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‘The Great Fragmentation’ Driving Conflict: World Peace Plummet

London, June 18, 2025 – The 2025 Global Peace Index (GPI), released today by the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), reveals a continuing decline in global peacefulness, with many key indicators that precede major conflicts higher than at any time since World War II.

Rising conflict deaths, accelerating geopolitical tensions, and middle power assertiveness are driving 'The Great Fragmentation' - a fundamental reshaping of the global order and marking the emergence of a new geopolitical era. When combined with major power competition, asymmetric warfare technologies, and mounting debt in fragile economies, the prospect for further conflict is high.

Key findings:

- Global peace is at its lowest level since the inception of the Index, while the conditions that precede conflict are the worst since WWII.
- Global peacefulness has deteriorated every year since 2014, with 100 countries deteriorating over the last decade.
- There are currently 59 active state-based conflicts - the most since the end of WWII, with 152,000 conflict-related deaths recorded in 2024.
- There were 17 countries with over 1,000 internal conflict deaths in 2024, the highest since 1999, and a further 18 countries that recorded over 100 deaths.
- The world is at an inflection point, with global influence and power fragmenting.
- The number of globally influential countries has nearly tripled since the end of the Cold War, rising from 13 to 34 by 2023.
- Conflicts are becoming more internationalised, with 78 countries involved in conflicts beyond their borders in 2024.
- The global economic impact of violence reached \$19.97 trillion in 2024, equivalent to 11.6% of global GDP, with military expenditure alone accounting for \$2.7 trillion.

The world is at an inflection point, and the number of state-based conflicts is the highest since World War II. Conflicts are becoming more difficult to win and increasingly expensive - at the same time, global investment in conflict prevention has dramatically reduced. Eighty-seven countries deteriorated in peacefulness in 2024 compared to 74 that improved. However, some indicators showed improvement in 2024, notably criminality and homicide rates, which continued their long-term trends.

Beyond the immense human suffering, conflict represents a substantial economic burden through the displacement, dislocated trade, business uncertainty, and destruction of infrastructure. The global economic impact of violence reached \$19.97 trillion in 2024, while the countries worst affected by conflict have recorded drops in GDP of up to 30% in a single year. Global expenditure on peacekeeping, relative to military expenditure, is at its lowest level in

more than two decades - just 0.52% of total military spending in 2024.

The concentration of global influence and power is shifting, with mid-level powers becoming more active and influential within their regions due to their rising wealth. This has led to a fragmentation of influence and increasing competition, often between themselves. Relations with neighbouring countries have deteriorated substantially in the last decade, with 43 countries deteriorating and only 10 improving.

There are now 34 countries with significant geopolitical influence in at least one other nation, compared to just thirteen at the end of the Cold War. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, India, the UAE, Israel, South Africa, Brazil, and Indonesia have become influential regional powers. Adding to the fragmentation, restrictive trade practices tripled to over 3,000 measures in 2023. China has witnessed the largest increase in influence since the Cold War but appears to be plateauing, with its gross debt rising to near 300% of GDP and FDI falling dramatically to its lowest level in 20 years.

Regional Analysis

Western and Central Europe remains the most peaceful region globally, with Iceland remaining the most peaceful country in the world, a position it has held since 2008, joined at the top of the index by Ireland, Austria, New Zealand, and Switzerland. European economies are experiencing sustained low growth, and with reductions in foreign aid and the current global retreat from democracy, their influence is diminishing. France and the UK have had the largest falls in influence.

For the first time, Russia is the least peaceful country in the world, followed by Ukraine, Sudan, DRC, and Yemen. Europe's military expenditure is almost four times Russia's, yet its combined military capacity is only one-third higher. As defence budgets increase, diverting funds from healthcare and education, governments risk exacerbating already high social tensions. Europe's priority should be efficiency and integration, not spending levels. Without a unified strategic vision and integrated command systems, their defence potential remains unrealised. Europe must seek to balance defence requirements with internal cohesion.

