

Global economic impact of violence reached \$14.3 trillion in 2014

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The economic impact of violence on the global economy in 2014 measured a staggering \$14.3 trillion, or 13.4 percent of world gross domestic product (GDP), equivalent to the combined economic output of Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom.

This represents a spending increase of \$1.9 trillion, or 15.3 percent, since 2008, according to the annual Global Peace Index (GPI) report, compiled by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) think tank. The report defines the economic impact of violence as the “flow on effects on the world economy and the opportunity cost due to the misallocation of resources into non-productive areas associated with violence.”

Most of the total expenditure stems from deaths and displacement due to internal conflict, military spending, GDP losses from conflict, increasing homicide and violent crime rates, and spending on internal security officers, including police.

In total, more than \$3 trillion was poured into military spending in 2014, with the US accounting for over \$1.3 trillion alone. The study found that expenses related to the military, internal police forces and homicides combined to have the highest impact on costs, accounting for 68.3 percent of the total.

The costs needed to support refugees and internally displaced people have increased by 267 percent since 2008, to \$128 billion, as the total number of displaced people reached 59.5 million in 2014, the highest level since World War II. Still, UN peacekeeping costs account for less than 0.17 percent of total violence containment expenditure.

The three most prominent targets of American imperialism in the recent period, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, have seen a substantial portion of their resources squandered on war. The US-stoked civil war

in Syria, which has ravaged the country for four years, is estimated to have absorbed 42 percent of the country’s GDP in 2014, while Afghanistan spent 31 percent of its GDP on military and police expenditures, and Iraq spent 30 percent in 2014.

The GPI report ranks the nations of the world according to their “level of peacefulness,” based on 23 different qualitative and quantitative measurements from 162 states, covering 99.6 percent of the world’s population. Since the first report in 2008, the divide between the most and least “peaceful” countries and regions has steadily deepened, as US-led imperialism has plunged large parts of the world into deepening violence.

Syria again ranked on these terms as the least peaceful country in the world, while Libya experienced the most severe decline, according to the ranking system. Ukraine saw the second biggest decline, due to the eruption of fighting between pro-Russian separatist forces and NATO-backed fascist militias in east Ukraine.

The Middle East and North Africa region saw the most marked decline in average rankings, while Europe as a whole continued to see increases in peacefulness, as Iceland was again ranked the most peaceful, followed by Denmark, Austria, New Zealand, Switzerland, Finland, Canada, Japan, Australia and the Czech Republic.

The US was ranked at 94th place, between Peru and Saudi Arabia. Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Central African Republic, in that order, were the bottom five countries in the index.

Significantly, the report found that deaths caused by terrorism increased by 61 percent from 2012-13 and have more than doubled since 2008, resulting in 17,958 people being killed in terrorist attacks in 2013. Of those

deaths, 82 percent occurred in just five countries: Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and Syria.

These figures once again expose the essential truth that the so-called War on Terror has in fact empowered terrorist organizations in those countries that have been targeted by American imperialism. Despite the constant invocation of “national security” as the centerpiece of the war, the vast majority of terrorist attacks take place outside the advanced capitalist countries.

While much of the data compiled in the report is useful in portraying the immense scale of the costs of imperialist war and internal political repression, the GPI rankings system is flawed and the authors themselves present a rose-tinted view of the current geopolitical situation. At one point, the report declares that, “Over the last sixty years, the world has become more peaceful. There has been a marked and consistent downturn in levels of violence and conflict since the end of the Second World War.”

Later, however, the report notes that the intensity of military conflict has increased dramatically in recent years, with 180,000 people killed in 2014 alone, a nearly fourfold increase from 49,000 in 2010. However, it glosses over the present threat of a major conflict between nuclear-armed powers and covers up of the machinations of the US-led imperialist order, effectively playing into the hands of the forces spearheading the drive to war.

Regarding the potential for such a global conflict arising from the ongoing disputes in the South China Sea, which are being driven through the US “pivot to Asia” directed against China, the authors write: “Although the likelihood of further military skirmishes in the disputed waters is high, a large-scale military engagement remains unlikely.”

In their overview of the crisis in Ukraine, the line of the US State Department comes through clearly: “The conflict began with Russia’s military takeover of Ukraine’s Crimean peninsula following the overthrow of the government of Viktor Yanukovich in late February. From April it extended to the Ukrainian mainland, when separatist militias—made up of some locals, as well as mercenaries linked to the ousted regime, local criminal gangs and Russian nationalist volunteers—began to seize urban centres across south-east Ukraine, backed heavily by Russian weapons, intelligence and finance, with regular Russian troops

intervening directly if necessary to prevent a separatist defeat.”

There is no mention whatsoever of the role played by the US, which backed far-right nationalist and outright fascist organizations such as Svoboda and the Right Sector to overthrow Yanukovich, and hand-picked the emergent government with puppets like Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk and billionaire oligarch President Petro Poroshenko.

Above all, the worldwide escalation in military spending and domestic policing indicate the advanced stage of the buildup to a new world war involving the major imperialist powers.



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