Lessons from the international mission in Afghanistan
This framework proposes what policy makers and planners can do to address the threat that corruption poses to future missions.
Briefing for policy makers

Achieving stability and security is a top priority for any intervention by the international community in an unstable or war-torn country. Corruption is potentially fatal to long-term stability, security and development, and therefore countering it also needs to be considered a priority objective.

The principal message from this study is that policy makers and military and security professionals should address the corruption threat from the very start of a mission and integrate anti-corruption into the mission mandate. This is a requirement that is fully supported by representatives of the EU External Action Service in their comments on our findings.

Our research was designed to establish why it took so long for corruption to be identified as a serious threat to the success of the mission in Afghanistan. The results have led us to propose a practical five-point framework.

Internationally, the serious impact that corruption can have on security is being increasingly recognised. For example, in February 2014, the then-UK Secretary of State for Defence Philip Hammond told the Munich Security Conference: “Challenging institutional corruption… is not just a moral imperative… it is a practical imperative.” US Vice President Joe Biden signalled a change in the US approach in April 2014 when he told Ukrainian leaders that they had to “fight the cancer of corruption” that had weakened their defences. Following the Westgate attacks in Kenya in September 2013, John Githongo, former Kenyan Permanent Secretary for Governance, said: “Corruption – systemic graft – is at the heart of the state’s inability to respond to insecurity in general.”

1. SUMMARY OF THE ANALYSIS

The UK-based Transparency International Defence and Security Programme (TI-DSP) has been engaged in Afghanistan since 2009. The TI-DSP team has worked with the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and with Afghan civil society by training military and police officers to recognise the symptoms of corruption and how to tackle them, reviewing the effects of corruption in-country, and co-ordinating the activities of different groups. Our strong engagement in Afghanistan means that we are also part of the analysis when it comes to lessons to be drawn from the international mission. TI-DSP is actively involved in corruption prevention work in a range of other countries where instability and the threat of conflict are prevalent.

Our objective was to establish why it took so long for corruption to be understood as a threat to mission success in Afghanistan and, from that, to develop guidance that can help the international policy making, military, and security communities to prepare better for corruption threats in planning for future missions and assistance. The output is framed principally in the form of a proposed framework for action, together with some specific proposals.

To meet the objectives of the research, we undertook detailed interviews with 65 experienced members of the international community (IC) who were involved in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014. We also interviewed 10 Afghan nationals who were very familiar with activities of the IC and their impact, and we drew on our own experience of the country.
The interview questions covered how the IC approached corruption threats and risks in Afghanistan, and why it took a long time for a proactive approach to develop. These questions led us to look back at the policy history, where we examined the priorities of the main stakeholders in the IC. Given that the bulk of international assistance was directed towards the building of the Afghan army and the Afghan police, we were particularly interested in the extent to which integrity-building programmes and anti-corruption measures were part of these efforts and what they achieved. The interviews generated over 600 pages of transcripts.

Based on the interviews, we identified nine reasons why the IC was slow to develop a response to the danger from corruption threats. These were:

1. A lack of appreciation of the nature of corruption threats, plus a decision to use corrupt actors without an appreciation of the implications at the beginning of the mission
2. A sense of complacency within the IC towards the extent and impact of those threats
3. The political dilemmas faced throughout the campaign
4. The primacy of security considerations
5. The perverse spending incentives that prioritise “burn rate” over outcomes
6. The limited development and mobilisation of anti-corruption tools
7. A disconnect between research and policy on corruption risks
8. Countermoves by the host government
9. The weakness of local civil society

The importance of international institutions, such as the UN, the EU and NATO, in setting the context for the IC’s approach to corruption was evident to all of our interviewees. In particular, they highlighted that the essential signal of a clear intent on their part to limit corruption was lacking. This was seen to send the wrong message, leading to low expectations of the IC, and also limiting the perceived ability of those international institutions subsequently to show leadership in this area.

Nevertheless, they were also identified as being the bodies that should be taking the lead in ensuring a unified approach on corruption. Unhealthy competition and imbalances between the civilian and military communities, as well as between various international institutions, were cited as having severely damaged the effectiveness of anti-corruption work. In its comments on this report, the EU External Action Service highlighted concerns that key non-military institution-building issues had been dominated by military actors, undermining their own efforts to incorporate anti-corruption, financial management, sustainability and Afghan ownership.

