

Corruption in war and peace

How the media can help in damage control

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Even in peacetime:

- Governments are slow, inefficient and corrupt
- Checks and balances aren't adequate
- Public apathy and fatalism exists
- Sensational coverage spreads cynicism

So, where do we start?

When corruption is endemic, cover honesty.
Chose the story that will have maximum impact.
Corruption is often a life-or-death issue, help save lives.

The Media's role is to restore faith in the system.

How?

- Go beyond the details to expose flaws in the system
- Be an agenda-setter for reform
- Name and shame the guilty
- Offer solutions
- Follow-up

How not to do it:

- Sensationalism
- Trivialisation
- Entrapment
- Crying wolf
- Defamation
- Treating story as one-off
- Petty corruption not real story anymore

What to investigate?

- Corruption in basic services education, health
- Natural resource exploitation
- Courts and law enforcement
- Rent-seeking in government
- Cronyism, party funding, patronage

- Development projects, contracts
- The military

Investigating graft

- Paper trail
- Deep throat
- Detective work
- Undercover techniques
- Cross-checking
- Beware motivated leaks
- Legal safeguards
- Prepare for repercussions

What works?

- Relentless reporting on issues of vital public interest
- Defiance of media curbs
- Evidence of wrongdoing at the highest levels
- Someone to take the ball and run (courts, parliament, law enforcement)
- Sober, authoritative tone
- Timing is everything

Difficult stories

- Structural malfunctions
- Semi-legal perks and malfeasance
- Complicated stories on collective decision-making
- Corruption that doesn't impact directly on constituencies
- Secretive, centralised regimes
- Corporate crimes
- The underworld

Challenges

- Commercialised media, trivialised content
- "Entertainment overload"
- Gatekeeper apathy for investigative reports
- Selling complicated stories of wrongdoing to a public with short attention spans
- "So what else is new?"