



LESSONS LEARNED RECORD OF INTERVIEW

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LL-03 - U.S. Perception and Responses to Corruption in Afghanistan				
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To learn about interviewee's experience in Afghanistan and as a (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) [REDACTED]				
Interviewees: (Either list interviewees below, attach sign-in sheet to this document or hyperlink to a file)				
SIGAR Attendees:				
Kate Bateman (Senior Analyst)				
Non-attribution Basis:	Yes	X	No	
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Kate Bateman, Senior Analyst, April 5, 2016				
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions and definitions of corruption • Kleptocracy • Obstacles to addressing corruption; intelligence issues • More on framing the problem as kleptocracy • USG contribution to the problem 				

Perceptions and definitions of corruption

Q: Did you find that in 2009/2010, there was an agreement or consensus among US agencies that corruption was a serious threat to the mission?

No. Was there agreement that it was an issue? Yes. But there were many different interpretations and ideas about the issue. The questions were, How does corruption rack and stack against other issues? And what do we do about it?



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This led to the question, what is “corruption”? Is it small bribes? Is it facilitation payments? Is it political appointments for patronage? We have that, too, in our Schedule C political appointments. So people were saying, what’s the big deal? We have patronage systems too.

Kleptocracy

What we never came to grips with is **kleptocracy**. And by 2006, the Afghan government had self-organized into a kleptocracy. So how corruption manifested itself was not a classic patronage network, where I have my people, I put them in position, and expect them to perform. But instead, a number of senior positions were purchased for a price. People didn’t pay for the positions as a national service, but in the expectation that you’d recoup the cost, through cuts from assistance programs, selling uniforms or ammunition on the black market, drug trafficking, or kidnapping.

The kleptocracy got stronger over time, to the point that the priority of the Afghan government became not good governance but sustaining this kleptocracy. But because we never appropriately identified or framed the problem, you have a huge dispersion [within the USG] in ideas of what corruption is.

I like to use a cancer analogy. Petty corruption is like skin cancer; there are ways to deal with it and you’ll probably be just fine. Corruption within the ministries, higher level, is like colon cancer; it’s worse, but if you catch it in time, you’re probably ok. Kleptocracy, however, is like brain cancer; it’s fatal.

As a government, we didn’t define the issue well enough or early enough to have a cohesive response. The issue was never framed effectively within the USG.

Nor was there an effective or systematic framing of the level of threat that it posed. Because the intelligence community (IC) does not typically do this. So what to do about it, and associated risks, were never effectively framed.

This is all part of why it [the kleptocracy] was never adequately addressed.

Obstacles to addressing corruption; intelligence issues

Other voices were saying, “We need to build this capacity and that capacity, and corruption is annoying but the only way we’ll be successful is by building the capacity of security forces, building government capacity, and degrading the Taliban. If you want to mortgage your relationship with Karzai, tilt up the anticorruption windmill and it’s going to be a completely self-defeating enterprise.”

At Deputies Committees and Principals Committees, they’re only dealing with the highest level of abstraction on these issues. They have to be generalists; they’re dealing with every issue around the globe. And the issue wasn’t framed adequately. How issues are framed by the IC is particularly important. When you have the IC frame this issue as a strategic threat, you’re much more likely to get people’s heads around it.

Q: Was another obstacle the fact that corruption was dismissed as a “cultural” phenomenon or characteristic?

Oh god yes, all the time. “Afghans are naturally corrupt and it’s just a fact of life.” You hear that from State, even – and it’s a bit disconcerting.

But again, because it was never framed in this way – i.e., petty corruption versus corruption as a system of government – then policy makers can’t evaluate it as the critical threat that it is.

Part of the problem is senior policy makers don’t have adequate intelligence on kleptocratic networks, in the first place.

A senior Afghan minister said to me, our [Afghanistan’s] number 1 problem is the purchase of position. Because it perverts everything else. It creates the wrong incentives, against good governance.



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(b)(5)



More on framing the problem as kleptocracy

We have to define the nature of the problem. If we do not have a functional definition of the political system as it relates to corruption – if we see it as a problem of a select group of individuals, or petty theft. Deputies' and Principals' first inclination will be to view corruption as *abnormal* behavior. Whereas for Karzai, it was about self-enrichment, it's how he held his diverse coalition together. We were insensitive to the position he was in. You can see how the kleptocracy developed over time, without anyone's individual agency, and how very powerful and well-armed people wanted to keep it going. Karzai was likely unwitting in the development of a kleptocratic system.

The report should use the term "kleptocracy." It's very important to do this.

USG contribution to the problem

It was through sheer naivete, and maybe carelessness, that we helped to create the system. Foreign aid is part of how they [i.e., Afghans] get rents to pay for the positions they purchased. We could use conditionality of funding at a certain level, requiring senior officials to disclose all their bank accounts. Some were pushing for a really hard approach, you know, fly them all to the US to stand trial. Another way is more gradually, through influence.