



التحالف الإسلامي العسكري لمحاربة الإرهاب
ISLAMIC MILITARY COUNTER TERRORISM COALITION
Planning and Coordination Department



Spotlight
On

Fragile States Index 2018







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Stability is one of the key targets that states and societies aim to achieve. It is a precondition for the establishment of peace, development and prosperity on local, regional and international levels. A number of universities and research centers have developed scientific methods to monitor and analyze the presence or absence of stability in various regions across the world. The Fragile States Index (FSI) is one of the most important international annual reports that measure stability in the world, supply decision makers with precise quantitative input about it and provide early warnings against conditions that may lead to instability.

Issued annually by the Fund for Peace and Foreign Policy magazine in the United States since 2005, the FSI analyzes stability and tension in sovereign states using 12 indicators, each from 0 to 10, where 0 represents “most stable” and 10 “least stable”, with a total of 120 points; the higher the points a state receives in the index, the more instability they indicate.

The FSI 2018 report, which monitors stability in the world between January 1st and December 31st 2017, revealed that most states continue to progress positively on their way towards stability. Of a total of 178 states covered by the report, 151 states have demonstrated improvement in their levels of stability. However, this progress will not always be linear, and could be indicative of a continuous process of taking two steps forward, one step backward, according to the report.

It may be surprising to see states like Iraq and Haiti atop the list of states that showed best improvement in the 2018 report, a fact which proves that a state that suffers from high levels of fragility can recover over time. It is true that the two countries are suffering from high levels of instability and conflict, yet their situation is much better than it used to be 12 months ago. In Haiti, elections took place with the least degree of conflict as the country progressed towards rehabilitation after the destructive earthquake of 2010. Iraq won decisive victories against ISIS and regained relative stability in some disputed areas in the country lately. However, both countries remain unstable to a large extent and can easily regress and lose their gains of 2017.



Pressure Spares No Country

Instability indicators worsened in numerous areas around the world. War continues in Syria and Yemen, Qatar is politically and economically isolated from its neighbors, Catalonia is moving forward in its attempts seeking independence from Spain, Venezuela is more instable, problems escalate in the UK as a result of the Brexit process and conflicts become more acute in the USA which moves from one political crisis to another.

Despite this situation, the outcome of the FSI in 2018 generally shows that countries around the world steadily improve and many of them demonstrate flexibility against mounting pressure. The clearest message, probably, of the FSI 2018 is that pressure can impact all countries including the richest and most advanced ones. Qatar topped the list of most worsening countries in the FSI 2018 report, with an increase of 4.1 points to register 48.1 points. Venezuela rose 3.3 points to hit 86.2, followed by the USA whose index increased 2.1 points, and Yemen 1.6 points making it very close to the most instable countries with a total of 112.7 points. Turkey scored 82.2 points while other countries such as Haiti, Iraq, Nepal, Ecuador, Japan, and Mexico proved to be the most recovering.



Most Deteriorating Countries

Past constant criticism of the FSI revolved around the claim that the report was somehow biased against the poorest countries. Yet, the most deteriorating country in 2018 was Qatar: the richest country in the world in terms of per capita income. Three of the ten most worsening countries in the 2018 report are among the most advanced in the world: Spain, the US, and the UK, all suffering from deep internal political turmoil. This provides clear evidence that stability cannot be regarded as *fait accompli*, and that it can hit developing and developed countries the same.

Spain, the second worsening country in 2018, was impacted by increased instability when Catalonia ran the independence referendum. The government's reaction in Madrid made the situation more intense. While the Spanish government took very strict measures against the separatist referendum, the year 2017 could be seen as a turning point, probably a point of no return in the long term.

The US also witnessed major political unrest, therefore was categorized as the fourth worsening country in 2018. Despite its strong economy, social and political unrest was unavoidable. Some critics link the deteriorating situation in the US to the arrival of president Trump to the Oval Office; however, the pressure the US faces, in fact, is growing further with the rise of extremism in the American society.

The stability indicators over the last ten years put the US among the most worsening countries in the world. Surely the US has relatively unmatched capability and flexibility, which means it is harder for

the US to fall into an abyss. However, such results should be taken as a call on American political leaders (let alone influencers in the world of media) to be aware that controversial policies and speeches will lead to catastrophic results that threaten the country's stability and prosperity on the long run.

2017 was a tough year for the United States as the worst hurricanes hit that year: hurricanes Erma, Harvey and Maria caused damages in billions of dollars. It was also the year of the worst forest fires. Over 1 million acres of land burnt to dust in California alone. 2017 witnessed also the worst mass shootings where hundreds were killed at concerts, churches and schools. That year was specially a bad year of political polarization full of political scandals of corruption, crime and alleged bad behavior at the highest levels in the American administration. Moreover, public protests escalated against such issues as immigration policy and women rights more than any other time in the past. Yet, not everything was that bad in the US. The economy witnessed improvement, unemployment decreased from a 2009 peak of %10 to 4.1%, the best average since 2000, and the stock market demonstrated good performance all year round continuing to rise since the 2008-2009 crash.

Even though the challenges faced by the United Kingdom are different from those facing the US, the two countries are going through a noticeably similar long term path as the UK is ranked the third worsening country in the world with regards to the three stability indicators since 2013. Brexit came amid unprecedented levels of division and mass protests. As tough negotiations with the EU continue, the FSI presents the UK leaders and influencers, like their American counterparts, with a conclusion empha-

sizing the fact that making controversial policies and speeches is against any country's ability to develop and grow.