The international military and security community needs better training and support on how to recognise corruption threats to the mission. This should be built in to doctrine, exercise planning, and pre-deployment training, in both nations and in international missions. Some nations are starting to take such measures, as is NATO, but they are not yet institutionalised or achieving a critical mass. The need for specialist task-forces capable of addressing harder questions such as understanding the spread of criminal networks and illicit funds flows was also recognised by many interviewees.
The implications for the huge investment in re-establishing and training the national military force of the host nation were very clear, but guidance and training on how to build transparency, accountability and counter-corruption measures are currently underdeveloped. The need for a full-time transparency and counter-corruption group to be set up within host nation forces was also identified, as well as in “back office” functions such as procurement, personnel practices and disciplinary or inspector general mechanisms.

In relation to the police, there was a common view that re-establishing a national police force, and especially one with a focus on transparency, accountability and counter-corruption, was something that the IC had not yet mastered and merits further research and development.

2. A POLICY AND OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The results of the research led us to propose a five-point framework by which policy makers – both civilian and military – might be guided in setting the parameters for future interventions.

This policy framework is of direct relevance to:

- International institutions engaged in missions
- Security policy makers
- Military and defence ministries in national governments
- National and international development organisations
- Others involved in stabilisation operations

Four elements of this framework (Sections 2-5) come to the fore only once a mission has arisen. These require the case-by-case assessment of corruption threats and the adoption of measures in specific mission mandates. However, Section 1 is actionable even in the absence of an international mission. It speaks to the immediate need for the IC to equip its staff better to recognise and confront corruption threats, so that policy makers and others are better prepared once a mission becomes imminent.

1. Equip policy makers and implementers

   a. Better equip international policy makers

      There is an immediate need for training, doctrine and guidance on how to recognise the range and potential importance of corruption threats.

      This should address dilemmas such as how to deal with corrupt actors when there is no choice, how to spend money safely and cleanly, and how to improve counter-corruption controls in fragile environments.

      Transparency, Accountability and Counter-Corruption (TACC) should be recognised as a formal discipline and corruption-limiting tools such as dual-key controls on spending, the use of joint national-international monitoring committees or the establishment of anti-corruption agencies should be developed.
b. Better equip international military and police and rule of law personnel

Those delivering a mission need training on how to recognise and deal with the impact of corruption in the field. There is a real appetite for such training, with some interviewees suggesting that the impact of corruption should form part of formal military and police planning processes, including stress tests, ahead of a proposed operation.

Material to support such competence development is already beginning to emerge in NATO, the US and some other countries and organisations. TI-DSP has made a first attempt to provide guidance with its recent handbook, "Corruption Threats & International Missions: Practical guidance for leaders.” For more information, see www.ti-defence.org.

c. Build host nation capability

Integrity-building and corruption prevention need to be built into the fabric of training for the national military, security, and rule of law actors.

There are more, and different, challenges in providing appropriate training for the police and the rule of law actors in post-conflict environments. This subject merits urgent further study.

d. Articulate the contents of the counter-corruption toolbox

Along with increasing expertise, policy makers need explicit guidance on what is in the counter-corruption toolbox, the relative merits and demerits of each component, and how each one can be scaled up when required.

For those involved in stabilisation operations, we recommend that they develop a formal toolkit of measures for recognising, analysing, mitigating and monitoring corruption issues on operations. The toolkit should include measures that can be applied at large scale in the re-establishment of national military, police and rule of law capabilities.

2. Be explicit about the threats from corruption from the outset

a. Include a requirement to tackle corruption in the mandate

An understanding of the corruption threats, and an appreciation that TACC measures are necessary, should be core to the design of missions and included in the mandate.

Settlements designed at an early stage with state-building and “clean” institutions as primary goals are more durable than those where corruption is put to one side. Counter-corruption considerations need to be factored into the negotiating process and the design of international missions on the basis of a clear understanding of the extent of corruption and how, as well as through whom, it operates.

The same approach – of explicitly including attention to corruption threats – might similarly be taken with smaller technical assistance missions.
b. **Integrate corruption threats into the mission risk assessment**

The range of possible corruption threats needs to be part of the risk analysis for the whole mission. This might include:

- An appreciation of the political dynamics and the characteristics of individuals in the host nation
- Assessing the likely impact of corruption on citizens and international staff
- Bringing together military, police and civilian perspectives on corruption threats
- Developing model responses to corruption challenges that the first wave of troops and international staff could face

**c. Assess the scale of the corruption**

There will be corruption issues in every country; when a country is in conflict or experiencing major insecurity, these problems are likely to be more serious. In Afghanistan, corruption ceased to be an aberration of the system and became the system. This made it much more difficult to control the problem. An early focus is needed on how to prevent this from happening.

