

Confronting the Threat of Corruption and Organized Crime in Afghanistan: Implications for Future Armed Conflict

BY TIM SULLIVAN AND CARL FORSBERG

As the conflict in Afghanistan has evolved over the last decade, it has become apparent that of the many challenges the country and its international partners face, few are as complex, pervasive, and threatening as corruption and organized crime. Together, corruption and organized crime have undermined efforts to build Afghan institutions, consolidate security gains, achieve political progress, encourage economic growth, and set conditions for enduring stability. These problems, however, are not unique to the war in Afghanistan. Conflicts elsewhere in recent decades have revealed that states engaged in or emerging from insurgencies and civil wars—especially those in which institutions are weak, rule of law is minimal, and substantial international resources have been injected with inadequate oversight—are particularly susceptible to the proliferation of corruption and organized crime.

The Afghan experience is rich with lessons for the American military and foreign policy establishment as it considers the likely nature of future armed conflict. In the years ahead, the U.S. may again be compelled to assist or intervene in weak states experiencing protracted instability or rebuilding after years of violence. In such environments—as in Afghanistan—there is a pressing requirement not only for seamless integration of civilian and military efforts to establish security, enable law enforcement organizations, and promote the rule of law, but also for full coordination in the pursuit of transparency and accountability within the critical institutions of

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the state in, or emerging from, conflict. All of these efforts, meanwhile, must be grounded in a thorough understanding of that state's politics, and tailored to generate the necessary will among its key leaders to undertake complementary reforms.

This article outlines the nature and origins of the current problems of corruption and organized crime in Afghanistan, as well as the effect they have had on the mission of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). It then discusses the measures ISAF has taken to address these threats. It concludes with a review of the lessons and implications of the Afghan counter-corruption experience for future armed conflict and stability operations.

The Nature and Extent of Corruption and Organized Crime in Afghanistan

The prevailing level of corruption across Afghanistan's public and private sectors presents a grave threat to United States interests in the region and the viability of the Afghan state. Corruption undermines the legitimacy, effectiveness, and cohesion of the Afghan government; it fuels discontent among the population, generating active and passive support for the insurgency; and it prevents the growth of a strong licit economy, thus perpetuating Afghan dependence on international assistance. Corruption and organized crime directly compromise the United States' fundamental interests in Afghanistan and the surrounding region. Long-term U.S. objectives—including the elimination and prevention of transnational terrorist safe-havens—remain dependent upon strengthening the Afghan state and hardening its institutions against the resurgence of the Taliban, the onset of further civil conflict, and the interference of the country's neighbors.

Afghan leaders increasingly acknowledge the scale of the problem and the threat it presents. Although President Karzai has often tolerated corruption as part of a complex political strategy, he has vocalized growing frustration with the problem. "The permeation of corruption and a culture of impunity have undermined the development of institutions in terms of strength and credibility," President Karzai warned at the December 2011 Bonn Conference in Germany.¹ Corruption in Afghanistan is not an intrinsic cultural phenomenon. It exists today at unprecedented levels as a result of the events of the past thirty years (and particularly the decade of Taliban rule), including chronically weak governance and rule of law institutions, social structures fractured by sustained conflict, and in more recent years, a fragile war economy sustained by international aid, security assistance, and the narcotics trade. "Our biggest weakness," President Karzai has explained, "was that the administration had almost been shattered during thirty years of war."²

The most serious and destabilizing forms of corruption in Afghanistan are carried out systematically by criminal networks that operate with political protection. "In this government," explained Afghan National Security Advisor Rangin Dadfar Spanta in December 2010, "we have mafia networks." The networks "begin with the financial banking system, with corruption networks, with reconstruction and security firms and also with drugs and the Taliban; they are in Parliament and they are in government."³ These criminal patronage networks (CPNs) are engaged in the capture and subversion of critical state functions and institutions. They divert customs revenue at Afghanistan's international airports and border crossing points, steal international security and

development assistance disbursed to the Afghan government, and abuse public and private financial institutions at the expense of Afghanistan’s economic stability. The networks also profit immensely from facilitating, protecting, and participating in the narcotics trade.

CPNs currently operate with impunity—consistently avoiding meaningful investigations and prosecution—by exerting influence within law enforcement, investigative, and judicial institutions across the Afghan government. “Politics is constraining [our] ability to prosecute high-level corruption cases,” noted Afghan Attorney General Mohammad Ishaq Aloko, whose office is particularly vulnerable to political interference and manipulation. The internal accountability and oversight

mechanisms of many critical Afghan institutions are similarly subject to intimidation and coercion.

The scale of corruption in Afghanistan is closely linked to the political settlement that has occurred in the country as CPNs, which are often regionally and ethnically aligned, pursue political as well as criminal agendas. The networks with the greatest degree of influence in the Afghan government and its critical institutions have their roots in the mujahideen commander’s networks and political parties that emerged in the conflicts of the 1980s and 1990s—the Soviet-Afghan war, the subsequent civil war, and the anti-Taliban resistance. With the Bonn Agreement in 2001, many of the figures in these networks acquired senior positions within Afghanistan’s newly formed national government. These figures, in turn,



The ‘Go Vote’ posters have a distinct message -- armed guards are prominent on either side and in this case there’s a real one at the base.

distributed power among their allies and affiliates, and the purchase of government posts became widespread. With this commoditization of political power came the development within key ministries of cohesive patronage networks, elements of which became engaged in illicit activities. Today, these networks dominate Afghanistan's political space. They are stakeholders in the state's weakness, as the continued fragility of Afghanistan's institutions provides them freedom of action and impunity.

Apart from weakening the country's critical institutions, corruption and organized crime have played a role in fomenting instability and insurgent violence. Analysts have consistently identified causal links between predatory governance and the expansion of insurgency in Afghanistan, noting, for

example, the connection between the Taliban's reemergence after 2003 and the abuse of power by government officials, security forces, and their networks of affiliates.⁴ More recently, by undermining popular confidence in the legitimacy, effectiveness, and long-term durability of the government, corruption has discouraged the population from actively mobilizing against the insurgency, thus lending the Taliban passive support. Additionally, the short-term maximization-of-gains mentality among the country's criminal patronage networks—which is driven both by a lack of faith in Afghanistan's future and the anticipation, despite reassurances, of an impending, large-scale international disengagement from the country—has heightened ethnic and factional tensions, accelerated the networks' efforts to



Staff Sgt. Joseph Swafford, U.S. Air Force

U.S. Army Capt. Justin Quisenberry, the commander of Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, conducts a joint patrol with Afghan National Security Forces in Andar district, Ghazni province, Afghanistan, on Jan. 7, 2011.

consolidate power, and set conditions for continued violence.

The Limits of Capacity-Building

Over the last ten years, the U.S., ISAF, and the international community have together pursued a variety of capacity-building and technical assistance initiatives in Afghanistan, many of which have sought to reduce opportunities for corruption and strengthen Afghan institutions against its corrosive effects. These efforts have included training and advisory programs for Afghanistan's elite counternarcotics and investigative units, along with initiatives to develop Afghan judicial and rule of law institutions at the national, provincial, and district levels. Various international development agencies have sponsored technical assistance programs in ministries across the government, and considerable resources and attention have been dedicated to the mammoth task of recruiting, training, equipping, and professionalizing the Afghan National Security Forces.

While significant progress has been achieved in each of these areas, corruption and organized crime nevertheless remain common within Afghan institutions. A fundamental obstacle to the success of capacity-building initiatives has been a frequent failure to acknowledge the inherently political nature of institutional reform. Portions of Afghan ministries function not as professional bureaucracies focused on public administration, but as vertically-integrated patronage networks, elements of which engage in and facilitate a range of illicit activities. Technical assistance and capacity-building alone, absent measures to counter the influence of CPNs within state institutions, can do little to prevent the systemic diversion of international resources, the limited and selective provision of services, and

the dysfunction now evident within portions of Afghanistan's institutions. Criminal patronage networks (CPN) within the Afghan government have likewise thwarted many of the structural and administrative anti-corruption reforms that the international community has advocated since the early years of the conflict, including merit-based hiring, pay and grade reform, and asset declaration policies for senior government officials. Moreover, CPNs have actively suppressed or sought to co-opt the junior, reform-minded officials who have received training from the U.S. and others in recent years, as well as the experienced – but politically vulnerable – technocrats operating within the Afghan government's bureaucracies.

