

Anti-corruption strategy in US foreign policy

By Curtis A. Ward

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One fundamental premise of US national security policy is that there exist a nexus between corruption, on the one hand, and terrorism and international organized crime on the other.

In his introduction of "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America" in September 2002, President George W Bush stated: "Poverty does not make poor people into terrorists and murderers ... poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders."

As a part of its national security strategy, the US would use its "economic engagement with other countries to underscore the benefits of policies that generate higher productivity and sustained economic growth, including: rule of law and intolerance of corruption...."

The overall conclusion was that there is a need to fight corruption in order to address global threats such as terrorism and international organized crime, and that the US would lead this process in its bilateral and multilateral relations. This process is already under way.

At the time the Bush administration issued its national security strategy document, the references to an anti-corruption policy within the context of national security went virtually unnoticed.

Most commentators emphasized the Bush administration policy of securing the US as the sole super power - its pledge to maintain, by all means necessary, US global military and economic dominance.

This US national security strategy, issued as it were in the post-9/11 period, was viewed primarily as the response of the neo-conservatives within the administration to the threat posed by international terrorism and the new dynamics posed by the US as the sole super power in a post-bipolar world.

The end of the Cold War was by then more than a decade hence, and US global economic and military hegemony was not to be in doubt.

A few years later, it has become apparent that the US intends to enforce the anti-corruption element of its national security strategy and is taking a series of actions to institutionalize anti-corruption policy in its international relations.

Thus the US government has embarked upon a program which now seeks to streamline good governance, including anti-corruption, in its foreign policy initiatives in the developing world. Countries that are most likely to be affected by the US decision to make anti-corruption a condition of foreign economic and development assistance should be paying attention.

The countries of the Caribbean should be particularly mindful of the consequences of failure to deal with corrupt practices prevalent in Caribbean societies.

However, action to root out corruption in Caribbean societies should not be seen merely as satisfying US national security strategy, or due to fear of losing US and other international economic assistance.

Anti-corruption action should be seen as fundamental to eliminating the negative impact corruption has on society, economic development, and human security.

The UN Development Program (UNDP), in its 2004 Anti-Corruption Practice Note, pointed out that "evidence across the globe confirms that corruption impacts the poor disproportionately" and that "corruption hinders economic development, reduces social services, and diverts investments in infrastructure, institutions and social services".

The UNDP has further concluded that corruption "fosters an undemocratic environment characterized by uncertainty, unpredictability, and declining moral values and disrespect for constitutional institutions and authority". This characterization is not alien to the Caribbean.

Moreover, this anti-corruption campaign is not exclusive to the US. The European Union and other donors promote good governance and anti-corruption in their bilateral relations as well as through the multilateral system.

Hence ratification and implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption will be viewed by donor states as a measure of each government's political will and commitment to deal with corruption at all levels of society - at the highest political level, in governmental agencies, national and local government institutions, and in the private sector.

In implementing its anti-corruption strategy, the US government is pursuing a number of specific actions primary among which is its new USAID thrust to streamline anti-corruption in its programs.

In January 2005, the US Agency for International Development issued what it called the "USAID Anticorruption Strategy".

It includes the development of a comprehensive implementation plan, which, inter alia, will incorporate specific anti-corruption goals into USAID mission and bureau strategies and results frameworks; and build collaboration by establishing integrated inter-agency and donor coordination mechanisms.

It highlighted the fact that USAID anti-corruption programs are expanding beyond administrative corruption, that is, corruption among mid- and low-level government officials, to encompass what it termed "grand corruption" - exchanges of resources or access to competitive advantages for high-level officials, privileged firms, and their networks of elite operatives and supporters.

The USAID strategy document noted that "the current US National Security Strategy underscores that poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels, and ... efforts to address these challenges in developing countries can contribute directly to US national security".

The document identified the fight against corruption as an important US foreign policy objective, and concludes that fighting corruption is fundamental to advancing US foreign policy interests. The strategy includes support to countries making real efforts to improve.

The legislative branch of the US government is also taking action in the campaign against corruption. In late July, the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted to approve a bill aimed at helping countries weed out corruption involving multilateral loan projects.

This would include a "trust fund" to help poor countries fight corruption on their own. The bill is a product of an earlier investigation led by the chairman of the committee, Senator Richard Lugar, into alleged corruption in projects funded by multilateral banks, including the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

The bill provides for specific instructions to US representatives in the multilateral development banks to ensure that these institutions establish effective monitoring and auditing mechanisms to prevent corruption in funded projects.

A visit earlier this year to the USAID website, showed funding for a number of anti-corruption programs around the world. This included programs in this hemisphere for Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Jamaica.

Almost one million dollars were earmarked for anti-corruption training in Jamaica. The anti-corruption program for Jamaica was developed as a "Washington initiative" rather than a field office request.

However, by April of this year, the money earmarked for Jamaica had disappeared from the funding matrix. Upon enquiry it was suggested that the funds earmarked for Jamaica had been diverted to more pressing needs elsewhere.

Diversion of these funds away from Jamaica seemed most unfortunate and untimely. The stated policy of the USAID is to support those countries making real efforts to improve, and to be quick to respond to emerging opportunities.

Withdrawing of the funds designated for Jamaica preceded by a month the meeting called in May by Prime Minister P J Patterson with the heads of the public sector agencies to discuss how they plan to counter corruption within their organizations.

This meeting, having followed closely the reports from a number of watchdog agencies on the problems they faced in fighting corruption under the current legal regime, was an apparent emerging opportunity to deal with the pervasive nature of corruption in Jamaica.

Should the government of Jamaica, or any other CARICOM member government, as a matter of priority, proceed with the development and implementation of a comprehensive anti-corruption program it should be able to find willing partners in the international donor community.

Such an undertaking would advance not only the development goals of Jamaica but also national and international security and, in particular, be in harmony with the national security strategy of the United States.

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