

The Corruption–Security Nexus: Forging U.S. Strategy

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Repeatedly, the government of the United States has given insufficient attention to issues of corruption in determining and implementing international security strategies. For example, it has turned a blind eye to widespread abuses of power for personal benefit in the government and military of Pakistan in pursuit of a strategic relationship. Between 1947 and 2011, the United States provided Pakistan with over \$67 billion in various forms of aid.ⁱ Or, to take another example, the United States provided another government with a long history of corruption with substantial aid year after year to support strategic goals. Between 1948 and 2015, the United States provided Egypt with \$76 billion in aid.ⁱⁱ

Learning from Iraq (2013), the final report of former U.S. Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, Stuart W. Bowen, Jr., details critical lessons that stress that when embroiled in a foreign war, the United States must set processes and seek to build institutions that prevent corruption. The quarterly reports from the office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction,ⁱⁱⁱ John F. Sopko, attest to the U.S. and NATO authorities' failure to apply Inspector General Bowen's Iraq experiences to Afghanistan. Bowen understood that major consistent efforts were needed in Iraq to root out corruption in order to enhance security in the country. Sopko agrees, but the practice on the ground in Afghanistan tells a different story. There is no evidence that corruption in the country has been reduced over the last decade.

Bowen argued in the case of Iraq that detailed monitoring of all expenditures and the deployment of sufficient professionals who were experienced for this purpose were essential. Sopko agrees when it comes to Afghanistan. Yet his regular reports tell many stories of insufficient accounting of U.S. aid expenditures and of projects with relatively straightforward goals—such as improving literacy in the Afghan military—whose results have been dismal. The implication is that allocated funds were improperly used.

Like recent books by journalists with long experience in Afghanistan (notably Sarah Chayes' [2016] *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security* and Carlotta Gall's [2014] *The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan 2001–2014*), Inspector General Sopko's reports suggest that the U.S. authorities in Afghanistan have contributed to corruption significantly. The most recent report, "*Corruption in Conflict: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*,"^{iv} documents Sopko's experiences. The inadequate accounting for the enormous funds for "reconstruction aid," which exceed \$100 billion; the failure to strongly support the development of institutions of justice; the acceptance of graft in almost every corner of national and regional government and politics; and the frequent use of presents of cash to obtain short-term security goals on the ground—all have contributed to securing the country's place year after year at the bottom of Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.^v

Although the deep ties between issues of corruption and security have been discussed increasingly in recent years at senior levels of the U.S. military and the U.S. Department of State, evidence of acceptance of the idea that curbing corruption is intrinsic to ensuring sustainable security has been scant. In war-riven countries, the prevailing practice is to seek security and stability first and to address justice and governance second—only after those priorities have been attained. For example, Iraq today shows that where the public has no confidence in accountable institutions of security (judiciary, police, and military), stability is a fiction, and corruption

abounds. Work to establish anticorruption processes and institutions that the public trusts must run parallel to military and police efforts to ensure security.

In May 2016, speaking on behalf of President Obama at the London Anti-Corruption Summit, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry pledged to explicitly address the nexus of corruption and security. At the summit, organized and hosted by former U.K. Prime Minister David Cameron, the United States issued a statement that included the following:

Anti-Corruption in the Security Sector

- The United States will integrate anticorruption components into training for its security forces deployed to environments with endemic corruption.
- Recognizing that corruption foments instability and drives violence, the United States is committed to tackling the link between corruption and extremism through measures to prioritize corruption in our security assistance and through new focused programming.
- The United States will take steps to conduct assessments on corruption risk during development of security cooperation with foreign security forces.
- The United States will seek to ensure that security sector assistance incorporates, wherever relevant, support in improving security sector governance, to complement the provision of equipment and tactical training.

The United States played an important role in the development of both the London summit communiqué (Anti-Corruption Summit: London 2016, 2016a) and the official declaration (Anti-Corruption Summit: London 2016, 2016b). These documents and Secretary Kerry's statement (United States, 2016) reflect what could be an emerging consensus in the Obama administration. It is critical that the next U.S. administration builds on this beginning to forge a comprehensive U.S. policy that can be widely applied to situations where the U.S. pursues strategic relationships with countries that are widely perceived to have highly corrupt governments.

In part, the U.S. statement presented at the London summit reflects U.S. experience in Afghanistan. It also reflects the increased engagement of Vice President Biden, who has made several visits to the Ukraine over the last 18 months to publicly warn that failure to counter extensive corruption would risk the loss of Western support for the Kiev government and an increase in the nation's security risks.^{vi} At the same time, the United States has quietly pressed the International Monetary Fund to refrain from extending significant financing to Ukraine until evidence that the government is moving to counter widespread corruption is stronger.^{vii}

The U.S. statement in London also contains important sections on anti-money laundering. One section asserts, "The United States redoubles our commitment to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global standard-setting body for anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism."