CJIATF-Shafafiyat: Responding to the Strategic Threat of Corruption

In the summer of 2010, ISAF created the Combined Joint Interagency Task Force-Shafafiyat (“transparency” in Dari and Pashto) in coordination with the international community, to support the Afghan government, foster a common understanding of the corruption problem, plan and implement ISAF anti-corruption efforts, and integrate the coalition's counter-corruption activities with those of key interagency and international partners. From the outset, the task force engaged regularly with leaders from Afghan civil society and officials across the Afghan government to frame the problem of corruption from the perspective of those who had experienced it, and to develop a shared understanding as a basis for joint action and reform. In partnership with senior Afghan leaders, Shafafiyat (which evolved into the Combined Joint Interagency Task Force –Afghanistan, or CJIATF-A, in late 2012) established a variety of structured forums in which ISAF, U.S. interagency

partners, and international organizations could exchange information, gain insights, and work cooperatively with Afghan officials to develop and implement concrete anti-corruption plans and measure progress.

Since the task force initiated its work, Afghan officials have increasingly recognized and acknowledged that the scale of corruption within their country's critical institutions is compromising the security, stability, economic health, and cohesion of the state. Afghan leaders also express concerns about their country's international reputation and standing, acknowledging that corruption, organized crime, and the narcotics trade jeopardize the credibility of Afghanistan's sovereignty. Many leaders remain deterred, however, by what they perceive as the near-term political risks of acting against powerful criminal networks. In its

coordination with its Afghan and international partners, Shafafiyat therefore sought consistently to illustrate the comparative long-term risks of *inaction*, so as to persuade senior leaders that it is in their ultimate interests—and the interest of the Afghan state and its people—to address the problem with a degree of urgency.

In partnership with organizations across ISAF, the U.S. interagency, the Afghan government, and the international community, Shafafiyat prioritized efforts in areas in which corruption and organized crime present the greatest threat to the coalition's mission and the viability of the Afghan state.

Security Ministries and the ANSF

The problem of corruption is particularly dangerous within the security ministries and the



PFC Shaquille Stokes

The first sergeant of the Afghan National Army (ANA) 1st Special Operations Kandak examines illegal drugs found during the search of a compound Nov. 11, 2013, in Achin district, Nangarhar province Afghanistan.

Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), as it threatens the combat effectiveness and cohesion of the army and police. ISAF, through the efforts of the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A), supported the development of professional Afghan security forces, managed by transparent and accountable security ministries. Shafafiyat and NTM-A worked closely with senior officials from the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Ministry of Interior (MOI) in a sustained manner through several joint, Afghan-led, working groups and commissions to develop detailed anti-corruption recommendations and implementation plans, including the creation of insulated investigative, oversight, and adjudicative bodies within the security ministries so as to ensure that the ANSF can enforce internal accountability while avoiding political interference and intimidation. ISAF also worked to identify areas in which security assistance is being diverted within the ANSF for criminal ends, such that it is a net dis-benefit to the coalition's mission.

Rule of Law and the Judicial Sector

Across Afghanistan's provinces, the erosion of the rule of law has not only empowered elements of the insurgency—which have capitalized on the population's demand for swift and impartial dispute resolution—but has allowed power to remain in the hands of local and regional powerbrokers, who are involved in a range of predatory, extractive, and illicit activities.⁵ ISAF and its partners in the U.S. mission in Kabul have supported the development of Afghan law enforcement and judicial institutions that are responsive to the needs of the population and reliably enforce the rule of law. This effort requires sustained engagement within the Afghan judicial sector, to ensure that investigators, prosecutors, and judges are

allowed to operate free from bribery, intimidation, and political interference. ISAF officials have also worked directly with senior, national-level Afghan leaders in an effort to lift protection from criminals, encourage prosecutions, and prevent the reinstatement elsewhere in the government of officials removed for corruption.

