

Integrity First

In June 2016, *The Foreign Service Journal* focused on the topic of combating corruption as a central task of U.S. foreign policy. As a retired FSO who now chairs an anticorruption organization called the Coalition for Integrity, I welcome this attention to an important issue.

We believe the United States needs

to enforce the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, encourage other major trading and investing nations to enforce their similar com-

mitments under the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Anti-Bribery Convention, and urge countries like China and India to become signatories of that agreement.

Toward that end, the United States needs to organize its foreign assistance programs so that bribery and corruption do not despoil the very economic development they try to promote. We also need to curb the bribery and corruption that can undermine our military and political efforts to defeat terrorism in places like Afghanistan.

The challenge for our country and our foreign policy is even more fundamental, however. Corruption is essentially about the abuse of entrusted power. Americans entrust power to government officials, and we expect these officials to use that power to promote the public interest, consistent with the promises they have made and the oaths they have undertaken. Unfortunately, for some time now the majority of Americans across the political spectrum have believed that their government officials are untrustworthy.

The United States is the most powerful country in the world. Through our alliances and the international institutions we established, the United States has pledged to exercise our power in a manner consistent with the promises we have made. People count on us. When



we keep our promises and show ourselves to be trustworthy, our reputation and our power grow. Putting integrity first is the best way to put America first.

On Nov. 29 the Coalition for Integrity extended its 2017 Integrity Award to Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.), a most deserving recipient for many reasons. We have also launched a nonpartisan “integrity challenge” for candidates in the state of Virginia. We asked all candidates in Virginia’s 2017 elections to support basic principles regarding financial disclosure, restrictions on gifts and disclosure of campaign contributions.

Beginning in 2018, we would like to see candidates in elections across the United States accept this challenge and discuss how they will ensure that they and their administrations will be trustworthy.

U.S. diplomats, military and international professionals represent American interests and values with courage and integrity. I encourage readers still in government service to reflect on how they can do more to combat corruption and epitomize integrity as they carry out their duties. And I encourage those who have retired from government service to consider how you can continue to be a part of this fight, perhaps by working with organizations like ours.

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