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www.afgazad.com

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Survey: Corruption Doubled in Afghanistan Since 2007

By Jason Ditz

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Though it is almost unfathomable that it is even possible given how widespread corruption was in 2007, a recent survey by the [Integrity Watch Afghanistan \(IWA\) organization](#) shows that the level of corruption in Afghanistan has doubled since then.

Though “doubled since 2007” and “most corrupt nation on earth” are terms often bandied about for effect, the details are perhaps even more shocking than the labels, [as Afghans are said to have paid upwards of a billion dollars in 2009 alone in bribes to officials](#). The entire GDP of the nation is estimated at just a hair over \$10 billion by the World Bank.

This amounts to a second tax on the Afghan people, as the entire tax revenue for the nation was only around \$1 billion itself. But this second tax is perhaps even more onerous, as reports from the survey suggest that it [effects the rural poor far more heavily than the well connected Afghans living in cities](#).

In Afghanistan everything has a price, or rather, two prices. Even getting one’s house wired for electricity usually involves not only a lot of paperwork, but successful bribes of the right officials. Filing complaints about demands for bribes, though theoretically possible, requires so many bribes itself that the process is unaffordable for all but the most affluent Afghans.

All this adds up to a serious problem for the NATO occupation forces, which insist that they need the Afghan government to “fight corruption” if they are going to win their ongoing military battle. This claim seems to be vindicated, at least in part, by survey respondents who said they believe the growing demands for bribes are considerably fueling support for the Taliban.

Yet this is a fight, it seems, that NATO is not destined to win, and that the Karzai government is all but unwilling to even tackle. Despite repeated claims about grandiose efforts to fight corruption from the central government, bribery remains the currency of political expediency in Afghanistan, and this is more true now than it was three years ago, when Afghanistan was being panned as the most corrupt nation on the planet.