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Decade of US 'War on Terror' Yields More 'Terrorism'

Inaugural study says that terror attacks worldwide have grown rapidly in the years since 9/11 and spiked during the US occupation of Iraq

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After more than eleven years of the US waging wars abroad in the name of "fighting terrorism" a new report released Tuesday shows that the number of global terror attacks has dramatically increased during the post-9/11 era, not decreased.

The new [Global Terrorism Index](#) (GTI) found that while the US wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere generated huge spikes in terrorist activity and civilian deaths in those countries, it is North America which has been most insulated from the growth in violence.

Produced by the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) the GTI is the first index to rank countries on the impact of terrorism and analyses the associated economic and social dimensions. The index is based on data from the Global Terrorism Database, which is collected and collated by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), headquartered at the University of Maryland.

"After 9/11, terrorist activity fell back to pre-2000 levels until after the Iraq invasion, and has since escalated dramatically," Steve Killelea, founder and executive chairman of the Institute for Economics and Peace, [told Reuters](#) in an e-mail interview.

"Iraq accounts for about a third of all terrorist deaths over the last decade, and Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan account for over 50 percent of fatalities."

The glaring fault of the study, which demands note, is that it employs a very narrow definition of the term "terrorism"—a word that Glenn Greenwald says "simultaneously means nothing and justifies everything." Within the scope of GTI report, the term excludes the violence of state or government-based actors like the US armed forces or NATO's military regime.

As *Reuters* [notes](#):

The researchers used the University of Maryland definition of "terrorism": "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation".

It did not include casualties from government-backed action such as aerial bombing or other killings.

Long a critique of the "global war on terrorism" is that the definition of the word "terrorism" is meant to connote violence perpetrated by less powerful, though committed, militant networks and not the politically motivated violence of powerful nations, such as the United States or others.

As Greenwald argued at Salon.com in 2011:

This topic is so vital because this meaningless, definition-free word — Terrorism — drives so many of our political debates and policies. Virtually every debate in which I ever participate quickly and prominently includes defenders of government policy invoking the word as some sort of debate-ending, magical elixir: of course President Obama has to assassinate U.S. citizens without due process: they're *Terrorists*; of course we have to stay in Afghanistan: we have to stop *The Terrorists*; President Obama is not only right to kill people (including civilians) using drones, but is justified in [boasting](#) and even [joking about it](#), because they're *Terrorists*; of course some people should be held in prison without charges: they're *Terrorists*, etc. etc.

And as the linguistics professor and author Noam Chomsky, commenting on the death of innocent people throughout the US military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, said: "Wanton killing of innocent civilians is terrorism, not a war against terrorism."

Despite the flaws of the definition used in the report, its value remains in the close examination of the last decade and tells a stark story about the nature non-state terrorism since 2001.

One of the key lessons of the report, as Killelea told Reuters, is that foreign powers should think twice before intervening militarily in regions like Yemen and Syria (or anywhere for that matter), as the mere presence of foreign armies simply adds to the grievances and anger of local people.

Other key findings include:

- The number of terrorist incidents and the number of successful attacks has steadily increased over the last decade.
- In 2011, 91% of terrorist attacks were successful.
- From 2002 to 2011 over one third of all victims killed in terrorist attacks were Iraqi.
- In 2011 there were 4564 terrorist incidents globally, resulting in 7473 deaths and 13961 injuries.
- Most terrorist attacks occur in the context of a wider conflict situation.
- Whilst religious terrorism often gets widespread coverage, there is a significant level of terrorism from non-religious groups.
- Western Europe experiences many more terrorist incidents than the U.S. having also suffered 19 times more fatalities than the U.S.
- Over the period 2002-2011, terrorists were most likely to target private citizens and property, government, police, and business. The trends for these attacks have been increasing as a percentage for all targets since 2002. Military installations and personnel were only targeted in 4% of incidents.
- Global incidents, fatalities and injuries are dominated by events in lower middle income countries. Seven of the ten countries most affected by terrorism are from the lower middle income bracket.
- Low income countries are much less likely to suffer from terrorism than lower middle income countries. This suggests that poverty is not a prime driver of terrorism.
- The majority of global incidents, fatalities and injuries occur in countries with hybrid regimes¹ and account for 46% of incidents, 54% of fatalities and 60% of all injuries.
- Terrorism correlates with low political stability, low intergroup cohesion, human rights violations and with high levels of group grievances.
- From 2002 to 2011, North America was the least likely region to suffer from a terrorist attack, followed by Western Europe.