**d. Develop a strong political strategy on corruption**

A clear and unequivocal political commitment to addressing corruption is essential to raise awareness of the issue and equip those involved at all levels to deal with it.

3. **Develop a common, sophisticated and civil-owned approach**

All those involved in a mission need to follow a common policy that runs across all chains of command – political, military and developmental. Bottom lines should be set that should not be crossed during the intervention. The consistent application of a common approach to TACC across the different national institutions and ministries, for example, is critical to success.

The approach needs to be sophisticated. Elements of the host nation are likely to be invested in corruption, patronage and criminal activity, and may therefore seek actively to undermine the international effort.

4. **Spend less, disclose more**

a. **Spend less**

Sums of money which greatly exceed a country’s ability to absorb them will, inexorably, lead to the difference fuelling corruption. Spending less, but more effectively, is part of the answer. The starting point for addressing these problems is the requirement to address corruption threats and risks in the intervention mandate (See 1. above). Once included in the mandate, policy makers can test all support and spending proposals against the requirement to limit risk.

b. **Accountability through outcome, not “burn-rate”**

A higher standard of accountability by IC funding agencies is overdue. All the agencies involved, whether international or national, need to make use of existing international forums to develop a set of requirements for verification of aid and support outcomes that are more rigorous than most that exist today. This standard should also apply to military assistance projects. We encourage the international development arms of national governments to develop such a standard.
c. Spend transparently
Making all contracts public as a matter of mission policy can be a powerful mitigator of conditions that might otherwise allow corruption to proliferate.

d. Ensure transparency at donor level
Greater transparency over the allocation and disbursement of funds and equipment should be required. Currently, the flow of funds is not clearly mapped, with donor countries using a multitude of bilateral and multilateral programmes and working through different government departments to channel funds to recipients. Accounting for how much is used is a significant challenge.

e. Encourage transparency at the national level of all defence and security spending
Greater transparency in the defence and security sectors is an important element of reducing corruption risks in fragile environments. This might include publicly available and detailed defence and police budgets; an explicit, transparent, merit-based system of recruitment and promotion; and the full availability of personnel numbers and salary information.

5. Strengthen oversight

a. Maintain the highest standards within the mission
Setting a good example is essential to the credibility and sustainability of the mission. It is almost impossible to restore the reputation of the IC once local expectations have been disappointed. This may require dedicated TACC staff and leadership at all levels of the mission.

b. Establish strong independent oversight
The use of external and independent bodies can greatly increase the effectiveness of corruption monitoring. Experience from Afghanistan and elsewhere points to the diversity of forms of external oversight available and this has already found partial expression in a number of good examples cited in the “Good Practice” section below. There is also a clear and well-established need to strengthen the role of civil society and the national media.

c. Create information and feedback channels
Donors need to develop processes to measure the extent to which assistance is being misused or diverted. Their own intelligence and information-gathering channels need to be appropriately calibrated to alert policy makers should they detect cause for concern.
3. GOOD PRACTICE

There were a number of good anti-corruption initiatives developed in Afghanistan that may have application elsewhere. We recommend incorporating some of these good practices into anti-corruption doctrine and training. Three initiatives stood out from our analysis of the Afghanistan mission.

1. A joint national-international, independent committee of experts to monitor and evaluate national progress on anti-corruption initiatives

The Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (the MEC) was created in 2010 after the need for independent monitoring and evaluation of anti-corruption efforts in Afghanistan was identified at the London and Kabul international conferences. Originally set up as a corrective to the perceived failures of the High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption (HOOAC), it quickly gained authority as an independent and credible voice. MEC independently monitors and evaluates national and international efforts to fight corruption in Afghanistan. It reports to the president, parliament, public, and IC. The Committee consists of six senior anti-corruption experts – three internationals and three Afghans – selected through a nomination process implemented by the international community and the Afghan government. The Chairmanship of the Committee alternates between an Afghan and an international appointee on a six-month basis. The Committee is supported by a strong secretariat.

MEC’s terms of reference include the following mandates:

- to develop anti-corruption recommendations and benchmarks;
- to monitor and evaluate the government and international community efforts to fight corruption;
- to report to the president, parliament, public and IC.

