

Opinion 2012 Fragility Rankings

Throwing aid at Afghanistan is not working

The situation in the South Asian country, the largest recipient of our aid dollars, has actually deteriorated over the past decade.

DAVID CARMENT AND
YIAGADEESEN SAMY

The 2012 state fragility rankings are now available from the CIDA-funded Country Indicators for Foreign Policy project, and the results are revealing, especially for Afghanistan.

Somalia tops the list of most fragile countries, followed closely by Afghanistan, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen, and the Central African Republic. Sudan, Eritrea, Pakistan and Côte d'Ivoire round out our top 10.

In fact, the majority of the top 20 most fragile states are located in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly the Great Lakes region as well as West and East Africa, a finding that is consistent with our historical data.

It should come as no surprise that Somalia tops the list. After all, this is a country that has had no central government for more than two decades, ongoing civil unrest in ungovernable spaces, a fundamental lack of economic and social development, and a Transitional Federal Government unable to exercise authority over militant groups.

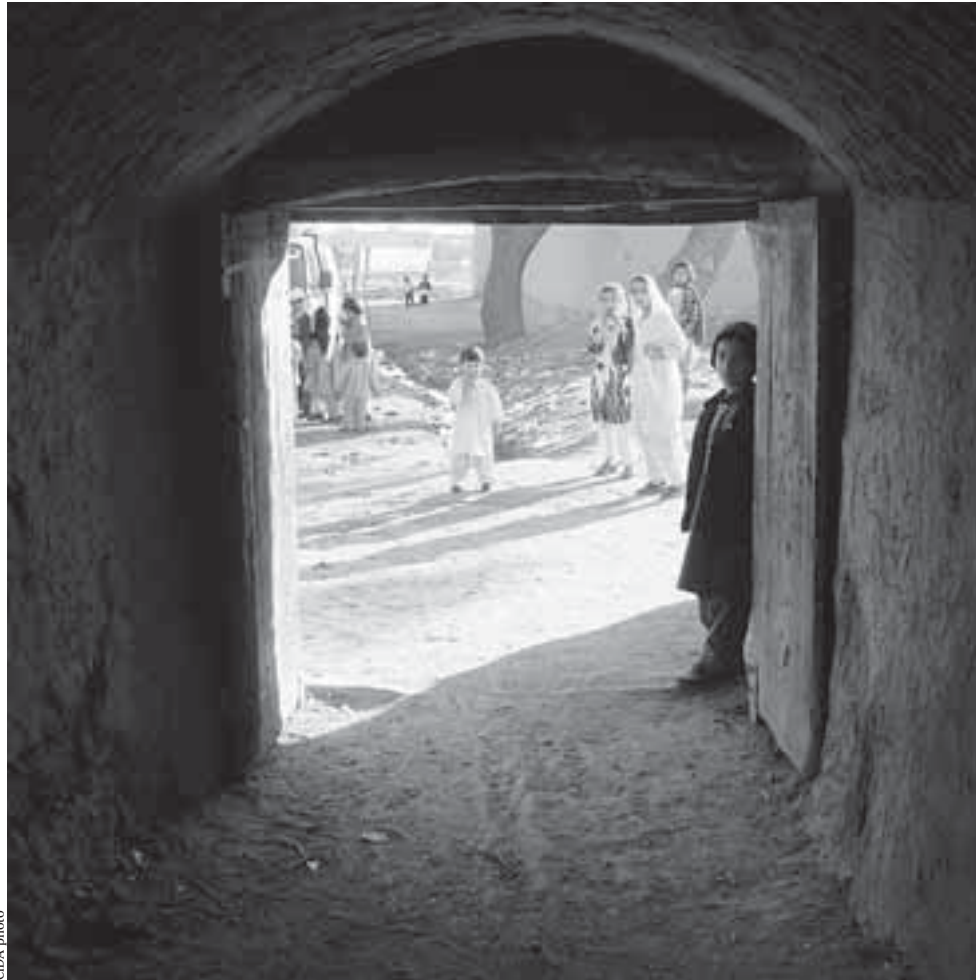
A year-over-year comparison with CIPF's previous rankings shows that Afghanistan, Chad, DRC and Somalia all rank consistently among the top poor performers and usually within the top five. On the other side of the ledger, Haiti and Iran have moved out of the top 20, suggesting modest improvements in their performance in the last several years.

Worrying, however, is Afghanistan's recent performance. The country is one of CIDA's 20 countries of focus and the largest recipient of our aid dollars. The situation there has actually deteriorated over the past decade, despite the injection of billions of dollars in aid money.

Afghanistan was ranked twelfth on our list in 2002 when the Taliban regime was ousted from power in Kabul. Our data shows the country's authority, legitimacy and capacity scores have not significantly improved over the last five years.

Throwing more aid at Afghanistan in the hope that it will reverse course—such as the \$16 billion US recently pledged by donors to Afghanistan—does not make a lot of sense without some thought being given to more fundamental questions.

When it comes to the failure of donors to build resilience in fragile situations, Afghanistan is not unique. As a group, the countries classified as most fragile on our list are continuing to fall behind and will not meet any of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.



