

# Mechanisms of Anti-Corruption by the United States Government: The example of Afghanistan Reconstruction

**Petrina (Pei-Chun) C. Feng**

*Dept. of Administrative Management, Central Police University, Taoyuan, Taiwan*

## Abstract

Corruption is an issue that is affecting many countries in the world, and there are several approaches that have been found to be effective depending on the other external factors. The United States has several anti-corruption approaches that were invested in countries of interest such as Afghanistan; however, these have failed dismally. The US government has spent over \$70 million in different sectors that was intended to support anti-corruption initiative through the government, law enforcement, and journalists. However, there were several reports that were released indicating the lack of preparation and the strategic flaws in the approach taken by the United States. Afghanistan still poses a security risk to the United States, and public funding towards reconstruction of the country should take an evidence-based approach that considers effective mechanisms applied in similar regimes. This paper evaluates the current framework of the procurement to preventing corruption by the United States and evidence-based mechanisms by organizations that have been resistant to corruption.

**Keywords:** Corruption, Afghanistan, Accountability, Law enforcement, Public Funding

## I. INTRODUCTION

Former President Barack Obama stated that reducing corruption for the United States was a national and global imperative. Corruption is a problem that is faced around the world and hinders growth, saps economic development, undermines democracy, and destabilizes the government. Furthermore, this creates an opening for dangerous groups such as terrorists, traffickers, and criminals (U. S Department of State, 2017). Therefore, reducing the occurrence of this problem is a national security priority and the department works globally to promote accountability, prevent graft, and empower reformers.

## II. OVERVIEW OF ANTI-CORRUPTION APPROACHES IN USA

In 2016, the U. S Secretary of State Kerry stated the initiative of the Department of State to commit an additional \$70 million towards reducing corruption by supporting prosecutors, police, reformers, detectives, civil society, judges, and journalists. In 2017, the United States also hosted the Global Asset Recovery Forum, which assists countries in abiding by anti-corruption initiatives that were established by the United Nations (Ligeti&Simonato, 2017). Therefore, this illustrates that reduction of corruption in all sectors is a priority for the United States government. The Department of State summarizes the efforts against corruption into three key elements that include strengthening law enforcement across borders, preventing corruption and increasing accountability, and tackling the corruption-security nexus (Rose-Ackerman &Palifka, 2016). The paper looks to explore the mechanisms that have been utilized in these three elements globally, their effectiveness, and failures to guide government procurement towards efficient anti-corruption strategies.

## III. PREVENTING CORRUPTION AND INCREASING ACCOUNTABILITY

The United States government provides assistance to nations that are committed in reducing corruption through constructing new support for reform by empowering the citizens, and also through strengthening democracy in the nation. The U.S. has been active in this regard in many countries and this paper will evaluate the approaches and effectiveness of the strategies that were employed in Afghanistan. According to a report that was released by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR Audit, 2013) the United States government appropriated over \$96 billion for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, and this also included multiple programs and strategies that were aimed at reducing the rate of corruption (Spector, 2011). Afghanistan was in a point of transition and the reconstruction process dependent on the donations that were made from other countries. Therefore, for processes to occur efficiently there was a need to reduce corruption and graft.

Reevaluation of the situation in Afghanistan by Singh (2016) illustrated that there was a no progress in reducing corruption. Firstly, despite the financial aid and assistance that was provided, the United States government did not illustrate concrete objectives and goals. In fact, the Department of State did not provide a final draft of the 2010 anti-corruption strategy. Therefore, the agency stated that the approaches in place are currently guided by the US Civil-Military Strategic Framework, and the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. These approaches all had the same issues, which were the absence of measurable outcomes (Ruder, 2015). The failure of these guiding principles were a result of their fundamental purpose as the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework was not designed for reducing corruption but facilitating growth and collaboration between Afghanistan and the donors.

