



 Editorial

Corruption, the Scourge of Humanity

*I have seen corruption boil and bubble
Till it o'er-run the stew.*

—Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*

Corruption is apparently as old as the world; it goes back at least to when a society organized for the first time, creating public institutions as a means of survival. It is a worldwide, disastrous phenomenon. Corruption exists in the private sector but primarily involves government officials. It is multifaceted, and the equivalent terms are endless: *red envelopes* in China or *brown envelopes* in Angola, *bakchich* in the Arab world, *matabiche* in Central Africa, *payola* in the Philippines, *propina* in Latin America or *pots-de-vin* in France.

Although corruption may be more noticeable in poor countries and dictatorships (often the same), it is not absent in rich countries and democracies. The cost of corruption is difficult to assess because it occurs between individuals in the greatest secrecy. According to the International Chamber of Commerce and other agencies, however, “Estimates show that the cost of corruption equals more than 5% of global GDP [gross domestic product] (US \$2.6 trillion), with over US \$1 trillion paid in bribes each year”; furthermore, “corruption adds up to 10% to the total cost of doing business globally, and up to 25% to the cost of procurement contracts in developing countries.”¹ It costs Europe 120 billion euros a year or about 1 percent of economic output; China, 10 percent of its GDP per year; and Africa, roughly \$150 billion a year.² It is worth noting that Russian president Vladimir Putin “has been named corruption’s ‘person of the year’ for 2014 by an international group of investigative journalists” and that he “has been a finalist’ every year since the ‘award’ began!”³

Of course, democracies are not immune to corruption. The dubious funding of political parties offers an example, but the rule of law and mature institutions are ramparts against systemic corruption. In contrast, corruption is more widespread in developing countries and those in transition—not because they are different from other nations but because the conditions are ripe. State institutions are weak; government policies or regulatory agencies contain loopholes that permit illegal activities; and institutions such as parliament, the judiciary, and civil society—including the press—that usually serve as safeguards are marginalized or themselves affected by corruption. Therefore, these countries are locked in a vicious circle of corruption. The Algerian Feddal Halim, deputy secretary-general of the National association de lutte contre la corruption (National Association in the Fight against Corruption), describes the Kafkaesque, nightmarish, vicious circle of corruption:

Law 06-01 addressing the prevention of and fight against corruption was passed in a corrupt environment by the National People’s Assembly, which is a product of a corrupt political election. The assem-

bly enacted only one law decriminalizing corruption and facilitating not only the corrupted and the corrupters but also the practice of corruption and the maintaining of corruptibility. Corruptibility is a mechanism for creating and enabling the widespread use of the corruption space. Let me explain: the administration managed to package and create a climate conducive to instilling a generalized guilty conscience, and since a corrupt person is never more at ease than in the presence of another corrupt individual, the best way to guard against honest people is to produce more corrupt ones.⁴

Corruption has become a major problem. According to experts on the subject, systemic corruption becomes particularly prevalent in the absence of adequate legislative control, judicial or autonomous control bodies, media professionals, and representatives of independent civil society. Corruption cannot be defeated if civil liberties are not firmly guaranteed. This scourge of humanity should be fought globally because it is the enemy of security, development, progress, and peace. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime points out that “fighting corruption is a global concern. Corruption is found in both rich and poor countries, and evidence shows that it hurts poor people disproportionately. It contributes to instability and poverty and is a dominant factor driving fragile countries towards state failure.”⁵

Good governance—one of the answers to systemic corruption—“recognizes the integrity, rights, and needs of everyone within the state. It offers a way of managing power and policy, while government serves as an instrument to do so.”⁶

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Notes

1. “The Business Case against Corruption” (n.p.: International Chamber of Commerce, Transparency International, United Nations Global Compact, and the World Economic Forum Partnering against Corruption Initiative, n.d.), [2], accessed 22 January 2015, <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/paci/BusinessCaseAgainstCorruption.pdf>.

2. Martin Santa and John O'Donnell, “Corruption Costs European Economy 120 Billion Euros a Year,” Reuters, 3 February 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/03/us-eu-corruption-idUSBREA120KN20140203>; “What China's Latest Anti-Corruption Campaign Means for Foreign Investment,” China Briefing, 16 July 2014, <http://www.china-briefing.com/news/2014/07/16/chinas-latest-anti-corruption-campaign-means-foreign-investment.html>; and Stephanie Hanson, “Corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa,” Council on Foreign Relations, 6 August 2009, <http://www.cfr.org/africa-sub-saharan/corruption-sub-saharan-africa/p19984>.

3. “Russia: Investigative Journalists Name Putin Corruption's ‘Person of the Year,’ ” *Ethical Alliance Daily*, accessed 22 January 2015, <http://ethicalalliance.org/daily-news/russia-investigative-journalists-name-putin-corruptions-person-of-the-year/>.

4. “La corruptibilité et la corruption en Algérie” (quoted passage translated from French by the editor), *Le Quotidien d'Algérie*, 28 August 2013, <http://lequotidienalgerie.org/2013/08/28/la-corruptibilite-et-la-corruption-en-algerie/>.

5. “International Anti-Corruption Day,” UNODC [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime], accessed 6 January 2015, <http://www.picbadges.com/badge/3494767/>.

6. Rémy Mauduit, “Governance and Democratic Transition,” *Air and Space Power Journal—Africa and Francophonie* 4, no. 3 (3rd Quarter 2013): 3, http://www.au.af.mil/au/afri/aspj/apjinternational/aspj_f/digital/pdf/articles/2013_3/editorial_e.pdf.