Borders and Airports

The criminal capture of state functions at Afghanistan's border crossing points, international airports, and inland customs depots robs the state of revenue, inhibits economic growth, impedes capacity-development efforts, and leaves the country vulnerable to transnational threats. The World Bank ranks Afghanistan's borders as the fourth hardest in the world to cross for the purposes of trade, creating a significant obstacle to the country's regional economic integration.⁶ Corruption and organized crime at Afghanistan's critical ports of entry also directly undermine the state's security and sovereignty by enabling the trafficking of narcotics, precursor chemicals, and weapons, while facilitating insurgent freedom of movement. The civil-military team in Kabul and senior Afghan officials have committed to work together to expose and act against the criminal networks operating at these borders, airports, and customs depots, so as to enable the Afghan state to maintain credible sovereignty and achieve enduring security, while collecting revenue sufficient to expand its licit economy and reduce its dependence on international assistance.

Counternarcotics and Transnational Crime

As the mutually-reinforcing relationship between the Afghan narcotics trade,

corruption, and the insurgency became increasingly apparent, ISAF and its partners in the international law enforcement community began targeting the intersection of these convergent threats. Likewise, as ISAF and its inter-agency and international partners in Kabul have expanded their visibility on the flows of money, narcotics, precursor chemicals, weapons, and other resources across Afghanistan's criminal networks, it became clear that there is a significant transnational dimension to corruption and organized crime in Afghanistan. As the U.S. Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime explains, "nowhere is the convergence of transnational threats more apparent than in Afghanistan and Southwest Asia."⁷⁷ The application of international law enforcement actions and targeted financial

sanctions is therefore a critical means of degrading Afghanistan's criminal networks, while creating a deterrent effect currently not achieved by the Afghan judicial system.

Contracting and Procurement

Task Force 2010, a component of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) was formed simultaneously with CJIAF-Shafafiyat in the summer of 2010 to coordinate, expand, and apply greater oversight and management of U.S. contracting, acquisition, and procurement processes, so as to deny criminal patronage networks and insurgents access to U.S. funds and materiel. Having acknowledged that international spending has the potential to directly impact campaign objectives, U.S. forces are increasingly integrating procurement and



Gunnery Sgt. Bryce Piper

U.S. Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Anthony Duncan picks a poppy flower while returning from a security patrol through a poppy field in Helmand province's Green Zone. Elements of 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit deployed to Afghanistan to provide regional security in Helmand province in support of the International Security Assistance Force.

contracting considerations into planning and operations at all levels. Task Force 2010 and others have recognized that high-value construction contracts in insecure areas are the most difficult to oversee and administer, and the task force has prioritized its efforts accordingly. Additional contracting reforms have included the disaggregation of large contracts to encourage more bidders and to deter the emergence of monopolies; the wider advertising of contracts so as to improve Afghan vendors' awareness of and access to the bidding process; and identification of intended sub-contractors in the course of bidding. U.S. forces' contracting reform efforts have been coordinated with the Afghan government, as well as with civilian agencies operating in Afghanistan like USAID, which has published its own COIN contracting guidance, similar to that issued by ISAF.

Looking Ahead: Implications of the Afghan Counter-Corruption Experience for Future Conflict

In anticipation of future missions of similar complexity, it will be essential to ensure that the lessons emerging from the counter-corruption experience in Afghanistan are integrated into U.S. forces' training, doctrine, and leadership development. Although future efforts will demand close civil-military coordination and unity of effort, U.S. and allied forces must be prepared to anticipate and exercise initiative in addressing the problems of corruption and organized crime in counterinsurgency and stabilization environments. The lessons and insights outlined below reflect the expectation that U.S. and allied forces and their inter-agency partners will, in the years ahead, engage in operations in which corruption and organized crime will serve as drivers of conflict, as

well as impediments to sustainable security, host nation security force development, political progress, and economic growth. These lessons are likewise presented with the understanding that the U.S. and the international community have at times inadvertently contributed to and compounded the problems faced today in Afghanistan with respect to corruption and organized crime—missteps the U.S. and its allies cannot afford to make in future conflicts.

