

Crime + Corruption



Where suggestions go in Ladakh, India.

As a fragile democracy grows in Iraq, as U.S. forces in Afghanistan try to reform governance in Kabul, and as Mexico threatens to devolve into a narco-state, we hear a strident, intensifying refrain: crime and corruption must be stamped out. But if the chorus is in harmony on the pernicious effects of these plagues—poverty, war, lack of development, poor governance—it has offered little in the way of remedy. Moreover, given how interwoven and insidious these problems often are, just which should be tackled first?

In arriving at the theme for this issue of *World Policy Journal*, we kept returning to the conundrum Aristotle first addressed, some four centuries before Christ. What comes first, he wondered, the chicken or the egg? After much thought, he resolved it quite simply, if not entirely satisfactorily—they must both have always existed. Indeed, both corruption and crime have been a constant since the dawn of

civilization. But are the two always joined? Can corruption at the national level exist without necessarily producing widespread crime among the public? Or is criminality at the root of corruption? Are there places where one or the other can stand alone?

In setting out to explore the impact of these two evils, our new UpFront section offers a global look at the scope of the problem. We asked specialists around the world how nations can break the cycle of crime and corruption, assembling their responses in *The Big Question*. For a better sense of which countries are making strides and which are backsliding, we've highlighted the major movers around the globe. We took a microscope to France's decades-long Angolagate imbroglio, which led to the conviction of three dozen leading French officials and foreign arms merchants by a criminal court in Paris last October. Two unique essays round off the section: Bradley Birkenfeld, a banker and whistleblower on Switzerland's illegal multi-billion dollar industry of abetting tax cheats, presents his case from inside a U.S. federal penitentiary; and Ludmilla Petrushevskaya, one of Russia's great novelists, witnesses the brutality of policing in Moscow.

No discussion of corruption would be complete without the insight of Transparency International, the world's leading chronicler and watchdog, whose co-founder, Laurence Cockcroft, offers an astute tour d'horizon of this social cancer. David Lewis, who has spent years in Central Asia, brings us back to the Aristotelian problem: how is it that these narco-states have such little crime? In Mexico, by contrast, Tomas Kellner and Francesco Pipitone examine a nation where both these scourges are rampant, and where drug gangs directly threaten the future of the state. In search of a remedy, we turn to Ronald K. Noble, Interpol's chief, who has overseen the rollout of perhaps the most potent weapon against crime—vast, interlinked police databases. There have been some surprising successes, but there's still a way to go.

On other subjects, Baghdad-based journalist Missy Ryan reports on the state of Iraq as it stumbles toward a democratic future. Also from the Middle East, Kenneth E. Barden, an expert on development finance, explores whether Islamic microfinance might bring a lasting peace to the Palestinian West Bank. From the banks of the East River, Stephen Schlesinger casts a skeptical eye on the United Nations under Ban Ki-moon, whose less than stellar leadership is struggling to win over Barack Obama. In our portfolio, the intrepid Bangkok-based photographer, Thierry Falise, takes us deep into the jungles of northeast Burma, capturing the plight of the besieged minority Karen people, who wage a desperate battle with the dark forces of the ruling junta. And, as U.S. troops escalate their own counter-insurgency campaign in Afghanistan, noted political commentator Michael A. Cohen debunks the flawed history employed by the proponents of this "kinder, gentler" mode of war-fighting, noting that it is violence—not compassion or money—that often wins the day.

Finally, amid all this turmoil, editor David A. Andelman offers a fitting Coda from the remote Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, where he learns some valuable lessons about what makes a successful, happy, and prosperous nation.

—*The Editors*