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Global terrorism falls to a decade low but Western fatalities surge

London, UK – March 19, 2026 – Deaths from terrorism in the West surged by 280 per cent in 2025, contrasting starkly against a global decline of 28 per cent, reveals the Global Terrorism Index (GTI). In the wake of the widening Iran conflict, the report warns that future trends in terrorism will be shaped by emerging conflicts, breakdown of international norms and declining economic conditions.

Key Findings:

- Deaths from terrorism fell by 28 per cent to 5,582, and incidents decreased by 22 per cent to 2,944, marking the lowest figures since 2007
- In contrast, Western terrorism fatalities rose sharply by 280 per cent to 57 in 2025, largely driven by antisemitism, Islamophobia and political terrorism
- Iran risks becoming another breeding ground for terrorist militias if it becomes a failed state
- Six of the ten countries most impacted by terrorism are in sub-Saharan Africa, maintaining its position as the epicentre
- For the first time, Pakistan leads the Index as the country most impacted by terrorism, experiencing a sharp resurgence with 1,139 deaths and 1,045 incidents in 2025, its highest level since 2013
- Youth radicalisation fuelled lone-wolf attacks, with youth terrorism investigations rising threefold since 2021. Over the same period, 93 per cent of all fatal attacks in the West were lone-wolf attacks
- Islamic State (IS) and its affiliates remained the deadliest terrorist organisation, responsible for just under 17 per cent of all attacks worldwide

Globally, deaths from terrorism reached their lowest level in a decade; however, this improvement may be short-lived. Many negative factors are converging in 2026, including the escalation of conflicts in Iran and South Asia, deteriorating economic prospects in the West, and the rising use of drone technology by terrorist organisations.

Seven of the 19 countries that deteriorated on the Index were Western nations, and the conditions driving that trend, such as the rapid radicalisation of youth, political polarisation, rising antisemitic violence, and the compression of online radicalisation timelines, show no signs of abating. Recent polling indicates public support for Israel is declining in several countries, while the Gaza war has coincided with increased concern about antisemitism and heightened political polarisation.

The GTI is produced by the international think tank the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) and has been published annually for the last 13 years. It is the most comprehensive resource on global terrorism trends and uses multiple factors to calculate its score, including

the number of incidences, fatalities, injuries and hostages, before combining these with conflict and socioeconomic data to provide a holistic picture of terrorism.

Steve Killelea, Founder & Executive Chairman, IEP: "The underlying conditions that drive terrorism are worsening despite improvements seen in 2025. Unless Iran can be stabilised quickly, it risks becoming a failed state and another breeding ground for terrorist militias. The lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan are clear: when states fragment and security vacuums emerge, terrorist groups quickly exploit the instability.

Terrorist activity along ungoverned international borders has also increased substantially over the past five years, with the Pakistan-Afghanistan conflict the most recent example. Viewed in totality, these trends point to one sobering conclusion: a fracturing world order risks erasing the hard-fought gains made against terrorism over the past decade."

The Iran Conflict & Escalating Risk

Iran has deteriorated nearly 30 places on the GTI over the past decade, reflecting a steady increase in the impact of terrorism driven by separatist groups on the Pakistan border area. The GTI data shows that while terrorism deaths in the Middle East and North Africa fell by 95 per cent over the last ten years, this progress remains fragile and contingent on regional stability.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has been linked to 157 terrorist plots across 15 countries in the past five years. Although Iran's long-range capabilities have been substantially degraded, if not destroyed, groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis have decentralised networks with significant capabilities for launching terrorist attacks. In addition, the breakdown in communication with Iran means these groups, including the IRGC, are acting autonomously, resulting in unpredictable behaviour.

For example, the IRGC has provided funding, training and strategic direction to over 70 militia groups in Iraq, with an estimated combined strength of at least 160,000 fighters. Escalation of the conflict in Iran could further destabilise the region and increase the risk of groups sympathetic to Iran carrying out terrorist attacks overseas.

