



Who Else Is to Blame?

From security short falls to lack of government accountability, Mo Ibrahim, Paul Wolfowitz, Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin, Bruce Babbitt, and Raymond C. Offenheiser explain those contributing factors that cripple societies and inevitably keep failed states failing.

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CORRUPTION

By Mo Ibrahim

There's corruption at the top, and then there's corruption at the bottom. At the commanding heights of failed states, massive theft and fraud perpetrated consistently by elites diverts funding from social projects and scares off investors. This grand corruption, when combined with the discovery of natural resources, often leads to conflict as expectations rise and are dashed when a select few capture most of the benefits. Everyday petty corruption -- baksheesh to the border guards or cash to the ambulance driver -- ironically allows daily life to go on in countries where salaries are low and irregular. But over time, this too takes its toll on a society's moral fiber, undermining governance. The unaccountable, opaque nature of all corruption is irreconcilable with the principles of transparency and accountability -- the exact principles required for the creation of peaceful, stable, and prosperous societies.

Mo Ibrahim, founder of telecommunications firm Celtel, is chair of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, which grants an annual prize for excellent leadership in Africa and compiles an annual index of African governance. Finding no suitable candidates last year, the foundation did not award the prize.

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THE ENABLERS

By Paul Wolfowitz

Bribe-takers are bad enough for a country teetering on the brink of failure, but for every bribe-taker, there has to be a bribe-giver, and those givers are all too often from a rich country. These firms are enabling corruption, crippling or even killing off vulnerable states. In Africa, the Chinese are the newest offenders. But though the United States has come far from its Cold War days, when it funneled billions of dollars into corrupt Zaire, U.S. companies are no angels either. In 2008, Transparency International listed two U.S. oil companies (Exxon Mobil and Devon Energy) -- along with two Chinese and one each from India, Japan, Kuwait, Malaysia, and Russia -- as the least forth-coming about the revenues countries collect from them. Perhaps these companies have nothing to hide. But the best way to show they aren't paying bribes is to open their activities to public scrutiny. And we must all hold them accountable.

Paul Wolfowitz is former president of the World Bank and is a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

David McNew/Getty Images



AMERICAN CONSUMERS

By Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin

One of the major factors that creates failed and corrupt governments around the world is us -- Americans -- and our insatiable consumption of oil. As the largest petroleum consumers in the world, we are the driving force of a global energy market in which the suppliers are often corrupt regimes maintaining power in part through the revenues they extract from our consumption. If we want to fix the problem of failed states, we must start by reforming our own approach to energy: adopting smart-growth policies, driving less, and creating alternative energy sources. Until then, we are just fueling the very corruption we condemn.

Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin of Maryland chairs the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (U.S. Helsinki Commission).

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TIMBER

By Bruce Babbitt

If you really want to send a country into a tailspin, the key resource to tap isn't oil, gold, or diamonds, but something a bit more prosaic -- trees. The rampant, corrupt extraction of timber has been consistently, repeatedly, and devastatingly linked to state failure, from the Khmer Rouge's clear-cutting in 1990s Cambodia to Charles Taylor's deforestation-for-guns in Liberia in the early 2000s. Today in the Congo Basin, rebel groups are financing their ruinous activities by selling rainforest trees via shady European logging companies to eager consumers in the West, who prize the exotic woods. In Burma, Chinese groups are slicing away at virgin teak forests, the revenues from which are supporting the junta there. With so much

corruption and secrecy involved, estimating how much of the world's timber industry is illicit is a guessing game, but the World Bank estimates annual losses due to lost revenue and resources at \$10 billion -- eight times the amount of aid aimed at sustainable forest management. And beyond the environmental catastrophe of this highly unsustainable industry, timber smuggling requires a network of bribery, corruption, and graft that hollows a state from within.

Bruce Babbitt is former chairman of the board of directors of the World Wildlife Fund and was U.S. interior secretary from 1993 to 2001.

KENZO TRIBOUILLARD/AFP/Getty Images



OUTGUNNED POLICE

By Raymond C. Offenheiser

It may seem obvious: A government that cannot provide security for its citizens will soon find itself running a weak or failed state. But recognizing the problem doesn't make combating it much easier. From Chad to Colombia, Somalia to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the absence of trustworthy security forces has inspired illicit armed groups to protect themselves and settle disputes through whatever means possible. The presence of such militias practically guarantees that a state will have difficulty expressing its authority and advancing development. Strengthening the police and military forces, however, is only half the battle; the easy flow of weapons exacerbates the proliferation of well-armed groups. Unscrupulous arms dealers are experts at exploiting the underregulated global arms trade, to deadly result. At least 95 percent of Africa's most commonly used conflict weapons, for example, come from outside the continent. So, until governments take real steps to curb arms flows, few troubled states are likely to emerge from weakness or failure.

Raymond C. Offenheiser is president of Oxfam America.

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