Last December, in an unprecedented move, finance ministers—not foreign ministers—filled the chairs of the UN Security Council. Chairing the conference was U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Jacob J. (Jack) Lew, and the topic was terrorist finance.^{viii} The U.S. authorities are well aware that terrorist networks operate with organized crime to secure assets and launder cash to support their activities and the purchase of arms. For example, an important link in the chain is the Haqqani network, which has been a major supporter of the Taliban in Afghanistan, is based

in Pakistan, and is the leading organization in opium production in Afghanistan and its international distribution from there.

Indeed, over many years, developments on the ground in Afghanistan and Pakistan have shown intense connections between corruption and the support of insurgencies, terrorism, narcotics production, and trafficking. This combination not only has produced a multiyear security nightmare for the people of Afghanistan and for large parts of Pakistan but also has a deadly impact on global security.

Making concerns even more grave is another consideration whose home is Pakistan: the illicit sale of nuclear bomb-making technology. The greatest single crime of the 21st century may well prove to be the sale of vital information by A. Q. Khan, the scientist who led Pakistan's nuclear bomb-making research, and his associates to the governments of Iran and North Korea.^{ix} It is improbable that he acted without the knowledge of senior Pakistani government and military officials. He accepted bribes while making the world a more dangerous place. Yet, the United States has never publicly rebuked the government of Pakistan and withheld foreign and military aid. It seems that the United States has tolerated such corruption because it believes that a breach in diplomatic relations would be counterproductive and perhaps because U.S. diplomats are cynical about ever reducing corruption in Pakistan.

In the Cold War era, the United States and the Soviet Union spared no effort to win foreign governments as friends. Foreign aid was seen as a major tool for winning, keeping, and influencing such friends. For example, despite extraordinary corruption in the Congo, the U.S. saw strategic advantage in providing support to President Mobuto.^x

Despite the end of the Cold War some 25 years ago, to no small degree this approach has prevailed. For example, diplomatic and perceived strategic concerns have been the prime imperatives for significant U.S. aid flows not only to Pakistan—but also, for example, to the former government of Egypt led by President Hosni Mubarak, which was widely perceived at home and abroad to be corrupt. To take another example, Kenya has been engulfed in corruption scandals in recent years, but mindful of security concerns above all, the United States has remained a supplier of aid.

Such approaches to diplomacy and security have increasingly been discredited. In January 2011, public protests against Mubarak exploded in Cairo, and the United States was initially on the wrong side. Opposition politicians in Pakistan have publicly denounced the United States for supporting corruption. More generally, citizens in many countries are demanding far greater accountability from their own governments as information technologies and the growth of nongovernmental organizations combine to document corruption in governments on a detailed and daily basis. These developments make it increasingly untenable for U.S. diplomats to be close to governments whose own citizens perceive as highly corrupt.

Leaders of the U.S. foreign policy establishment must urgently develop a full-fledged approach to the issue of the relationships between security and corruption. In so doing, it must consider that the stability of countries depends not only on basic security but also on good governance. The challenge is difficult in a world where terrorism is a major threat and where deep ties between terrorist organizations, corrupt politicians and public officials, and organized crime are widespread.^{xi}

Although no easy answers arise, one thing is clear: The practice by U.S. authorities in Afghanistan today, which fails to place as much emphasis on anticorruption efforts as it does on short-term military and CIA security actions, is counterproductive and will have additional deadly consequences for citizens in Afghanistan and beyond.

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ⁱ Center for Global Development. <http://www.cgdev.org/page/aid-pakistan-numbers>; and Direct Overt U.S. Aid Appropriations for and Military Reimbursements to Pakistan, FY2002-FY2017 involved a grand total of \$33 billion, according to the U.S. Congressional research Service. <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/pakaid.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Jeremy M. Sharp, U.S. Congressional Research Service report *Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations*. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33003.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, see the 31st quarterly report (April 30, 2016) of the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. <http://static1.squarespace.com/static/5728c7b18259b5e0087689a6/t/57b0f92d579fb320a637abfd/1471215922333/SIGAR+Afghan+2016+1st+quarter+report.pdf>

iv U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction.
<https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/LessonsLearned/SIGAR-16-58-LL.pdf>

v See Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2015.
<http://www.transparency.org/cpi2015>

vi For example, see U.S. Vice President Biden's speech to the RADA, the parliament in the Ukraine, in 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/12/09/remarks-vice-president-joe-biden-ukrainian-rada>

vii See the statement by the IMF's Managing Director Christine Lagarde in February 2016.
<https://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2016/pr1650.htm>

viii Press announcement from the U.S Treasury. <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/media-advisories/Pages/12112015.aspx>

ix See David Sanger, "Pakistani Army Linked, in Letter, to Nuclear Sale" *The New York Times* (July 7, 2011). http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/08/world/asia/08khan.html?_r=0; and **Matthew Bunn**, Chapter 6, "Corruption and Nuclear Proliferation," in *Corruption, Global Security, and World Order*, edited by Robert I. Rotberg (2009, Brookings).

x For a detail insight into the Mobutu regime and U.S. relations with Zaire, see, for example, Michela Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz – Living on the Brink of Disaster in Mobutu's Congo* (2001, Harper Collins).

xi See, for example, *Dirty Entanglements: Corruption, Crime, and Terrorism*, by Professor Louise Shelley (2014, Cambridge University Press).