Lesson 1: Anticipate and Respond Swiftly to Corruption and Organized Crime

In insecure states with underdeveloped institutions and weak rule of law, a massive infusion of international resources disbursed with limited oversight is likely to be accompanied by a surge in corruption and organized crime.⁸ International forces and their interagency counterparts prosecuting counterinsurgency or stability operations must anticipate this development and be prepared to put in place, in the earliest stages of their mission, mechanisms by which to mitigate and monitor the problem (by tracking illicit financial flows, for example, and implementing vendor-vetting measures), while at the same time articulating expectations for transparency and accountability among officials in the supported government. Timing, in all these efforts, is critical. It is vital to launch counter-corruption initiatives before criminal networks and patterns of corruption become entrenched, before the population has become disillusioned with its government and international forces, and before the perception has arisen within the host government that impunity for politically-connected criminals will be tolerated. The international community will also maximize its influence if it acts before its will to impose costs for

corruption—whether through conditionality of aid or international law enforcement actions—has been called into question.

Lesson 2: Acknowledge the Centrality of Politics

International forces and their civilian partners must ground all of their efforts in a thorough understanding of the history and politics of the state in which they are engaged. War—whether in the form of a counterinsurgency campaign or post-conflict stability operations—is a fundamentally political endeavor. Corruption in post-conflict states, likewise, is fundamentally a political problem, closely linked to the balances of power among national elites. As a 2010 UNDP study noted, “effectively responding to corruption can be difficult because it nearly always requires taking political, economic, and social power away from those who benefit from the status quo.”⁹ With this in mind, international forces must understand the key leaders with whom they engage and partner in the context of their political, social, and cultural networks. The intelligence community has an important role to play in this regard, although additional training for analysts may be required to ensure a proper focus not only on the composition of political networks, but on the historic affiliations, dynamic relationships, and balances of power within them—as well as an understanding of their respective roles in the context of a broader national political settlement. It is also important to be aware that host-nation officials’ interests might not always align fully with those of international forces. Host-nation political actors may in some cases be motivated by narrow agendas driven by their historic, ethnic, and factional affiliations—as well as a desire to maximize their political and

financial positions prior to international forces’ ultimate departure—rather than a shared commitment to satisfy mutual goals. It is clear, therefore, that counter-corruption efforts stand to have the greatest effect when implemented in support of a carefully coordinated political strategy on the part of international forces and their civilian counterparts, designed to marshal military, diplomatic, and economic tools and resources in pursuit of a thorough and clearly articulated set of political objectives.

Lesson 3: Guard Against the Criminal Capture of Institutions within the Supported Government

Attention to the politics of the supported government and early implementation of joint anti-corruption measures are particularly critical for preventing the emergence of what has been called the “political-criminal nexus”—a mutually beneficial relationship of protection and profit between corrupt government officials and criminal networks.¹⁰ If left unchecked, this dynamic has the potential to lead to the criminal capture of critical state functions, whereby the supported government’s institutions become directed toward serving the interests of a narrow political elite and their criminal associates, rather than advancing and protecting broad national interests. In post-conflict states whose governments are the recipients of large sums of international assistance, there is an enormous incentive for criminal networks to infiltrate and co-opt fragile institutions newly flush with resources. The Afghan experience has demonstrated that international technical assistance and professionalization training are necessary, but not sufficient, for girding institutions against criminal infiltration and subversion. Rather than

focusing narrowly on capacity-building, those providing international assistance must become attuned to patterns of criminal activity and work with key leaders in the supported government to develop coherent, broadly acceptable strategies to disrupt criminal networks and sever the relationships between political patrons and their criminal clients.