Despite the lack of objectives and goals by the Department of State, the relationship between corruption and political accountability has been extensively studied in different states. These findings can shed more insight on the approaches that the US government can take in its procurement towards preventing corruption. Lederman et al (2005) found that democracy; closed lists and reelection were the main attributes of associated with accountability. Reelection had a straightforward impact on this direction, while the development of closed lists led to the increase in concern of the politicians regarding their reputation (Welenzuela & Bailey, 1997). Furthermore, the same findings were replicated by Garman et al (2001) and Rose-Ackerman (2005) and this shows the relevance of strengthening electoral structures in enhancing accountability. Another element that was found to also contribute to a higher level of accountability is the freedom of press. Cuervo-Cazurra (2014) found that there was an increase in transparency as information was easily accessible, and people were held accountable for their actions.

Studies have also been conducted for the evaluation of political structures and how they impact accountability. State autonomy and a decentralized political system were identified as factors contributing to an increase in accountability (Gelineau & Remmer, 2006). This was because the processes in the government were easier to monitor and at local and broad levels (Faguet, 2014). Furthermore, this process has been found to increase the level of competition that existed between different entities and states, which required an overlap in the bureaucratic process from the state and federal governments (Boffa et al., 2015). In essence, this reduced autocratic control over a particular process by one entity, which made corruption more difficult and the corrupt parties were more identifiable.

Another important aspect of accountability that was found in previous studies is that of political competition (Jones, 2013). In fact, historical data illustrates that the mere existence of political competition makes the leadership accountable for the efficiency of their systems and in this case working with agencies to reduce the level of corruption. Furthermore, a study by Rose-Ackerman (1999) showed that institutions that strengthen the harm inflicted on politicians through the threat of political defeat, increases the force of this institution to control the behavior of individuals in this position. Berliner et al (2015) replicated these findings and stated that the approach biased politicians towards long term goals and provided higher incentives from these individuals to increase their commitment towards good governments, which includes less corruption.

Another attribute that has been noted in systems that are more resistant to corruption in terms of accountability is the existence of branches of power (Mikhailov et al., 2016). Separating the authoritative responsibility of the officials and strategically designing the system creates balance and checks and encourages different governing bodies to monitor one another for the benefit of the citizens (Cousin, 2007). In fact, this has been found to also hold truth among legislative, executive, and judiciary powers. Countries such as the United Kingdom have utilized parliamentary systems as a way of implementing stronger and more immediate monitoring of political activity, which in turn increases accountability among officials.

#### **IV. STRENGTHENING LAW ENFORCEMENT**

The law enforcement agency has been an integral part in of strategies aimed at reducing corruption in different countries. In Afghanistan, the United States government has worked in collaboration with the Afghan law enforcement to reduce the level of corruption to minimal success. A study that was conducted by Afzali and Timory (2016) aimed to compare the difference in the dynamics of failure and success of anti-corruption institutions in other countries and Afghanistan. In particular, the authors evaluated the efficiency in specialized anti-corruption agency against that of law enforcement. Past studies indicated the existence of some pattern between these entities (UNDP, 2005), which included a relationship between the level of corruption in a country and the effectiveness of the strategy. In particular countries that had a high level of corruption benefited more from a specialized agency (De Sousa, 2010). For example, countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Hong Kong that were previously plagued by corruption have reduced the occurrence of such activities through specialized agencies (De Speville, 2010). In particular, Singapore and Hong Kong

have experienced marked levels of success, while Malaysia and Indonesia have some occurrences but with substantial improvements.

Furthermore, these findings are supported by the outcome among countries that took the alternative approaches such as Bulgaria, which invested in law enforcement and the Attorney General's Office. The difference between the two approaches is distinct even among the countries such as Indonesia with modest improvements that have shown success between 2010 and 2015 according to the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (Joseph et al., 2016). However, it is also worth acknowledging the barriers and variables that influence the strategy developed. These include the fact that at the time Bulgarian law enforcement agents were prepared for the reduction in the level of corruption. Therefore, it was more economical on a country with a strained budget (Smilov&Dorosiev, 2016). On the other hand, this was not the case in Indonesia that had a law enforcement agency plagued with corruption. Another such example is that of Nigeria and other developing countries that have police perceived as the most corrupt institution in the country (Agbibo, 2015).

