

At Today's UN: A Blind Eye to Corruption

Brett Schaefer / January 16, 2014



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A recent Associated Press report raises concerns about the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services. OIOS is supposed to be the organization's equivalent of an inspector general. But AP's story leaves doubt that the OIOS is willing and able to fulfill its oversight functions.

The story, in a nutshell, goes like this. The U.N. Dispute Tribunal has vindicated claims by two OIOS whistleblowers. It found that Michael Dudley, deputy director of the OIOS Investigation Division, had altered or withheld evidence in an investigation of U.N. physicians who were using or improperly dispensing narcotics. In addition to retaliating against the OIOS whistleblowers who raised questions about the matter, Dudley also and "threatened to report [then head of OIOS] Inga-Britt Ahlenius... for incompetence unless she agreed to 'protect' him."

The OIOS whistleblowers were awarded compensation. But Dudley, an American, still works for OIOS and, according to AP, has not been punished.

However, the problems extend further than an unethical U.N. official going unpunished. The story reveals that OIOS has neglected a key part of its responsibilities. Specifically, it has failed to actively pursue cases of corruption for the last five years. According to AP, “A review of the reports submitted by OIOS to the General Assembly through mid-2013 shows that the U.N.’s oversight functions still have not completed any major corruption cases since the [Procurement Task Force] was disbanded” in December 2008.

During its short existence (January 2006 to December 2008), the independent task force was incredibly effective. It uncovered fraud, waste, and mismanagement in U.N. procurement and other activities involving contracts valued at more than \$630 million. The evidence unearthed by the Procurement Task Force led to misconduct findings against 17 U.N. officials and the conviction of a senior U.N. procurement official. On the eve of its elimination in December 2008, the Procurement Task Force issued four significant corruption reports involving 20 confirmed corruption schemes.

The U.N. General Assembly refused to extend the task force’s mandate past 2008 at the urging of Russia and Singapore, whose nationals had been fingered for mismanagement and corruption by the unit. The AP report reveals how mistaken this decision was. To protect the billions in U.S. taxpayer dollars sent to Turtle Bay each year, the U.S. Mission should insist on reviving the task force, overhauling OIOS, or both.



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