Lesson 4: Understand the Impact of International Spending

The infusion of substantial international resources—whether in the form of development assistance or contracts—without sufficient oversight into a contested or post-conflict state with an underdeveloped economy has the potential to significantly empower some actors

while dramatically disempowering others, thus generating unintended political, social, and security consequences. Development, procurement, and acquisition initiatives thus, as COMISAF’s COIN Contracting Guidance suggests, represent operational concerns that must be integrated and aligned with a comprehensive national or coalition political strategy. It will be imperative in future conflicts to implement measures to ensure rigorous vendor-vetting and sustained post-award oversight for large logistics and development contracts—and to pursue full integration across the civilian and military agencies involved, so as to achieve a “common contracting operating picture.” In Afghanistan, it has further been observed that failure to adequately judge local



Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, intercept illegal timber as it is smuggled through the Narang Valley in Afghanistan’s Konar province.

populations' development needs or accurately assess communities' capacity to absorb international aid has generated extreme waste and created opportunities for graft, corruption, and patronage, while preventing the emergence of entrepreneurs.¹¹ Models of development, focused instead on host nations' nascent small enterprises and business sectors, stand to serve as a check against large scale corruption, while setting the conditions for inclusive, responsive governance of a sort that deters systemic abuse of power.¹²

international forces can anticipate having significant access, agency, and leverage within the supported government's security sector.

Lesson 5: Promote Transparency and Accountability in Security Force Development

With the expectation that future counterinsurgency and stability operations will be coupled with security force development missions, international forces can anticipate having significant access, agency, and leverage within the supported government's security sector. This access presents a critical opportunity to integrate counter-corruption efforts within training and professionalization initiatives. The development of effective, professional, and accountable security forces is essential, of course, for the transfer of security responsibilities to the host nation – a prerequisite for successful counterinsurgency and stabilization missions. In many developing countries emerging from conflict, however, control of the security ministries and their forces is much sought after among elites and their networks as the political settlement develops.¹³ As a

result, security forces can become subject to factionalism, politicization, and corruption. International forces assigned to develop the supported government's security sector must therefore be prepared to apply the same rigor of analysis to understanding the political and factional affiliations of key leaders within the host nation's security forces as those of other national figures, as discussed above. A security force development model focused strictly on capacity-building and professionalization may not be sufficient for ensuring a politically neutral force or for adequately integrating former combatants into new national security structures. As the 2006 Counterinsurgency Field Manual makes clear, "the acceptance of values, such as ethnic equality or the rejection of corruption, may be a better measure of training effectiveness in some COIN situations" than simple "competence in military tasks."¹⁴ In the long-term, of course, there is not a dichotomy between these objectives, as host-nation security forces rife with corruption will suffer significantly reduced operational effectiveness. The Afghanistan experience demonstrated the extent to which corruption consistently undermined a unit's leadership, morale, will to fight, readiness, and logistical sustainability. To the degree that host-nation security forces are seen by the population to be professional and above ethnic, tribal, and political factionalism, they have the potential to lend additional credibility to the supported government, serving as the locus of an emerging sense of national unity.

Lesson 6: Integrate Law Enforcement, Military, and Information Operations

As the war in Afghanistan has made clear, corruption, organized crime, and insurgency are interconnected problems that cannot be dealt

with in isolation. In states engaged in or emerging from conflict, an effective response to these converging threats requires the integration of law enforcement, military, and information operations at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels, so as to employ the full range of tools available to address these problems. The integration of these capabilities is also essential for exploiting the likely “criminalization” of the insurgency. This dynamic has been seen, to varying degrees, in Colombia, Iraq, and Afghanistan—as insurgent groups that had engaged in illicit activities initially as a means of financing their operations became increasingly profit-focused, at the expense of their original ideological or political aims. International forces and their civilian partners can capitalize on this dynamic not only through information operations—calling attention to the groups’ venality and hypocrisy—but by mobilizing and empowering host-nation law enforcement assets through evidence-based operations against insurgents groups’ criminal activities.¹⁵ Because host-nation law enforcement and judicial institutions often become targets for insurgent attacks, as well as for infiltration and subversion by criminal networks and their affiliates, international forces and their civilian partners must also help insulate and protect these institutions from intimidation and coercion.

