

Danger | Neutral | **Positive**

Colombia: FARC On the Rise Again

After more than a decade of relative peace and quiet and growing prosperity, Colombia appears set to take back the top spot as the murder capital of the world. The nominally Marxist Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) has returned to attacks on rural economic targets – mainly oil and mining – that generate over 15 percent of Colombia's GDP. FARC's aim is to establish a Marxist dictatorship in Colombia, but it has long championed land reform and has been opposed to illegal theft of land, which are common in the countryside. Colombia has been in a state of on-again, off-again civil war since 1948, but FARC has been severely weakened over the past decade, when it got caught up in cocaine trafficking and felt the full onslaught of a Colombian army backed by U.S. narcotics control forces. FARC had lost senior officials and had retreated deep into the jungle, near the Ecuadorian border and had begun peace negotiations with the government, only to re-emerge as a kidnapping for ransom operation.

FARC's hope is to either raise cash or force the government to make concessions in peace talks, but as with cocaine, money appears to talk louder than politics, and FARC has increased its attacks fourfold over the past year. For three decades FARC financed its rebel army by working for the drug cartels. As the drug trade has gradually shifted to Mexico, FARC has gone back into the kidnapping and extortion business, with rising levels of violence. While conditions are still nowhere nearly as bad as neighboring Venezuela, where the murder rate has soared from 48 per 100,000 in 2011 to 73 per 100,000 last year – in Caracas it's 122 – Colombia's murder rate is inching past 25. By contrast, in the supposedly trigger-happy United States, the murder rate is only 4.8, which puts it in the middle range of Western European nations.

Pakistan Slipping Towards Chaos

Pakistan and India both suffer from terrorist attacks at the hands of marginal separatist groups, India from a long-standing Communist insurgency in Kerala, Sikh extremists who want their own nation, and Pakistani Muslim terrorists in the nation's northwest. But India's 1,171 terrorism deaths last year were minuscule

compared to Pakistan's, which suffered 6,211 similar deaths last year – five times as many in a nation with a sixth the population of India. In other words, Pakistan is now 30 times more dangerous than India, which helps to explain why educated Pakistanis and generally, anyone with the economic means to do so, are pulling up stakes and emigrating.

In the past five years, Pakistan has suffered over 38,000 terrorist-related deaths, mostly in the northwest tribal territories, where there is effectively no government control. Ironically, most of the attacks come from groups sponsored by Pakistan's ISI, the Inter-Services Intelligence agency, which has been financing terrorist attacks on India. The terrorism is almost entirely Muslim-on-Muslim violence similar to attacks throughout the Middle East, with most of the attacks coming from Sunni Muslims on Shi'ites. But there are also attacks on Pakistan's small Christian and Hindu populations.

Unfortunately for Pakistan, much of the wealth is also in those populations, as in Egypt (See Fever Thermometer from February 2013) and like Egypt's Copts, non-Sunni Muslims are pulling out, in favor of Dubai, if they want to remain in the region, or Great Britain, Canada or South Africa, if they have family there. In fact, Britain has been hit with record immigration from India and Pakistan over the past three years, with immigrants from those two nations making up more than two-thirds of newcomers to Britain. But poorer Pakistanis are flooding over the border into Afghanistan, reversing years of Afghan refugees camping out in Pakistan.

But it gets worse. The legal system is heavily biased in the direction of Sunni Muslims, and the country is a cesspit of corruption, poor management and political infighting, so much so that assassinations are the leading cause of death in Karachi, Pakistan's former capital and major city. It's little wonder that people want to leave.

Tunisia: Wobbling Toward Democracy

The assassination of Tunisian opposition leader Chokri Belaid on February 6, many people thought, could have been the beginning of a decent into civil war. Tunisia, the home of the Arab Spring movement, had seen its fledgling democracy begin to wobble as the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired Ennahda party government of Hamadi Jebali has found itself caught between the usual mix of Islamist moderates, a small secular Christian population and Sufi mystics on one side, and Salafist extremists on the other side, who want to impose strict, Saudi-style Sharia law. The Salafists have been responsible for burning movie theaters, and an astonishing number of beatings and rapes.

When Ennahda was accused of the assassination by Belaid's followers, Jebali offered to set up a non-political technocratic government to bring peace back to

the streets. But Salafist followers, who are mainly among the poor, rioted in turn, and what followed was two weeks of political wrangling, followed by Jebali's resignation and the formation of a coalition government that gives much more power to moderate factions. This has brought a measure of stability back to Tunisia, but it will be interesting to see how well it sticks.

Unlike neighboring Algeria and Libya, Tunisia has no natural resources to speak of, and depends almost entirely on tourism from Europe for its income. The beaches are among the best on the planet, the food is a delightful mixture of North African and French cuisines, the sun shines almost all the time, and the girls at the beaches have felt free in the past to go topless. In addition, Tunisia has both a robust software business and good olive oil and wine. Tunisia needs peace among its Arab factions, but it needs to maintain its façade of sophistication even more, not only to keep the tourist euros flowing, but to keep its best-educated citizens from packing up and emigrating to climes that may be less hospitable from a weather perspective, but far safer.