

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

CounterPunch

Dying to Corrupt Afghanistan

By James Bovard

12/02/2011

It's Not Corruption, It's Just Politics

American soldiers are dying so that Afghan politicians can continue looting U.S. tax dollars. Foreign aid has long been notorious for creating kleptocracies — governments of thieves. The \$50+ billion foreign aid that the United States has dumped on Afghanistan over the past decade is a textbook case of how foreign handouts drag a nation down.

Corruption has been a huge issue ever since the United States installed a puppet government in Afghanistan. Following is a partial timeline of the major developments:

In January 2002, shortly after the United States announced that Afghan exile Hamid Karzai would be the new Afghan ruler, Karzai promised to prevent any corruption with foreign aid. He assured donors that he would take “personal responsibility” to protect their contributions from abuse.

By September 2003, Karzai was vigorously backtracking on his promise to end corruption. In a New York speech to the Council on Foreign Relations, he declared, “There are too many things that we cannot do something immediately about, and corruption is one of those things. The

people are complaining very much. They are angry because of it. It's something that worries me too very much.”

In December 2003, Karzai proudly announced the creation of an “independent graft-busting agency.” The presidential decree creating the agency promised that it would “monitor governmental organizations in order to prevent bribery and corruption in the country.” Reporting on the decree helped Karzai’s image in Washington, but no other impact from the change was perceivable.

In June 2004, Karzai visited Washington in part to “fight back against charges of corruption that have come up against” him, CNN reported.

In December 2004, Newsweek interviewed Karzai and headlined his promise to deliver an “honest, accountable, and austere government.”

In 2005, as the conflict in Iraq heated up, attention shifted away from Afghanistan. However, between 2005 and 2009, Afghanistan’s “corruption rating” went from merely bad to worst in the world (except for Somalia, which doesn’t have a government), according to Transparency International, a highly respected nonprofit.

By November 2007, even Karzai had become outraged by the pervasive looting. He declared at an Afghan conference on rural development, “All politicians in this system have acquired everything — money, lots of money. God knows, it is beyond the limit. The banks of the world are full of the money of our statesmen. The luxurious houses [built in Afghanistan in the past five years] belong to members of the government and parliament, not only in Kabul, but here and there. Every one of them [has] three or four houses in different countries.

On January 1, 2009, the New York Times declared, “The state built on the ruins of the Taliban regime now often seems to exist for little more than the enrichment of those who run it.” One Afghan truck driver bitterly told a reporter, “Every man in the government is his own king.”

Also in January 2009, a United Nations study reported that 60 percent of Afghans identified corruption as the nation’s biggest problem — even worse than the war with the Taliban. The report estimated that Afghans must pay more than \$2 billion in bribes to government officials and others each year — equivalent to almost a quarter of the country’s gross domestic product. That would be akin to Americans’ paying more than \$3 trillion in bribes each year. One official noted, “The Afghans say that it is impossible to obtain a public service without paying a bribe.”

In August 2009, Afghanistan had a presidential election. The U.S. government hoped that the result would legitimize Karzai and spur international support for his regime. The PR exercise was marred after Karzai’s team was caught stealing a million votes. Regardless of the pervasive vote fraud, the Obama administration still insisted that Karzai was a “legitimate” leader.

In September 2009, Pentagon officials touted Kandahar as the most important battleground against the Taliban. The Washington Post reported that Kandahar “is filled with ineffective government officials and police officers whom the governor calls looters and kidnappers. It is the

corruption of the police — and that alleged of senior government officials — that many Kandaharis say has been the principal reason for the Taliban’s resurgence.”

In October 2009, when the U.S. government was still considering whether to send more troops to Afghanistan, the Associated Press reported that “one U.S. military official said discussions within the Obama administration are ongoing about whether it is even possible to ‘surge’ enough troops to overcome the corruption.” The fact that the U.S. foreign aid spurred the corruption was left out of that particular discussion.

In November 2009, Karzai became indignant that anyone would doubt his government’s anti-corruption bona fides: “Where we have found facts on corrupt practices by senior government officials, we have acted: they have gone to prison. We like our partners to have a lot of respect for Afghan sovereignty. Afghanistan is extremely sensitive about that.”

In December 2009, in his West Point speech announcing plans to send far more American troops to Afghanistan, President Obama declared, “The days of providing a blank check are over.... Going forward, we will be clear about what we expect from those who receive our assistance... We expect those who are ineffective or corrupt to be held accountable.” Obama received applause for the speech’s commitment to good government, and business continued as usual in Afghanistan.

In January 2010, at his inauguration for his second term, Karzai proclaimed, “Fighting corruption will be the key focus of my second term in office.” Washington applauded.

In May 2010, Obama and Karzai held a joint press conference, and Obama slobbered all over his foreign tool, stressing that “President Karzai committed to making good governance a top priority. And I want to acknowledge the progress that has been made, including strengthening anti-corruption efforts, improving governance at provincial and district levels, and progress towards credible parliamentary elections later this year.”

In June 2010, Attorney General Eric Holder praised Karzai for his anti-corruption efforts, saying, “We applaud President Karzai for his actions and encourage him to continue his efforts, as much work remains to be done.”

Later that month, American newspapers had front-page stories of the Karzai government’s squelching bribery investigations of its top officials. Even more damaging were reports that billions of dollars in cash had been openly (and illegally) transported from the Kabul airport to Dubai. Rep. Nita Lowey, chairwoman of the House appropriations subcommittee on foreign aid, declared, “I do not intend to appropriate one more dime for assistance to Afghanistan until I have confidence that U.S. taxpayer money is not being abused to line the pockets of corrupt Afghan government officials, drug lords, and terrorists.” Lowey’s indignation did nothing to prevent the Democratic leadership from deluging Afghanistan with billions of dollars of more aid in a bill Congress passed later that year.

In July 2010, Integrity Watch Afghanistan released a survey that concluded that Afghan corruption had “doubled since 2007.” But the following month, Karzai demanded an

investigation of U.S.-backed anti-corruption teams who were nailing tainted Afghan officials. Defense Secretary Robert Gates “assured Afghan officials that any efforts to stamp out corruption need to be led by the Kabul government,” according to the Washington Post.

In September 2010, the New York Times revealed that the CIA had been making secret massive cash payoffs to top Afghan government officials in order to protect them from corruption. The Times explained, “Called ‘top-up raises,’ they had been paid by the American government to keep qualified people and insulate them from corruption and political interference.” As long as the payoff recipients followed U.S. orders, there was apparently no danger of “political interference.” One U.S. government official explained, “The corruption we need to combat is the corruption that undermines the fight against the Taliban.” Thus, as long as the officials who were accepting the secret payoffs appeared to be anti-Taliban, there was no problem.

The purpose of anti-corruption declarations in Washington and Kabul is to provide a fig leaf for propping up the most corrupt government in the world. Unfortunately, as long as American voters perceive American politicians as opposing corruption, the politicians are absolved — notwithstanding that their policies ensure that the corruption will continue.

Pervasive corruption is the inevitable result of dumping massive quantities of U.S. dollars on foreign governments. The ultimate purpose of foreign aid is to buy allegiance and submission abroad. For politicians, buying allegiance isn’t corrupt — it is simply politics. There is no bureaucratic cure for the perverse incentives created by flooding foreign nations with U.S. tax dollars.