



Fighting Corruption

A Core National Security Interest

Sarah Chayes

FEBRUARY 2024

“Corruption?”

“National Security?”

Really?



How has Netanyahu's (alleged) corruption contributed to the current war?
How has Mahmoud Abbas's (alleged) corruption helped Hamas?

How has Vladimir used corruption to advance his objectives?



Change of Command, 1999



Yanukovich's palace, ca. 2014



Ukrainian army ca. 2014



Moscow bombings, 1999



As for Afghanistan....

Why would Afghans risk their lives for a government that robbed and abused them every time they encountered it (policemen, office clerks, local officials, school teachers)?

How did corruption in America contribute to the development of Afghan security forces so poorly adapted to the conflict they faced?



How has corruption accelerated and intensified climate change and other ecological disruptions? What are the security implications?

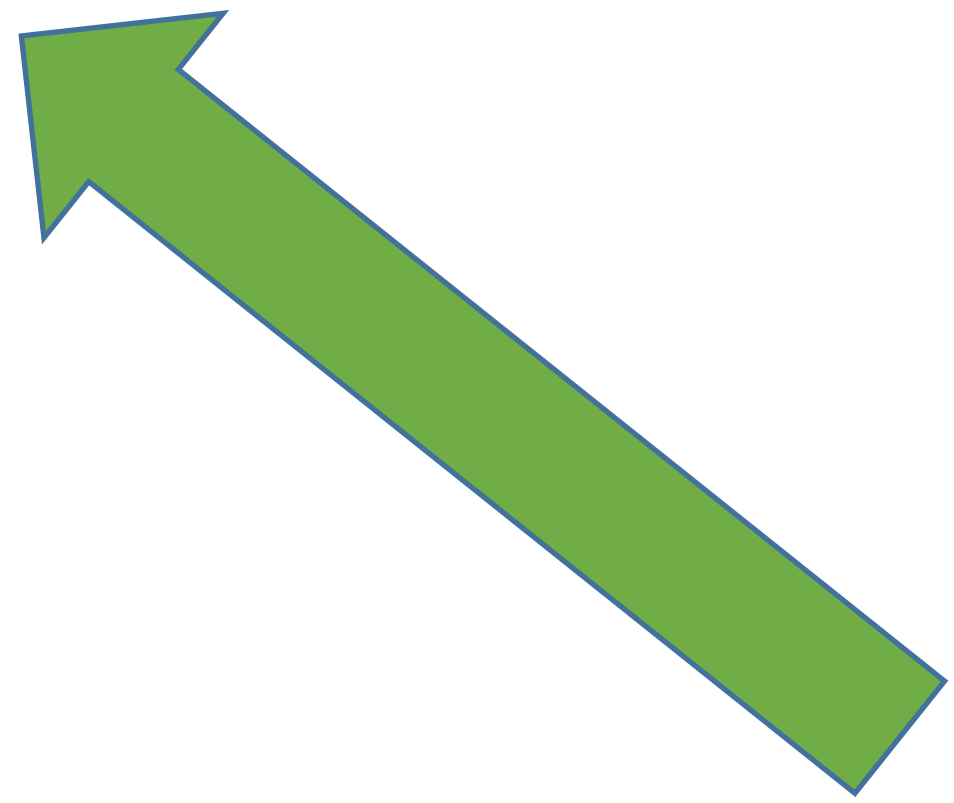


Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters/NYT

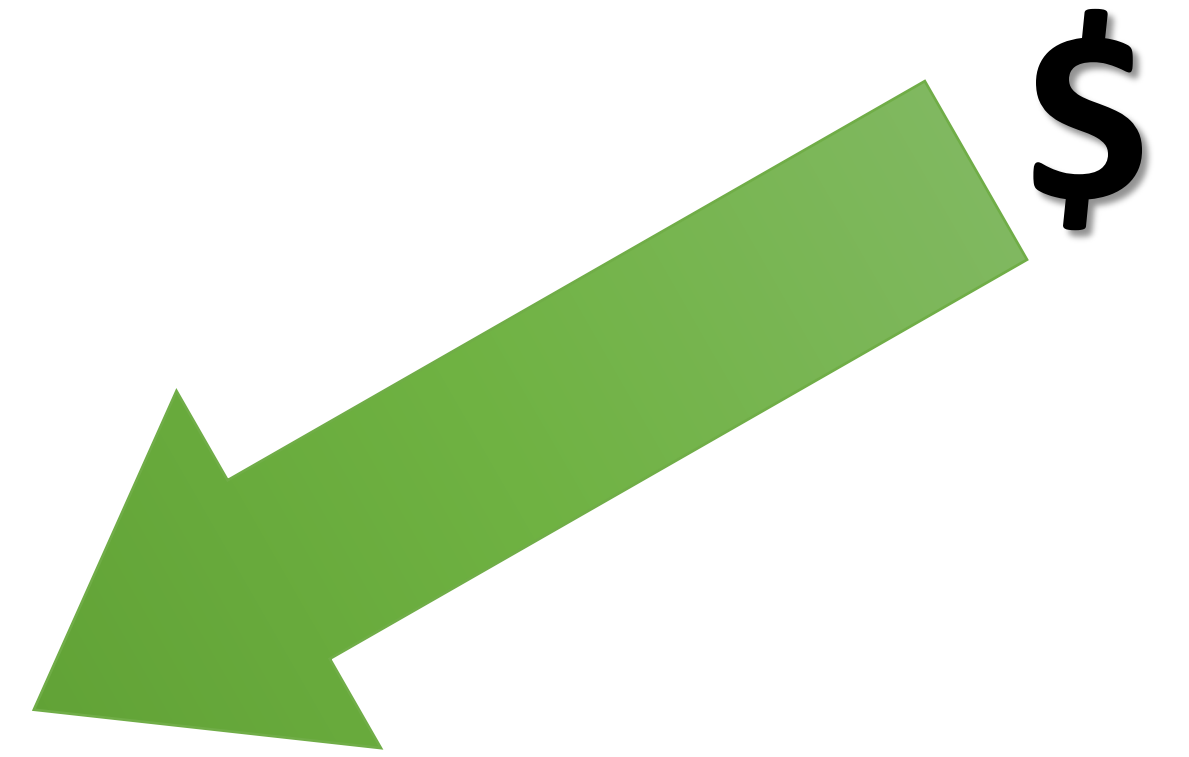
Corruption is....

- Hard.
- Not just a scandal...
...a “tawdry” one-off event; not just some jerk’s fingers in the cookie jar
...or a bribe disguised as a fancy trip.
- Gets political. Because...

Corruption is the operating system of sophisticated, integrated networks
...that masquerade as governments.



