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Conflict deaths at highest level this century causing world peacefulness to decline

London, June 28, 2023, Today marks the launch of the 17th edition of the Global Peace Index from international think-tank, the [Institute for Economics & Peace](https://www.economicsandpeace.org/) (IEP).

Key results

- Deaths from global conflict increased by 96% to 238,000
- New data shows higher number of conflict deaths in Ethiopia than Ukraine, eclipsing the previous global peak during the Syrian war
- 79 countries witnessed increased levels of conflict including Ethiopia, Myanmar, Ukraine, Israel, and South Africa
- The global economic impact of violence increased by 17% or \$1 trillion, to \$17.5 trillion in 2022, equivalent to 13% of global GDP
- A Chinese blockade of Taiwan would cause a drop in global economic output of \$2.7 trillion, almost double the loss that occurred due to the 2008 global financial crisis
- Despite the conflict in Ukraine, 92 countries improved on military expenditure and 110 decreased their military personnel
- Conflicts are becoming more internationalised with 91 countries now involved in some form of external conflict, up from 58 in 2008

Impact of the War in Ukraine on Peacefulness

- Ukraine recorded the largest deterioration, falling 14 places to 157th
- The economic impact of violence has increased by 479% or \$449 billion, equivalent to 64% of Ukraine's GDP
- Despite the conflict, Russia's incarceration rate, violent demonstrations, terrorism impact and homicide rates have improved over the past year, with the homicide rate at its lowest since 2008
- 65% of men in Ukraine aged 20 to 24 years have fled the country, or died in the conflict

The 17th edition of the annual Global Peace Index (GPI), the world's leading measure of peacefulness, reveals the average level of global peacefulness deteriorated for the ninth consecutive year, with 84 countries recording an improvement and 79 a deterioration. This demonstrates that the deteriorations were larger than the improvements, as the post-COVID rises of civil unrest and political instability remain high while regional and global conflicts accelerate.

Iceland remains the most peaceful country, a position it has held since 2008, followed by Denmark, Ireland, New Zealand and Austria. For the sixth consecutive year, Afghanistan is the least peaceful country, followed by Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, and the Democratic

Republic of Congo. Highlighting the shifting dynamics of conflict, both Afghanistan and Syria recorded improvements in peacefulness.

Ukraine's overall score recorded a decline of 13%, the largest deterioration in the 2023 GPI, and is now 157th on the Index. Libya experienced the largest improvement in overall peacefulness, improving by 7% and rising 14 places to 137th.

The shift in the global distribution of conflict continued as major conflicts in the MENA region and South Asia declined, while conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and Asia-Pacific intensified. The Russia and Eurasia region recorded the largest deterioration in peacefulness in the world.

Ten of the 23 GPI indicators improved, 11 deteriorated, and two had no change. The largest deteriorations were in *External Conflicts Fought* and *Deaths from Internal Conflict*. Other notable deteriorations included *Neighbouring Country Relations* and *Political Instability*, where 59 countries deteriorated.

The impact of violence on the global economy increased by \$1 trillion to a record \$17.5 trillion. This is equivalent to 13% of global GDP, approximately \$2,200 per person. This was due to increased military expenditure owing to the Ukraine war. The disparity in the economic impact of violence is stark: the ten countries most affected averaged 34% of GDP, compared to just 3% for the ten least affected.

Steve Killelea, Founder & Executive Chairman of IEP, said: *"The 2023 Global Peace Index highlights the contrasting dynamics of militarisation and conflict. On the one hand, the majority of countries are decreasing their reliance on the military, while on the other hand an increasing number of conflicts are becoming internationalised. Conflict deaths are the highest since the Rwandan genocide which had over 800,000 deaths and sparked a wave of global action."*

"After the Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syrian wars and now the Ukraine war it is obvious that the most powerful armies cannot prevail against a well-resourced local population. War has become mostly unwinnable, and an increasingly heavy economic burden. This is highlighted by the impact of a potential economic blockade on Taiwan, which would result in a global economic recession twice as impactful as the global financial crisis of 2008."