Yemen and Syria are, of course, among the worsening countries in 2018. The two countries have been witnessing prolonged civil conflicts that go only from bad to worse, and each one of them is strongly maintaining its position among the worst FSI countries such as Somalia and South Sudan. **Venezuela** ranks third worsening country in 2018 as a result of the chaos that hit the country which was suffering from the mismanagement of Maduro's government who tightened its grip on power, confiscated civil liberties and silenced political opposition. Venezuela is considered now the second worsening country in the western hemisphere after Haiti. In **South Africa**, despite the problems that emanated from the catastrophic leadership of former president Jacob Zuma, the resignation of Zuma and the election of Cyril Ramaphosa as the head of the African National Congress and president of South Africa gave new hopes that South Africa's ordeal may gradually witness improvement.

Even though Poland is not listed among the most worsening countries in 2018, it has regressed by 0.7 points since 2017. Its long term tendency seems to be seriously worrying, not for Poland alone, but for Europe in general. East Europe shows generally growing illiberalism tendency especially in Hungary and Poland which give early warning to what the region might be experiencing in the future. **Mexico** (and Ethiopian) appeared in the 2017 report as two of the most worsening countries because of the economic situation and the growing advancement of violence. Yet, Mexico flourished in 2018 swinging between worst country in 2017 and sixth most improving in 2018.



most worsened countries in 2018

Sahel Countries in Need of Different Approach



The challenges and threats facing the Sahel countries are numerous. However, the response to those threats has been effective, focusing narrowly on security and military participation. It is true that prevention of violent extremism is a matter of no doubt, but the data provided by the FSI shed light on the sustainable pressure (on those countries) that transcends direct security and forms real danger that jeopardizes the current and future stability in the region.

The country that ranks as the most worsening in the Sahel region over the past decade is, no doubt, Mali. It jumped 18 points to stand in rank 27 in 2018. Evidently, the conflict that started in 2012 had a great impact on the people and state of Mali, and big regional impact caused by the waves on refugees and indirect impact on absence of security. According to the UNHCR data, 2017 witnessed the highest number of Malian refugees since the beginning of the conflict, reaching around 145,000 refugees. Boko Haram rebellion in northeastern Nigeria contributed to a mass exodus in the Lake Chad region housing over 1.7 million IDPs in Nigeria and over 200,000 refugees in Niger, Chad and north Cameroon. The cross-border attacks launched by Boko Haram in Diffa south of Niger also contributed to the increased numbers of IDPs in Nigeria. Chad, Niger, Mauritania, and to a lesser degree, Burkina Faso, took nearly all the refugees, which created mounting

pressure on these countries and their abilities to provide for their own citizens.

In addition to the visible humanitarian burden resulting from displacement, the rising numbers of refugees and the IDPs present a unique challenge to the Sahel states which lack the capacity to take in any refugees or supply the needs of IDPs. Disputes between refugees and host societies could develop leading to tensions and conflicts. Refugees also impose extra pressure on the infrastructure and on health and educational systems, most of which are indeed weak in those countries.

The demographic pressure indicator which measures the pressure emanating from such issues as demographic growth, diseases, natural disasters, and food security has special importance for the Sahel states. Demographic pressure is considered the most registered indicator for three countries, namely, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mauritania. Such pressure is mostly caused by increased population growth, in addition to continuous drought cycles, natural disaster and absence of food security. High fertility rates and fast population growth in many Sahel states resulted in high ratios of youth to the overall population. Niger, for example, has the highest number of youth in the world. The huge numbers of young people in a country can be a blessing for economic growth, and a curse in

the Sahel countries which suffer from low economic productivity and high rates of illiteracy and poverty. This leap in the ratio of youth raises all fears of the possibilities of extremism in the future.

Despite this myriad of challenges, there are positive tendencies in the region that give hope. All Sahel countries, except Mali, demonstrated noticeable improvement in the FSI 2018. Burkina Faso also witnessed sustainable improvement in the economic indicator since 2006, achieved best results among Sahel countries and ranked third best among ECOWAS countries (after Cape Verde and Ghana). Likewise, Burkina Faso and Mauritania saw improvement in group grievances indicators in the past decade. Burkina Faso now has one of the lowest 50 points in group grievances in the world, doing much better than some very stable countries such as Denmark and the Netherlands.

The Sahel countries are facing a substantial wave of social, economic and security challenges, all of which lead to an aggravated situation in the region. Securing stability in the future will demand more than a mere military approach. Investments in education, infra-structure, poverty alleviation, family planning, and youth engagement, in addition to initiatives in good governance, humanitarian relief and climate adaptation strategies, among many more things, are vital in curbing the pressure on those countries and dealing with the wider causes of the lack of security and violent extremism.

It remains for us to emphasize that the FSI does not predict disturbances, but provides early warning of conditions that might lead to instability. Therefore, policy makers and people in power must respond to the short and long terms warnings, bearing in mind the increasing probability of instability conditions, and take necessary measures to prevent or mitigate them. Despite the overall improvement in the world, the FSI reiterates the fact that stability can never be taken for granted, even in the richest and most advanced countries.

Fragility indicators



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