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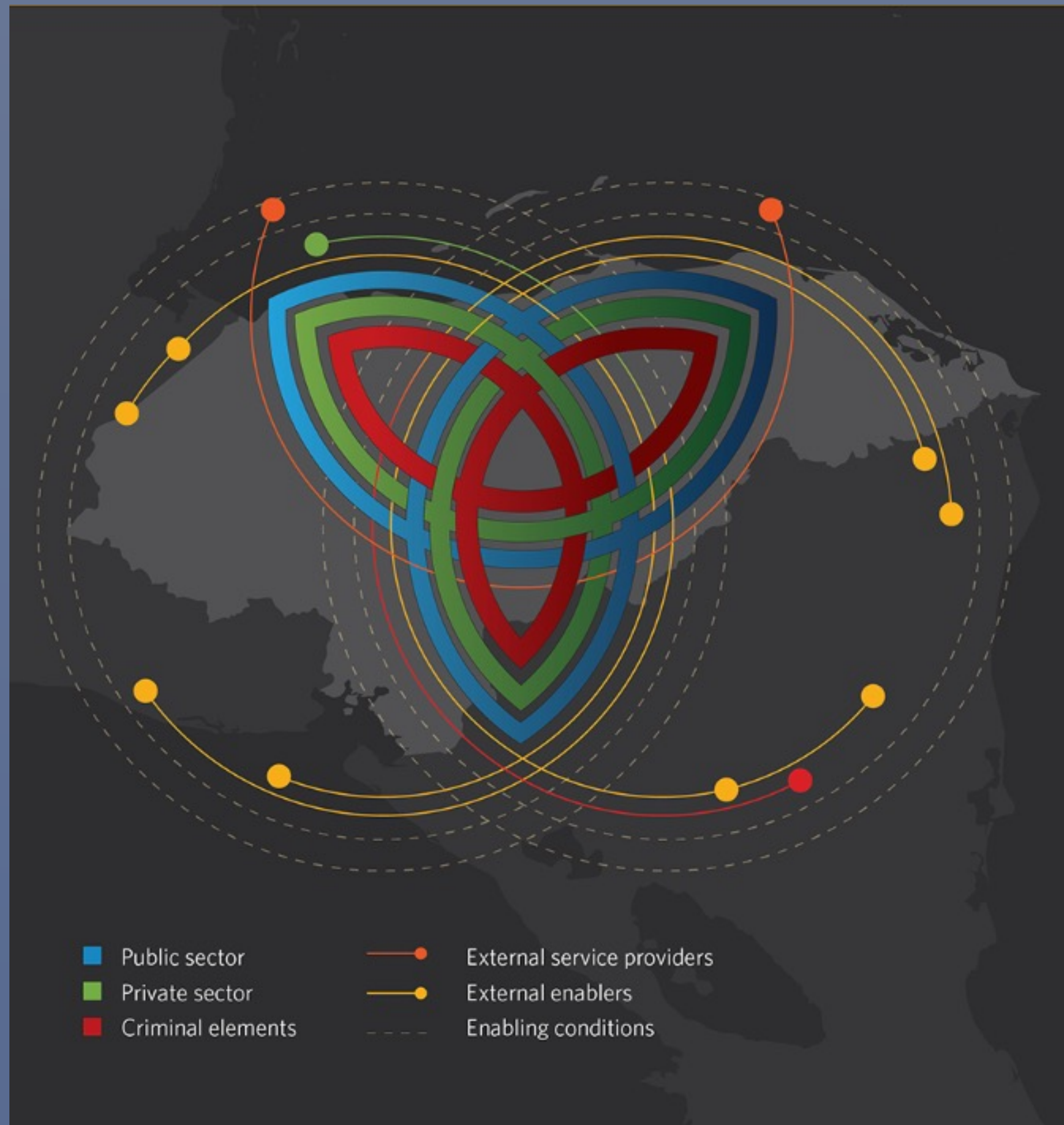


How do you combat a dangerous network?

**What policy options
... for a core national security interest?**

Get smart

- Map the network.
- Pay attention to nodes linking different strands.
- Notice who serves as proxies or cut-outs for the main actors.
- Identify external enablers and facilitators.
- Seek vulnerabilities and leverage points.
- Follow the money.