The rise in conflicts

79 countries deteriorated in the *Ongoing Conflict* domain, with conflict related deaths increasing by 96% compared to the prior year. Conflict deaths are now at the highest level this century. The Ethiopian conflict claimed the most lives in 2022 with new data finding that battlefield deaths were over 100,000, while disease and famine related deaths were conservatively estimated at over 200,000. This conflict has been largely hidden from the media because of domestic media restrictions and internet blackouts. This has coincided with US and UN aid organisations stopping food shipments because of corruption in the food supply chains.

In sub-Saharan Africa, Mali recorded the largest deterioration with conflict-related deaths increasing by 154%, while violence against civilians rose by 570%. Eswatini experienced the next largest drop in peacefulness in the region.

The Ukraine war has seen the total number of Ukrainians who were either refugees or internally displaced jump from 1.7% before the conflict, to over 30% and is likely to continue increasing. Recent data has found that up to 65% of men in Ukraine aged 20 to 24 years have fled the country or died in the conflict¹. The report estimates 83,000 deaths are related to the conflict so far.

In contrast to the devastating effects of the war on the Russian population, other internal factors have improved including the incarceration rate, a decrease in violent demonstrations, and the impact of terrorism. The homicide rate within Russia is now at its lowest level since the inception of the GPI in 2008. If not for the Ukraine conflict, Russia would have been one of the largest improvers in peace in this year's Index.

The global number of refugees and internally displaced people continues to rise; there are now 15 countries with over 5% of their population displaced.

Taiwan Blockade

While China is not currently directly involved in any external conflicts, it has become more assertive in the South China Sea and has intensified aerial operations near Taiwan. The Index indicates that if a Chinese blockade of Taiwan were to materialise, it would lead to a drop in global economic output of \$2.7 trillion, or 3% of global GDP in the first year alone.

Almost 60% of this loss would occur in China and Taiwan. The Chinese economy would shrink by an estimated 7%, and Taiwan's by almost 40%. China's five largest trading partners are established democracies that are militarily aligned – the US, Japan, South Korea, Germany, and Australia.

Militarisation and Technology

Although conflict is increasing, more countries are directing military expenditure toward other priorities including healthcare, education, infrastructure, and pandemic recovery. The improvements in militarisation were widespread with every region improving. However, the total military spending increased by 17% since 2008 with the largest increases coming from China (\$180 billion), the US (\$70 billion), and India (\$40 billion).

Drones are being increasingly used in conflicts, including in Ukraine, Ethiopia, and Myanmar. The total number of drone attacks increased by 41% in 2022, with the number of different groups using drones increasing by 24%.

¹ Source: UN World Population Prospects

Regional Highlights

- The largest regional improvements occurred in MENA and North America. North America's improvement was driven by Canada, but the United States deteriorated slightly where homicide rates have risen to levels six times higher than Western Europe.
- Since 2016 MENA has seen the largest improvements in peace globally, however it is still the least peaceful region. The epicentre of terrorism has shifted from the MENA region into sub-Saharan Africa, especially the Sahel.
- Central America, the Caribbean and South America have recorded substantial deteriorations, falling mainly on measures of repression, violence, and conflict.
- Coastal West Africa is at its most peaceful since reporting began in 2008, with countries in the region recording an average improvement of 5% in the past 14 years. The coastal region between Morocco and Ghana recorded no deaths from terrorism in 2022, in contrast to the neighbouring countries in the Sahel.
- Europe is still the most peaceful region in the world, despite military expenditure and *Neighbouring Country Relations* deteriorating because of the Ukraine war. The region is still home to seven of the ten most peaceful countries, with the level of violent demonstrations, protests and riots remaining high. The other three most peaceful countries are in the Asia-Pacific region.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

For more information and to download the Global Peace Index 2023, visit visionofhumanity.org and economicsandpeace.org. The full GPI report, articles and interactive maps are available at: visionofhumanity.org

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About the Global Peace Index (GPI)

Produced by the international think-tank the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), the GPI report presents the most comprehensive data-driven analysis to date on peace, its economic value, trends, and how to develop peaceful societies. The report covers 99.7% of the world's population and uses 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators from highly respected sources to compile the Index. These indicators are grouped into three key domains: Ongoing Conflict, Safety and Security, and Militarisation.

About the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP)

IEP is an international and independent think tank dedicated to shifting the world's focus to peace as a positive, achievable and tangible measure of human well-being and progress. It has offices in Sydney, Brussels, New York, The Hague, Mexico City and Harare.