In regards to Afghanistan, the country is considered one of the five most corrupt nations in the world, and this has been the case for the past seven consecutive years (Afzali&Timory, 2016). Several authors suggest that this because the corruption in the country is institutionalized, which requires substantial reforms to ensure that there is good governance. In such governments, as illustrated in Nigeria, the law enforcement that is responsible for reducing acts of corruption is among the most corrupt establishments in the country (Agbibo, 2015).

There are challenges that have also been faced by countries that decide to adopt specialized agency for fighting corruption. These areas often face challenges in minimizing the duplication of the roles that are served by the anti-corruption agency and the attorney general. This is further enhanced when both entities are provided prosecutorial power, and many countries look to minimize the conflict by establishing the attorney general as the only establishment that has the power to prosecute criminals. However, there are mixed results in the success of this strategy as countries such as Nigeria still face challenges and delays, while Malaysia has been able to solve this problem efficiently (Kuris, 2015). Findings find more effect when there is distributed power between these agencies, which is to say that the anti-corruption agencies require some authority that will allow them to enforce their role. At the same time, the attorney general ensures that all processes are performed in the appropriate legal conduct (UNDP, 2015).

In essence, strengthening law enforcement is an appealing approach; however, there is a need to identify the weaknesses of this agency in terms of resistance to corruption and potential use of funding to meet the intended anti-corruption targets. A report that was published by the United States Institute of Peace (2009) showed that as of 2009 there was a substantial growth in the Afghan police from 68000 to 86000. These individuals occupied different positions and departments within the force. Despite the fact that the expansion was aided by over \$10 billion in assistance from external sources, there were still no improvements in the rate of corruption both within and outside the police force (Singh, 2014). In fact, at the time of the report, the police was accused of being incompetent in protecting members of the public or regulation of criminal activity (United States Institute of Peace, 2009).

A study on the corruption among Afghan police officials attributed the persistence of corruption to consistent funding of the Afghan narcotics industry (Singh, 2014). It is also worth noting that these groups were also responsible for sponsoring the Taliban and sustaining instability in the country. Another important finding was that there was a high level of drug abuse or involvement in the drug trade by the police, which further increased vulnerability to corruption and incompetency in using public funding for reducing corruption (Basir et al., 2016). There was also a poor level of coordination between the anti-corruption agencies and the police officials, which adversely impacted the rate of progress. Nevertheless, the Obama administration continued to work with this department and acknowledged its role in the long term success of reducing corruption and establishing rule of law in Afghanistan.

## **V. TACKLING THE CORRUPTION-SECURITY NEXUS**

The threat of corruption towards national security has been demonstrated in numerous countries that include Afghanistan. As stated above, drug trafficking in the country is largely connected with the law enforcement agency and the Taliban (Singh, 2014). This issue is more directly related to the United States as it is invested in the country with its troops and many employees that are working towards improving the living conditions in the country. The United States has worked with many countries to reduce corruption as a matter of national security. For example, between 1947 and 2011, it is estimated that America invested more than \$65 billion in Pakistan, and over \$76 billion in Egypt between 1948 and 2015 (Vogyl, 2016). The importance of this was also expressed in reports published by Bowen, who is the former U.S. Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction. The report illustrated that Iraq was an important learning curve

for America, as this showed the importance of building systems and institutions that fight against corruption. However, representatives that are in charge of reconstruction in Afghanistan stated the failure of NATO and the United States to consider the lessons learned during the time in Iraq.