The Iraqi government faces the prospect of being drawn into the conflict. Balancing its reliance on Iran, keeping the militias onside while responding to US pressure and avoiding US military strikes will be difficult. A sustained exchange between militias and US forces would divert Iraqi security resources, complicate international support, fragment territorial control and create local vacuums that could be exploited by the Islamic State or other militias loyal to Iran.

Youth and Online Radicalisation

Terrorism in Western nations is increasingly driven by youth radicalisation and lone-wolf actors. Children and adolescents accounted for 42 per cent of all terror-related investigations in Europe and North America in 2025, a threefold increase since 2021. The average radicalisation timeline has compressed from 16 months in 2002 to a few months today, driven by algorithmic amplification and the exploitation of developmental vulnerabilities. An estimated 87 per cent of radicalised minors had a history of neglect or psychological abuse, while 77 per cent suffered from abandonment.

Adding to the difficulty of detection, lone wolf actors carried out 93 per cent of fatal terrorist attacks in the West over the last five years and remain three times more likely to successfully execute an attack than groups.

Recruiters are leveraging platforms like Roblox, Fortnite, and Discord to establish social bonds with isolated youth, while extremist networks employ a funnel strategy originating on algorithm-driven platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube Shorts to channel users towards increasingly extreme content before migrating interactions to encrypted messaging apps for operational planning.

Geography of Terrorism

Pakistan has, for the first time, emerged as the country most impacted by terrorism, recording 1,139 deaths and 1,045 incidents in 2025, its highest level since 2013. This sharp resurgence has been driven in part by the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021 and the resulting increase in cross-border militant activity by the TTP and the Balochistan Liberation Army. Without reconciliation, the current Afghanistan-Pakistan conflict is likely to result in high levels of terrorism.

Border proximity is a defining feature of modern terrorism, with the GTI finding that terrorism in these areas has more than doubled over the past 15 years. Over 76 per cent of attacks occurred within 100 km of an international border in 2025, up from just under 60 per cent in 2007, with hotspots including the Ecuador-Colombia-Venezuela frontier and Central Sahel tri-border area. Regions such as the Central Sahel and Lake Chad Basin suffer from weak state control, which enables groups to recruit and operate with relative freedom.

Drivers of Terrorism in sub-Saharan Africa

The Sahel region in sub-Saharan Africa continues to be strongly impacted by terrorism. Although deaths fell in 2025, the region still accounts for over half of all terrorism-related deaths globally. Violence has also spread beyond the Central Sahel's traditional hotspots, with JNIM launching coordinated strikes in western Mali and IS claiming its first attack in Niger's southern Dosso region.

Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo recorded the largest increases in deaths from terrorism, with deaths rising by 46 per cent and 28 per cent respectively. In Nigeria, deaths surged in the north-west of the country amidst growing political instability related to Boko Haram, whilst in the DRC, IS-linked forces carried out several large-scale attacks along the country's eastern border. IS' largest increases in impact occurred in Niger, with deaths caused by the group nearly quadrupling.

Motivations for joining terrorist groups in sub-Saharan Africa contrast sharply with the West. For 71 per cent of recruits, the final catalyst for joining was human rights abuses by state security forces. Economic factors are also critical, with a quarter of voluntary recruits citing a total lack of job opportunities as their primary motivation. In regions with weak governance, armed groups exploit this vacuum by offering tangible benefits such as salaries to young people without legitimate employment prospects.

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Notes to Editors

The full GTI 2026 report and interactive map are available at: economicsandpeace.org & visionofhumanity.org

X: @GlobPeaceIndex

Facebook: facebook.com/globalpeaceindex

Global Terrorism Index (GTI)

The GTI by the Institute for Economics & Peace provides a comprehensive summary of the key global trends and patterns in terrorism over the last 17 years. The report ranks 163 countries (99.7 per cent of the world's population) according to the impact of terrorism. The indicators include the number of terrorist incidents, fatalities, injuries and hostages.

The GTI report is produced using data from TerrorismTracker and other sources. TerrorismTracker provides event records on terrorist attacks since 1 January 2007. The dataset contains over 76,000 terrorist incidents for the period 2007 to 2025.

Institute for Economics & Peace

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.