Lesson 7: Identify and Operate Against the Transnational Dimensions of the Problem

As President Obama’s Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime makes clear, the problem of transnational organized crime can be particularly acute within weak and developing states, where criminal networks “threaten stability and undermine free markets

as they build alliances with political leaders, financial institutions, law enforcement, foreign intelligence, and security agencies.”¹⁶ Transnational criminal organizations, in short, exploit and further destabilize the weak institutions, internal divisions, and permissive security environments of states engaged in or

criminal networks “threaten stability and undermine free markets as they build alliances with political leaders, financial institutions, law enforcement, foreign intelligence, and security agencies.”

emerging from conflict. If the Afghan experience and others are a reliable guide, key figures within indigenous criminal networks will also rely upon links to the international financial system to launder their criminal proceeds and maintain licit business interests abroad. In these instances, the U.S. and its allies have a range of tools at their disposal to operate against the transnational dimension of corruption and organized crime, while furthering counterinsurgency and stabilization objectives—by tracking illicit finance, initiating targeted coercive financial actions, pursuing sanctions designations, and identifying opportunities for mutual legal assistance requests. International forces and their civilian partners would benefit in future conflicts from the creation of a central, unified, interagency strategic planning body with the capacity to manage and coordinate the application of these tools and capabilities against transnational networks.

Lesson 8: Develop a Counter-Corruption Narrative That Resonates With the Population

Given the extent to which corruption undermines popular confidence in a supported government's effectiveness, legitimacy, and sovereignty, international forces and their civilian partners must find a means of presenting themselves as an honest broker between the population and the state, thereby avoiding perceived complicity in the host government's corruption, even as international forces continue to provide vital assistance to the supported state's leaders and institutions. To do so, it is essential to consistently transmit a message of enduring international commitment at the strategic and tactical levels—commitment not only to ending corruption, but to ensuring durable security and to advancing the interests and aspirations of the population. Without a compelling narrative of commitment, a series of harmful hedging strategies can develop: criminal networks and their patrons will accelerate and expand their illicit activities, driven by a short-term maximization-of-gains mentality that anticipates the eventual departure of international forces and the easy access to international resources that accompanies them.

Lesson 9: Recognize Civil Society as a Force for Anti-Corruption Advocacy and Reform

As has been observed in Sicily, Colombia, Georgia, Mexico, and elsewhere, civil society groups can play a dramatic role in reversing the influence of organized criminal networks and the institutional corruption they encourage and enable.¹⁷ When properly networked and empowered, social activists, educators, entrepreneurs, elements of the media, religious leaders, and other moral authorities can together foster a critical mass of societal support for upholding the rule of law, while stigmatizing corruption, and thus generating

positive social pressure for reform. International forces and their civilian counterparts can create the space for these groups to mobilize unimpeded, in part by remaining aware that, much like the host-nation's judicial institutions, civil society organizations will become targets of intimidation and retribution from criminal networks and their political patrons. Support for and engagement with a post-conflict state's civic and social organizations can directly advance fundamental counterinsurgency and stability objectives, to the degree that a healthy, vibrant civil society is the foundation of a stable state whose institutions are responsive and whose leaders are accountable.

Lesson 10 : Employ Incentives and Disincentives

Although it must be carefully and strategically applied, international forces and their civilian partners should be aware of the leverage they maintain to shape events within a host-nation's political space. This leverage is afforded, in large part, by the security assurances provided by international forces, as well as by international assistance and spending, which in some cases may be the only reliable source of revenue for the government of a beleaguered post-conflict state. This leverage can prove vital when pursuing counter-corruption efforts, especially when host-nation officials' appetite for reform is minimal, and leaders will thus need to be persuaded and incentivized into action. Incentives can include, for example, the provision of additional assistance to a given state institution (or military unit), linked to the execution of a desired host-nation reform or law enforcement action. Targeted coercive financial sanctions or international law enforcement measures

represent yet another means of leverage that, again, must be applied only after consideration of the political context. Finally, although it represents a more indirect form of influence, the international community can take steps to integrate the host nation into international regimes and compacts related to corruption, transparency, and accountability, in an effort to encourage compliance with international norms and standards that appeals to host-nation leaders' concerns about the state's international reputation, standing, and sovereignty.