Studies involving countries that are considered a risk illustrated the importance of reducing corruption for the purpose of national security (Bush, 2009). Literature by individuals documenting experiences in Afghanistan such as *The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan 2001-2014* (Gall, 2014) and *Thieves of the State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security* (Chayes, 2016) illustrate that the negligence of the approach by American and other countries has contributed to an increase in the level of corruption. This was through the financial injection of over \$100 billion without substantial goals or measurement tool in place, graft in almost all political and government activities, and use of money for bribes and attaining information securing short term goals (Sopko, 2016). There are several changes that have been adopted aimed at reducing corruption as a national security risk and this includes the development of the Anti-Corruption Summit held in London that will allow all countries to collaborate on their ideas in allocating funding for reduction of corruption.

## **VI. DISCUSSION**

Therefore, there are several approaches that have been taken by the United States and other countries in an attempt to reducing the level of corruption. Procurement towards preventing corruption should take into consideration the reasons for the success and failures of previous strategies. The government is committed towards the reduction of corruption both locally and internationally and this paper explored the approaches that may be implemented in Afghanistan, whose level of corruption is an issue of national security for the United States. Findings demonstrate that funding should be aimed at first improving the system as the problem of corruption is spread through all sectors. This could begin by creating a decentralized government and allowing the officials to also work with private agencies that are under the funding of the United States and other allies. This will limit the opportunities accessible for corruption as there will be a need for use of funding to be approved and monitored by different departments.

Secondly, the findings show the importance of the electoral process and the involvement of community members. Governments in a transparent political system have lower levels of corruption and more liabilities to the people as the events during their term can affect their political and the future of their party. Hence, funding should be targeted at electoral commissions and training to strengthen their competency in a free and fair election. Additionally, free press should also be encouraged in these communities as this enhances accountability and makes information available to the public. This places the community in a better position for political decision making, and also encourages people in office to be more cautious with their actions.

Despite the success that has been found in strengthening law enforcement in developed countries, places with high corruption such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and also Afghanistan have been found to have better results from creating specialized agencies that are targeted at fighting corruption. The United States and other countries have donated over \$10 billion to expanding the police force without substantial results in reducing corruption or even protecting the citizens (Singh, 2014). Therefore, this should also be budgeted towards specialized agencies that have specific goals and objectives in the country as this approach has been found to be more effective. On the other hand, police may also receive further training for the collaboration with these agencies.

## **VII. LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH**

One potential limitation of studies that assess corruption and the necessary strategies towards minimizing the process is the fact that the studies are reliant on certain groups of key respondents as these individuals are the only figures with access to information. On the other hand, the views of the politicians in the research are either exaggerated or underestimated as they are intended to serve personal gain. Therefore, the single respond group approach has justification as there are limitations in the sources of information. Another potential limitation of the study is the use of literature without sufficient data to critically assess the research methods and approaches that were adopted by the author. Finally, many of the authors also narrow their research to one aspect or frame of corruption where as illustrated in the paper the problem is divers and encompasses many external factors. Therefore, the data that is often presented is limited in its representation of the effectiveness of a strategy and the replication of the success in another environment.

## **VIII. CONCLUSION**

In summation, corruption in countries such as Afghanistan is an issue of national security for the United. Despite the large of amounts of funds that have been allocated to this country, the results continue to remain minimal. The United States has allocated over \$96 billion to different organizations that are aimed at fighting corruption without success. The administration that was responsible for the reconstruction process in Iraq has criticized the strategies adapted to fighting corruption in Afghanistan, and how they have failed to implement the recommendations that were suggested by this program. Furthermore, a security risk still exists in Afghanistan. The reevaluation of strategies and targeting the necessary sectors will have a positive impact on the outcomes as lessons have successful and failed methods have been

identified in setting such as Iraq and other countries. There is a need to devise new frameworks with specific goals and objectives that are based on evidence and aimed at ensuring that there are milestones and platforms for assessment. The law enforcement agency has received over \$10 billion in funding, and there is a need to shift procurement strategies to independent agencies. These have been found to be more effective in countries with corruption throughout the system. There will also be a need to revise the electoral process and encourage democracy and introduction of agencies that will regulate these activities. Democratic states have a higher accountability that allows the government officials to be cautious with their activities. In essence, a holistic approach should be taken by the United States government in its procurement to preventing corruption.

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