A view of an old area of Afghanistan, taken by a highschool student in 2008.

This despite the fact that they receive a significant share of aid, 37 per cent in 2009 according to data from the OECD. Besides Afghanistan, several other countries of focus for CIDA—namely Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Haiti, Mali (where the situation is rapidly deteriorating), Pakistan, and Sudan—are in the top 40 fragile states.

The persistence of fragility among certain countries over decades means that CIDA, like all donors, needs to have a much better strategy on aid effectiveness than they do now.

Canada's current approach unworkable

Our methodology of assessing fragility along different characteristics of stateness, using both structural and events data, allows us to identify the sources and extent of both weaknesses and strengths of a state over time.

The project provides a comprehensive monitoring capability, which appears to be lacking in donor circles, where most country assessments are one-off exercises.

CIPF identifies how states lacking resilience are setting themselves up for deepening crisis, failure and eventual collapse. It also specifies how, where, when and why policymakers should engage a country mired in broad structural malaise.

Consider a country like Pakistan, which is consistently in the top 20 but where fragility is not as extreme, where service delivery is to some extent in place, and there is some level of effective policy making.

We suggest that the strategic timing of aid could work in Pakistan by targeting a particular area, which may then create positive feedbacks for other weak areas.

More generally, aid needs to be context specific and timed properly and strategically, and it must be tied directly to indigenous capabilities that demonstrate long-term effectiveness.

Consider also our analysis of the Middle East and North Africa. Our report shows legitimacy, followed by authority, is the most important structural factor contributing to fragility in that region.

Simply put, it is far too simplistic to think of the Arab Spring as being only about economic underdevelopment and authoritarian regimes. The core problems are longstanding frustrations with human rights violations, lack of political freedoms, gender inequality, lack of good governance and corruption.

Efforts to support superficial democratic transitions, monitoring elections and pushing private sector investments in the region won't cut it in the absence of a deeper understanding of Middle East state-society relations.

In more general terms, Canada's current policy approach towards state fragility is simply unworkable. In particular, there is an absence of effective linkages between analysis, monitoring and warning, on the one hand, and support to donor decision-making on the other. There is also not enough attention paid to countries that have emerged from fragility and have become more resilient over time.

Our project's goal is to identify and understand the sequence of changes leading to extreme fragility and to match those to the timing of effective interventions.

The key is identification of where Canada's investments will yield the biggest bang for the buck.

This means focusing on our strengths and being humble enough to say no in certain cases. It implies scaling back aid if necessary, and in particular cases, such as Afghanistan, where out of control corruption requires even more careful monitoring of every dollar of aid spent.

An effective fragile states policy can only be accomplished if proper and comprehensive monitoring tools are deployed and actually used by donors at the strategic and operational level. If Canada coordinates with and provides leadership for other donors to ensure that we are not constantly throwing money down bottomless pits, all the better.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Terrorism troubles

The Talking Point (RE: "Anti-terrorism program gets \$8 million," July 4) has left me confused. It said Foreign Minister John Baird "said the new funds would go to a program aimed at helping other countries fight terrorism through better training, equipment, and technical assistance."

And yet Mr. Baird and his Conservative government don't seem to be happy that Sri Lanka, with no help from Canada, wiped out militarily the Tamil Tiger terrorists.

When it comes to how Sri Lanka went about eliminating this scourge, the Canadian government doesn't seem to

be happy and lambastes the Sri Lankan government at every turn. Do I smell a rat here?

**Asoka Weerasinghe
Gloucester, Ont.**

Read before you write

You recently published an article written by Scott Taylor that was a scathing review of Rajiv Chandrasekaran's book *Little America: The War within the War for Afghanistan*, in which Mr. Taylor implied that the book is a negative account of Canadian military involvement in Afghanistan.

Having read the book, I find Mr. Taylor's comments mystifying. Had he actually read the

book (343 pages) instead of a couple out-of-context comments (five paragraphs), he would know that it is a scathing indictment of US politicians, US military leaders, and most of all USAID.

The Canadian military is mentioned in the explanation of NATO issues during rotations of US military divisions or in descriptions of the Kandahar airbase. The comments on the Canadian mission and NATO are supported by the Manley report.

In the book there are descriptions of the contributions of Canada's JTF2 and their impressive and awarded records for long-distance sniper kills, however Mr. Taylor apparently didn't read that part of the book.

As the parent of a child who was in Kandahar for a year, I found the book very informative. The explanations of what took place in Afghanistan

were enlightening. I have read everything I could over the years to help me understand why my son was there. I needed to make sense of it and this book explains the war in detail. I have included in my reading many editorial pieces by Mr. Taylor in which he has criticized the Canadian government and military, which makes his comments even more confusing.

Mr. Taylor's article may sell magazines but it is the worst kind of journalism: lazy. There are journalists all over the world who work hard to make sure they are reporting the truth. They give up a lot to do so—in some cases their lives.

It appears that Mr. Taylor couldn't manage to find the time to actually read the entire book before writing his article.

**Laura Perry
Ottawa, Ont.**