

# Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq top index of weak states

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By Sue Fleming

WASHINGTON, Feb 26 (Reuters) - Somalia, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Iraq are the four weakest states in the world, according to an index of fragile nations released by two U.S. think tanks on Tuesday.

Washington-based Brookings Institution and the Center for Global Development ranked 141 developing countries according to their performance in four core areas -- economic, political, security and social welfare.

Using those indicators, the 10 weakest states were listed as Somalia, Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo -- all classified as "failed states" and found to be the most insecure -- Iraq, Burundi, Sudan, Central African Republic, Zimbabwe, Liberia and Ivory Coast.

"Given the role that weak states can play as incubators and breeding grounds for transnational security threats, building state capacity ... should be a higher priority for U.S. policy," said the report.

Following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks against the United States, studies indicated weak states posed a big threat to world security and the Bush administration said dealing with those fragile nations was a national priority.

But the Brookings Institution's Susan Rice, who co-authored the index, said there had not been a big enough focus, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where the bulk of the critically weak states were located.

"The overarching point is that for all of our newfound rhetoric after 9/11, the U.S. government has yet to generate any kind of coherent approach to strengthening the capacity of weak states," Rice, who is also an adviser to Democratic presidential hopeful Barack Obama, told Reuters.

A weak state is defined as one lacking the capacity to establish and maintain political institutions, to secure their populations from violent conflict and control their territories or to meet the basic needs of the population.

The report also included a "watch list" of countries that should be monitored by policymakers because of their significant weakness.

Those included Syria, Algeria, the Philippines, Cuba and Paraguay, but also G8 member Russia, which ranked 65 on the overall list of weak states as well as China at 74th and India at 67th.

"We have to get out of the habit of assuming that states we have come to believe are rising powers -- China, Russia and India -- are all strong states," said Rice.

"We need to understand that there are states to watch that we are accustomed to saying are out of the woods," she added.

The study said the index reflected a direct link between low income and the weakness of a state, pointing to a need for poverty alleviation to become a greater priority.

"Poverty fuels and perpetuates civil conflict which swiftly and dramatically reduces state capacity. Yet still lacking from the George W. Bush administration are any comprehensive strategies to address poverty in the world's most challenging institutional environments," said the report.

It also urged that aid should be better targeted in failed and weak states with an emphasis on improving security.

For example, in Iraq and Afghanistan where the United States is most deeply involved since Sept. 11, the report said U.S. troop levels were inadequate to stabilize both nations.

There had also not been a great enough effort to improve economic recovery and governance in those nations and too little was devoted to job creation and social services.  
(Editing by Peter Cooney)

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