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# Graft a risk to national security

**C**ORRUPTION has a debilitating effect on the lives of billions of people around the world. And usually it's the most vulnerable members of society that are the hardest hit.

Corruption comprises a range of unethical and deviant activities that pervade the private and public sectors.

Of the two, corruption in the public sector has greater consequences for the majority of citizens.

Corruption continues unabated despite efforts by the UN, various institutes, NGOs, specialised units and international organisations to eliminate it. This is certainly the case in South Africa.

The country's media are replete with reports of corruption at all levels of government. And there's growing evidence that corruption has resulted in the ineffective use of state resources aimed at providing essential services. Corruption in urban and rural areas has led to neglect in providing health care, education, employment, housing, roads and security.

Personal interests, greed and avarice continue to undermine the government's capacity to allocate resources effectively and to deliver services. The result is poverty and deprivation. In turn, this has led to frustration, disillusionment and relentless protests. All are a clear illustration that people's support for those who rule them has dissipated.

Instability is the result.

Corruption is thus a threat to national security when measured by, among others, socio-political stability, economic solidarity and strength, ecological balance and internal peace.

Corruption undermines the national security of a state in a number of ways.

First, it manifests itself in the growing lack of legitimacy of the state among all layers of society. The fact that South Africa has seen unprecedented levels of protest in recent years can be attributed to corruption and its serious consequences.

The country's anti-corruption laws are not wanting. The Municipal Finance Management Act and the Public Finance Management Act regulate the management of finances in national and provincial government. Its aim is to secure sound financial management in government and public institutions.

The real issue is that personal financial interests intersect with public interests. And personal interests take precedence over the interests of the people of the country. The state is shown that it's too weak to mount an effective fight against such interests.

The notion of corruption as a threat to national security is not just applicable to South Africa. Major economic powers, such as China and Russia, have declared that corruption, particularly in the public sector, is a national threat.

In 2016 the Chinese President Xi Jinping as well as the heads of the country's anti-corruption bureaus painted a disastrous picture of public service corruption. This despite the fact that China has perhaps the most rigorous and severe legal punishments for corruption in the world.

Closer to home, Ibrahim Lamorde, the chairperson of the Nigerian Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, has described corruption as the biggest threat to the country's national security and economy. And the foundation of its economic crisis.

Many ideas have been put forward to eliminate corruption, but I would suggest at least three measures could be helpful.

It's imperative that South Africa intensifies the fight against corruption. The first key issue to be tackled is the appointment of people loyal to the ANC in key public service and state enterprises positions. This has laid the foundation of a new upper-middle class – known as “tenderpreneurs”.

Many, if not most, have been instrumental in building and enjoying their own rewards and at the moment they are untouchable. Unless the state acts against those who are corrupt there's no hope of defeating corruption. This applies particularly to public servants who do business with the state or distort the supply chain management systems.

There's also no hope of fighting corruption unless private consultants contracted throughout government become a thing of the past, especially consultants appointed to manage other consultants.

Second, plans need to be backed up by thorough research by NGOs, universities and the media, can help identify the causes, effects and types of corruption. This is crucial in understanding and fighting corruption.

An example of how this can work is the Poznan Declaration signed by 700 university professors from across the world, committing to do research on ethics and the effects of corruption.

But none of these interventions can be implemented without strong political will, effective law enforcement, an efficient and corrupt free judiciary, free press and an independent and active civil society. South Africa is fortunate to at least have an active civil society, free press as well as a respected judiciary.

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