assistance Is Subject to State's Certification of Pakistan's Progress on Nonproliferation and Counterterrorism Issues. [GAO-11-786R](#). Washington, D.C.: July 19, 2011.

Department of State's Report to Congress and U.S. Oversight of Civilian Assistance to Pakistan Can Be Further Enhanced. [GAO-11-310R](#). Washington, D.C.: February 17, 2011.

Accountability for U.S. Equipment Provided to Pakistani Security Forces in the Western Frontier Needs to Be Improved. [GAO-11-156R](#). Washington, D.C.: February 15, 2011.

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Combating Terrorism: Increased Oversight and Accountability Needed over Pakistan Reimbursement Claims for Coalition Support Funds. [GAO-08-806](#). Washington, D.C.: June 24, 2008.

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Combating Terrorism: U.S. Efforts to Address the Terrorist Threat in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas Require a Comprehensive

Plan and Continued Oversight. [GAO-08-820T](#). Washington, D.C.: May 20, 2008.

Preliminary Observations on the Use and Oversight of U.S. Coalition Support Funds Provided to Pakistan. [GAO-08-735R](#). Washington, D.C.: May 6, 2008.

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