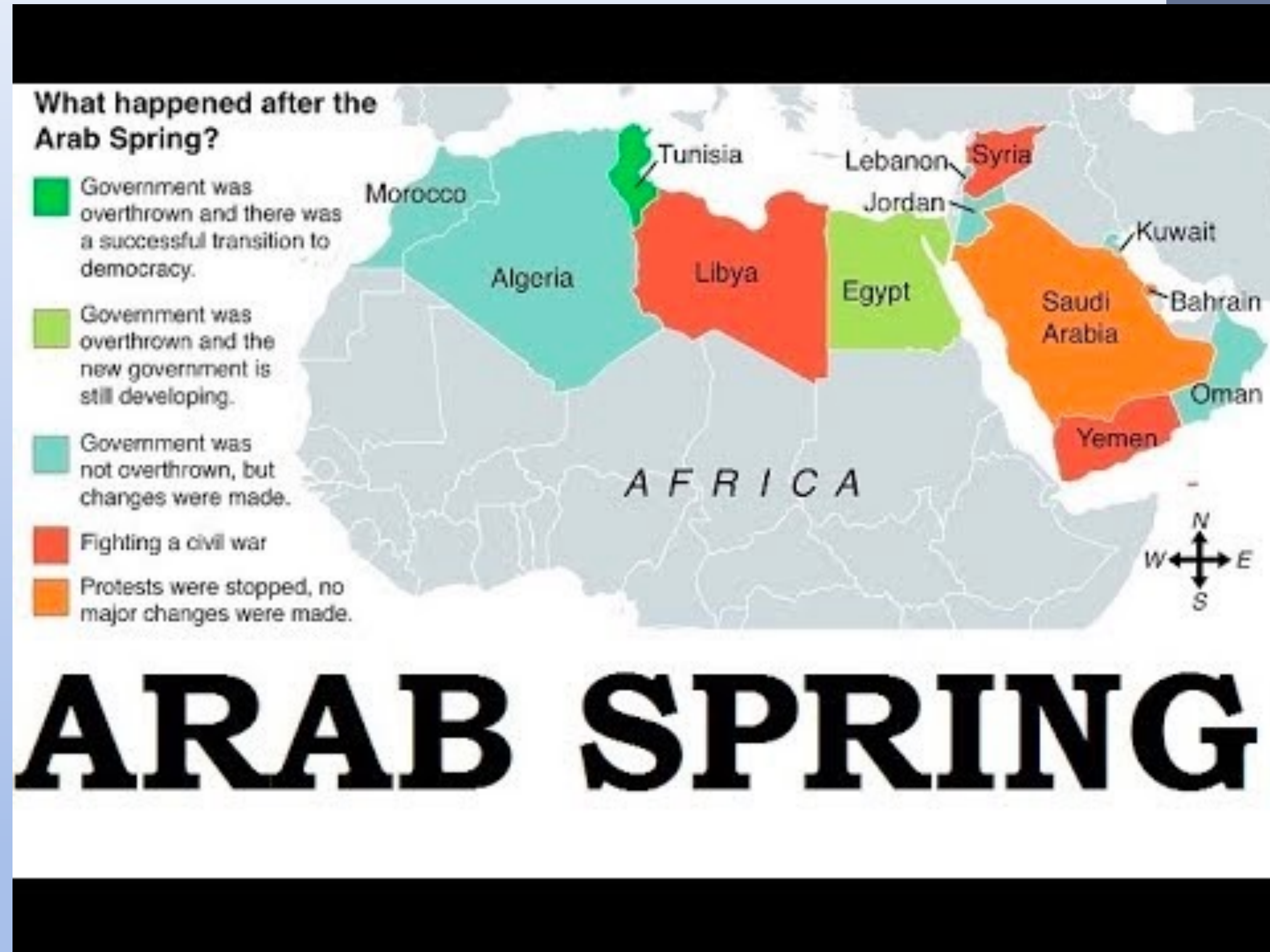
Seek and seize
"windows of
opportunity"



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Windows of Opportunity



Examples:

- Afghanistan, 2002
- Tunisia, Egypt, 2011
- Ukraine, 2014
- Angola, 2017
- Sudan, 2020
- Honduras, 2021
- Ukraine, 2022
- Guatemala, 2024

Windows of Opportunity

Are:

- Fleeting (6 months – 1 year)
- Difficult to exploit, because...
...Subject of fierce competition on the part of the residual kleptocratic network or would-be replacements

Not solved by the mere removal of a head of state

Require:

- Sudden intense effort
- Strategic thinking
- Creativity

Guatemala, 2023-2024



- Sociologist and anti-corruption campaigner Bernardo Arévalo trounced former first lady Sandra Torres, the candidate of the “*Pacto de Corruptos*” in August.
- The incumbent executive branch/justice ministry launched numerous proceedings aimed at disqualifying him.
- In October, Indigenous peoples led a general strike demanding resignation of prosecutors and defending the electoral results. They remained in the streets for 109 days.
- Congress attempted to pack the High Court.
- Congress tried to derail the inauguration, delaying it by hours.

Guatemala, 2023-2024



U.S. officials made swift and consistent use of targeted sanctions and visa denials, including against the intimate partner of the term-limited incumbent, and the families of members of Congress identified as working to block the electoral results. U.S. efforts continued throughout the hours when the inauguration was delayed.

Be a Little Consistent



Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Policy priority



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Core National Security Interest

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