Every six months, MEC submits a report of its assessments and findings of the agreed-upon benchmarks to the president, parliament, and people of Afghanistan through the media. More information on the MEC can be found at http://www.mec.af

2. Specialist counter-corruption task-force to support the mission

An agency was set up by ISAF in 2010 to provide support for corruption prevention efforts, as the international military realised that corruption problems exacerbated security problems and threatened the success of the mission. Entitled Shafafiyat, which means “transparency” in Dari, this evolved from the earlier Anti-Corruption Task-Force, established in 2009. Although it suffered from being a military creation rather than an agency across the whole IC, it was nonetheless a dramatic improvement on the previous lack of any critical mass on the topic. Such an agency (or similar capacity) should be an integral part of future international missions. More information on Shafafiyat can be found at http://www.isaf.nato.int/subordinate-commands/combined-joint-interagency-task-force-afghanistan/index.php

3. Specialist capacity to track corruption and fraud in international contracting for the mission

After a public outcry against corruption in international contracts for logistics supply to Afghanistan, the US set up an agency specifically tracking corruption and fraud in their contracting for Afghanistan. Called “Task-Force 2010”, it had considerable success in both tracking problem contracts and in encouraging better behaviour by contractors. A similar effort with a mandate broader than US contracting could have had a positive effect on contracting more generally.
4. CONCLUSIONS

The mission in Afghanistan is not the only mission where there has been a slow or insufficient international response to the threats from corruption. Interviewees made the same point in relation to other missions such as those in Bosnia, Haiti, Iraq, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The interviewees did not ask us how Afghanistan was different to other missions – except of course in relation to its much greater scale – but why the problems were so similar to what they had experienced elsewhere.

The growing awareness of corruption threats to missions should galvanise debate and shape the future of international policy in this area. To this end, some of the observations and proposals offered by our interviewees might serve as a basis for this:

**TACC should be recognised as a formal discipline** and corruption-limiting tools such as dual-key controls on spending, the use of joint national-international monitoring committees or the establishment of anti-corruption agencies should be developed.

Those involved in stabilisation operations should develop a formal toolkit of measures for recognising, analysing, and mitigating and monitoring corruption issues on operations. The toolkit should include measures that can be applied at large scale in the re-establishment of national military, police and rule of law capabilities.

**Establish a higher standard of accountability by IC funding agencies.** This is long overdue. All the agencies involved, whether international or national, need to make use of existing international forums to develop a set of requirements for verification of aid and support outcomes that are more rigorous than most that exist today. This standard should also apply to military assistance projects.

**Maintain the highest standards within the mission.** Setting a good example is essential to the credibility and sustainability of the mission. It is almost impossible to restore the reputation of the IC once local expectations have been disappointed. This may require dedicated TACC staff and leadership at all levels of the mission.

The key message to come from our research is that failing to address corruption threats weakens the international response to international crises. Nevertheless, the growing awareness of the problem and the good practice that eventually came out of the mission in Afghanistan both stand as evidence that progress is possible. Transparency International is committed to helping to find constructive solutions to corruption threats in fragile and conflict environments.

We welcome all engagement, and hope that this framework will help everyone - whether in positions of authority or in civil society - to prepare in a timely manner for the difficult and dangerous threats from corruption in the future.
Additional reports from the Defence and Security Programme

Corruption Threats and International Missions: Practical guidance for leaders (2014)

Single Sourcing: A multi-country analysis of non-competitive defence procurement (2014)

Classified Information: A review of current legislation across 15 countries & the EU (2014)


Building Integrity in UK Defence: Practical recommendations to reduce corruption risks (2014)

Corruption as a threat to stability and peace (2014)

Corruption and peacekeeping: Strengthening peacekeeping and the UN (2013)

Watchdogs?: The quality of legislative oversight of defence in 82 countries (2013)

Raising the Bar: Good Anti-Corruption Practices in Defence Companies (2013)

Training the military and defence and security officials in understanding and preventing corruption (2013)

Government Defence Anti-Corruption Index (2013)

Arresting corruption in the police: The global experience of police corruption reform efforts (2012)

Defence Companies Anti-Corruption Index (2012)


Due Diligence and Corruption Risk in Defence Industry Offsets Programmes (2012)

Military-Owned Businesses: Corruption and Risk Reform (2012)

Counter Corruption Reforms in Post-Conflict Countries (2011)

The Transparency of National Defence Budgets (2011)

Organised crime, corruption and the vulnerability of defence and security forces (2011)

A review of anti-corruption reform measures in the defence sector in Colombia (2011)

Codes of conduct in defence ministries and armed forces: What makes a good code of conduct? A multi-country study (2011)

Building integrity and reducing corruption in defence & security: 20 practical reforms (2011)

Defence offsets: Addressing the risks of corruption & raising transparency (2010)
Transparency International UK's Defence and Security Programme works to reduce corruption in defence and security worldwide.

We engage with governments, armed forces, security forces, defence companies, civil society, and others to advance this goal.

We provide new tools, practical reforms, benchmarks, and research to enable change.

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