

CORRUPTION AND PEACEBUILDING

INSTITUTIONAL LEAD

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OVERVIEW

Corruption is the abuse of power, position or trust for private gain. It is present in all countries but is especially prevalent in conflict-affected and fragile states. According to a United Nations–World Bank report, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*, corruption is an underlying cause of conflict and violence. In addition, it is often the most disempowered and vulnerable members of society who are most affected by corruption. Women, for instance, tend to rely more on public services such as health and education due to their childbearing and caregiving roles. Despite the corrosive impact of corruption on the state and the social compact, it is often neglected, deferred to some future stage of recovery and development, or forced down the agenda as other objectives such as counterterrorism take priority. The session discussed experiences and challenges of mitigating corruption risks in stabilization and peacebuilding environments and lessons learned.

FOCUS AND OBJECTIVES

The session aimed to examine how corruption interacts with and can undermine efforts to build peace and resilient states in countries affected by conflict and in transition towards democracy. It identified key lessons learned in mitigating corruption risks in stabilization and peacebuilding environments

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Research suggests that some level of corruption may be built into peace agreements in order to buy off potential spoilers. Criminal or violent actors are given impunity and a chance to make some money through lucrative positions in ministries. A peace deal thus enshrines some level of corruption in the post-conflict state. As it becomes entrenched, it fosters anger and instability, leading to further conflict.

One challenge for practitioners is where to draw the line in terms of an acceptable level of corruption and what support can be given to local actors. However, politically, this is a very difficult stance for donors or international organizations to adopt publicly.

With the fall of Mosul and the crumbling of the corrupt Iraqi Army, people lost trust, and an international coalition funded militia groups. These groups are still there. The United States' stabilization programme in Iraq is not achieving the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) because militias are not allowing anyone to go back unless they pay bribes. These groups force parliamentarians to support them through the award of government contracts and ministry positions. They are the real rulers of Iraq in many provinces. They are protected from being held accountable. There is a need to dissolve the militias, but to do that would also require the dissolution of the parliament and government.

Corruption is not a culture but a system that has become entrenched in society. In Iraq, corruption has worsened to the extent that a recurrence of civil war would not be surprising.

Defence and security professionals tend to see corruption as a soft governance issue that is not their business. They feel that the problem is pervasive, is too big to deal with or is just part of the local culture. This implies that moral standards are lower than in Western countries. Western intelligence agencies do not look at financial arrangements, but at the enemy. The extent to which internationals exacerbate the problem is underestimated.

Tunisia made important major institutional steps after the fall of President Ben Ali in 2011, but it is widely perceived that corruption has increased since then. On the ground the results of anti-corruption measures and structural reforms have still not been seen. The fight against corruption is a national objective and has resulted in whistle-blower protection and a law against conflict of interests in the public sector. A minority of political parties and members of parliament have declared assets and potential conflict of interests, so even those who passed the anti-corruption law have actually complied with the law.

An international military presence complicates an already complex situation in societies emerging from conflict. Corruption tends to be seen by Western militaries as a long-term local self-governance and civilian issue that does not fit into military time frames or tools. Corruption is also seen as political, and that engaging with the problem will mean taking a side where this is not supposed to happen (international intervention is often self-perceived by international militaries as 'neutral', even though they are clearly intervening to assist one party, usually the host state). Military forces are also not trained or prepared to recognize corruption or its consequences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The 'dirty deals' in peace agreements which build in some degree of corruption must then somehow not allow corruption to become entrenched in the society.
- Deal with corruption from the onset of contingency and peace operations.
- Recognize international military forces as a huge ally in the fight against corruption. They have the opportunity and legitimacy to talk to other military forces in a way that might be difficult for civilian actors. As an entry point, address corruption as an issue undermining operational efficiency.
- Ensure that civil society and the media have the capacity and skills to investigate corruption and perform a watchdog function.
- Ensure that laws promoted by international actors are not too sophisticated and can work without the necessary resources; tailor them to the context, its legal infrastructure and the resource base.
- Make sure that highly technical anti-corruption measures (e.g. payment chains or biometric systems) can work by ensuring, when they are introduced, the political awareness of who is gaining opportunities from the resources brought into the context by the international military presence.
- While transitional justice has focused on human rights abuses, explore economic transitional justice for the forms of corruption that amount to an international crime.

SESSION QUOTES

‘Parliament is not a parliament anymore, it’s an auction.’

‘Corruption has grown within the cracks that have been created under the pressure of the structural progress.’

‘The same phenomena that get us into war, get us out of war.’

‘Achieving peace is important, but more important perhaps is how afterward to unravel that “dirty deal” that bought off potential spoilers, whether through impunity or access to state resources.’

RESOURCE LINKS AND DOCUMENTS

World Bank and United Nations, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (World Bank Group: Washington, DC, 2018), <<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337>>.



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