Conclusion

Not only are the problems of corruption, organized crime, insurgency, and the narcotics trade in Afghanistan mutually reinforcing and convergent; they are also enduring. Even with concerted coalition and Afghan security and law enforcement efforts in the next two years, these problems will remain a threat to Afghanistan's stability and economic health long after the international force presence recedes. Likewise, the influence of narcotics profits in the Afghan political-economy may grow as ready access to international resources—and thus the potential for criminal diversion—diminishes. Any long-term security commitment to Afghanistan, therefore, must consider the capabilities and organizational arrangements necessary to sustain the integration of U.S., Afghan, and international law enforcement, counter-corruption, counter-narcotics, and counter-terrorism efforts.

The approach adopted by ISAF and CJIAF-Shafafiyat has parallels in a number of other successful models, which have integrated military and law enforcement efforts to stabilize states facing convergent threats of insurgency, organized crime, and government subversion. The U.S. Military Group (MILGROUP)

in Colombia, for example, is designed to train, advise, and strengthen Colombia's special forces in the fight against the narcotics trade, terrorism, and insurgency, while reinforcing regional partnerships. The work of the MILGROUP has contributed to the reversal of the narcotics-driven insurgent and paramilitary violence that had for decades paralyzed Colombia's politics, corroded its judicial sector, and left its population victimized. Another successful model drawn upon in Afghanistan is Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF)–South, located in Key West, Florida, which marshals resources, shares intelligence, and coordinates operations across agencies in the fight against

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regional narcotics-trafficking. With representatives from the U.S. military, nine U.S. civilian agencies, and eleven different countries, JIATF–South has had a dramatic impact in disrupting and interdicting the flow of narcotics throughout Central/South America and the Caribbean.

As the U.S. military and national security establishment looks back on the wars of the last decade to cull lessons in preparation for future conflicts, the Afghan anti-corruption experience must be an essential area of focus. Few threats have cut as widely across U.S. and international forces' lines of effort in Afghanistan as corruption and organized crime. By hollowing-out the critical institutions the coalition and its partners have struggled to build, undermining the legitimacy of the government ISAF has sought to support,

preventing the mobilization of the population against the insurgency, and contributing to insurgent narratives, corruption has jeopardized all that the U.S. and its allies have set out to achieve in Afghanistan. ISAF's continually improving understanding of the problem, however, as well as its efforts to engage constructively with Afghan leaders on the issue—while at the same time assembling the proper tools necessary to address the challenge directly—have together laid the foundation for counter-corruption progress in the coming years. Much work lies ahead, clearly, and much still depends on the will of senior Afghan officials and political elites to commit definitively to reforms that, while daunting in the near-term, represent the country's best hope of achieving the promising and peaceful future its people, after decades of conflict, sorely deserve. **PRISM**

Notes

¹ President Hamid Karzai, "Statement at the Bonn Conference," December 5, 2011.

² President Kamid Karzai, International Anti-corruption Day Speech, Kabul, Afghanistan, December 18, 2010.

³ Matthew Rosenberg, "'Malign' Afghans Targeted," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 29, 2010.

⁴ Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Anand Gopal, "The Battle for Afghanistan: Militancy and Conflict in Kandahar," New America Foundation, November 2010; Tom Coglán, "The Taliban in Helmand: An Oral History," in Giustozzi, ed., *Decoding the New Taliban* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

⁵ Stephen Carter and Kate Clark, "No Shortcut to Stability: Justice, Politics, and Insurgency in Afghanistan," Chatham House, December 2010.

⁶ The World Bank, *Doing Business 2012*, Washington, DC.

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