

CORRUPTION, LEGITIMACY, AND STABILITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S. ARMY

Shima D. Keene

Corruption increases the level of instability and the risk of conflict by undermining the legitimacy and credibility of state institutions as well as of peacekeeping and state-building interventions by the international community, to include the U.S. Army. Post-conflict states, or states emerging from conflict, are particularly vulnerable to corruption, due to the lack of good governance infrastructures, which makes it difficult to detect, disrupt, or bring about successful prosecutions against those who are involved in activities such as bribery, extortion, false accounting, and embezzlement.

Where corruption is rife, it is widely acknowledged that funds intended for country stabilization projects often do not reach their intended recipients. This, in part, is the reason that tackling corruption has become a high priority in some post-conflict transitions. In addition, anti-corruption efforts, whether direct or indirect, are seen as having a potentially legitimizing and stabilizing effect. However, such measures can only be successful if implemented with strong, high-level leadership, as corruption has the potential to contribute to legitimacy as well as to erode it. Lack of legitimacy is a common feature of fragile states, which have failed to establish good governance.

Poor governance, in turn, results in an environment where corruption and criminality can flourish. Corrupt individuals holding senior public roles of influence are able to abuse their positions to further their own personal goals and accumulate personal wealth, to the detriment of the people who they are intended to serve. This results in instability through the inevitable sense of injustice and desperation that develops amongst the citizens of that regime, which can drive populations to civil war and leaves citizens susceptible to crime and radicalization, both as perpetrators and as victims.

History has repeatedly illustrated that this problem, if not dealt with effectively, will inevitably lead to conflict and instability, not only in the country directly affected, but in the global community, as fragile or failed states become fertile breeding grounds for insurgency, terrorism, and organized crime. This has direct consequences for the United States both at home and abroad.

For the U.S. Army, the threat of force and the ability to use force will always remain an important part of the military remit, but there is an increasing acknowledgment that such measures must be used as a last resort. Consequently, it is appropriate that the U.S. Army familiarize itself with alternative measures to achieve stability other than force. In tackling corrupt or hostile leadership, there are other effective ways in which corrupt leaders can be dealt with, such as the confiscation of assets, including funds that are the proceeds of bribery.

As such, it is essential that the U. S. Army develop an understanding of the ways in which corrupt leaders exploit funds, as well as the roles that the U.S. Government and the international community play in bringing such individuals to justice—the threat of which in itself can serve as a deterrent to such behavior—or bring individuals who have committed such crimes against their own people to justice. In addition, it is vital that the U.S. Army appreciates the unintended consequences of international interventions, like the mismanagement of international aid and funding, which exacerbates bribery and corruption and may do more to destabilize, rather than stabilize, a country.

The answer is to develop an integrated approach whereby anti-corruption measures are combined with existing policy and operational procedures so that corruption is not treated as a standalone problem. This can only be achieved through developing a contextual understanding of the interconnected challenges in relation to corruption, leadership, and stability, as well as addressing existing knowledge gaps through effective training and education. Furthermore, it is essential to implement monitoring and evaluation policies to promote a culture of transparency that assists with the prevention of corruption; and that intelligence assessments—to include the use of financial intelligence—are fully exploited toward that aim.

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