Central and North America recorded the second-largest decline, with Canada recording the largest fall in the region, mainly due to a deterioration in the neighbouring country relations indicator following heightened tensions with the US administration. The US score did not change; however, future falls are likely due to rising political tensions and increasing polarisation. There have been over 1500 violent demonstrations in the US since 2020, with 51 violent demonstrations recorded since the last federal election

Steve Killelea, Founder & Executive Chairman, IEP: *"The concept of 'forever wars' is more real than at any stage in history. This year's Global Peace Index shows that the world is at a critical inflection point with Global Fragmentation dramatically increasing. This is driven by rising middle-level powers, major power competition, and unsustainable levels of debt burdens in the world's most fragile countries. This is leading to a fundamental realignment and a possible tipping point to a new international order, the nature of which still can't be fathomed."*

Conflict Hotspots & Risk Assessment

The MENA region remains the world's least peaceful, with four countries ranked in the bottom ten on the GPI: Sudan, Yemen, Syria, and Israel.

Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the most countries engaged in conflict, with 35 of 43 countries involved in a conflict in the past five years - a significant increase from just seven in 2008. Sub-Saharan Africa's debt servicing to government revenue is particularly concerning, at over 40%. These countries are amongst the most fragile in the world.

The Sahel remains the global epicentre of terrorism. Africa Corps continues to build its presence in the region with major arms shipments to Mali, ranked 154th, avoiding western sanctions while the remnants of the Wagner group withdraw. The shipments include tanks, armoured vehicles, artillery and planes.

South Asia recorded the largest deterioration in peacefulness, driven by repressive measures in Bangladesh and civil unrest and conflict in Pakistan. Kashmir clearly illustrates the risk of conflict escalation, with an April 2025 terror attack bringing nuclear-armed India and Pakistan close to open war.

South America was the only region to improve, with Peru recording the biggest improvement, driven by reductions in civil unrest.

IEP has developed a new set of predictive conflict measures that identify areas at highest risk of escalation into major wars: Kashmir, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Syria. All these conflicts are at risk of more than tens of thousands of annual casualties.

Technology & Modern Warfare

The changing nature of technology is fundamentally altering conflict dynamics, making warfare more accessible and prolonged. The number of companies manufacturing drones increased from 6 in 2022 to over 200 in 2024. Ukraine will produce more than 2.5 million drones in 2025. The next generation of drones will be AI-enhanced and capable of autonomous navigation, swarm coordination, and precision targeting. The conflict in Ukraine has become a testing ground for this new warfare, with drone attacks by Ukrainian forces increasing by over 127 times since the early days of the war.

Inexpensive drones, improvised explosive devices, and other technologies, costing as little as a few hundred dollars, can neutralise high-value military assets worth millions, fundamentally redressing the power balance between state and non-state actors. This asymmetric capability means smaller insurgent groups can now sustain conflicts against far larger conventional forces. Once these technologies are adopted by insurgent militias globally, it will become increasingly difficult to contain their activity, contributing to the 'forever wars' phenomenon where conflicts become prolonged and unwinnable.

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Contact

gpi2025@bursonglobal.com

Notes to Editors

The full GPI 2025 report and interactive map are available at: visionofhumanity.org

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About the Global Peace Index (GPI)

The GPI is produced by the international think tank the Institute for Economics & Peace and has been published annually for the last 19 years. It is the most comprehensive resource on global peace trends, ranking 163 independent states and territories, covering 99.7 per cent of the world's population. It uses multiple indicators to measure the state of peace across 'societal safety and security', 'ongoing domestic and international conflict', and 'degree of militarisation'.

About the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP)

The Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) is the world's leading think tank dedicated to developing metrics to analyse peace and to quantify its economic value. It does this by developing global and national indices, including the annual Global Peace Index, calculating the economic cost of violence and understanding Positive Peace, which is the attitudes, institutions, and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies.