



Afghanistan Policy Page

A one-page brief on a major issue concerning U.S. policy and engagement in Afghanistan.

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Corruption

Take Aways

- Corruption is a **significant and growing problem** across Afghanistan that undermines security, development, and governance objectives.
- The main **causes of corruption** in Afghanistan are:
 - **systemic issues within state institutions** that provide opportunities for corruption
 - a **weakened social fabric** after thirty years of conflict
 - Afghanistan's dominant role in worldwide **opium and heroin production**;
 - The size and diversity of international assistance, and **lack of coordinated oversight**.
- Some of the **most serious effects of corruption** in Afghanistan are:
 - hindering delivery of **public services**
 - destroying trust in the **justice system**
 - weakening the **education system**
 - deterring **private investment**
 - accelerate **culture of impunity**
 - undermining **land registration**
 - forcing families to pay **costly bribes**
 - choking **private business activities**

What They Say...

"Corruption is a phenomenon that will not go away overnight. It is a problem that will continue to be with Afghanistan for a long time. Until we achieve that sort of national awakening that business as usual is not in the interest of a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan, you will not be able to achieve success in your anti-corruption campaign."

Ershad Ahmadi, Deputy Director General of the High Office of Oversight and Anti-corruption in Afghanistan. November 2009

"There does have to be actions by the government of Afghanistan against those who have taken advantage of the money that has poured into Afghanistan in the last eight years so that we can better track it and we can have actions taken that demonstrate there's no impunity for those who are corrupt."

US Secretary of State **Hillary Clinton**, November 2009.

Key Issues

Afghan culture is not historically defined by corruption. Analysts say that corruption is not innate to Afghan culture or the result of extraordinarily bad luck in political appointments. It is a logical and systemic reaction -- which would be seen anywhere in the world -- to huge amounts of money washing around without accountability. The key is to remove the "push and pull" factors that create opportunities for corruption.

Corruption within the international community working in Afghanistan is another serious problem. Three-quarters of U.S. oversight investigations are targeting suspects who aren't Afghan nationals.

Current Afghan capacity to combat corruption is growing but still weak. Government anti-corruption institutions do exist, such as the High Office for Oversight, but they are still new and limited in capacity.

The perceived **eighteen month 'deadline'** of a July 2011 withdrawal date, unfounded or not, has created an urgency amongst Afghan officials of needing to grab what they can before the country is abandoned to chaos.

Possible Questions

- What is being done by the international community to help the Afghan government change the underlying systems within public administration that create opportunities for corruption?
- Is there a comprehensive plan by the international community to coordinate anti-corruption and oversight efforts? What are the U.S. benchmarks to support that Plan?
- What other development activities can help eradicate corruption? For example, what is being done in private sector development, public health, delivery of public services, alternative (non-opium) agriculture?

Top Key Facts

- Transparency International's 'Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)' for 2009 ranks Afghanistan 179 out of 180 countries surveyed. This is the latest fall in a steady decline from ranking 176 in 2008, 172 in 2007, and 117 in 2005.
- Two polls in 2009 both found about three-quarters of Afghan respondents considered corruption to be a serious problem in the country.
- Latest surveys estimate the average Afghan household pays \$100 in bribes every year, in a country where 70% of the population lives on less than \$1 a day.
- US responsibility for anti-corruption activities is led by USAID, whose stated agenda is: 'prevention, education, enforcement'. The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) is responsible for oversight of all U.S. programs for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.
- 40% of all investigations being carried out by SIGAR involve procurement fraud amongst international contractors.

In the News

Afghan lawmakers will vote this Saturday on President Hamid Karzai's second list of cabinet nominees, after vetoing most of his first selection, parliamentarian Shukria Barakzai told AFP.

Further Reading

<http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistanin2009.pdf> - The Asia Foundation Survey
http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADO248.pdf - USAID Assessment of Corruption

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