

## An Upward Graph in War Casualties: Are We Accelerating in the Wrong Direction

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### Introduction

According to a report from Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) at Uppsala University, Sweden at least 2,37,000 people have died in organised violence in 2022. This was a 97 per cent increase compared with the previous year, and the highest number since the Rwandan genocide in 1994.

“We see this increase despite considerable de-escalation in the two deadliest conflicts of 2021; Yemen and Afghanistan. Instead, violence in Ethiopia and Ukraine escalated drastically,” said Shawn Davies, Senior Analyst at UCDP.[\[1\]](#) One shudders to think what the report will be for 2023.

### The Ongoing Conflicts

The wars in Ethiopia and Ukraine resulted in at least 1,80,000 battle-related deaths in 2022. This is an estimate as information from these conflicts can rarely be accurate and is subject to extensive propaganda. If we take the data at face value, more people died in those two conflicts alone, in 2022, than in the whole world the year before.[\[2\]](#)

“A common perception is that Russia’s war in Ukraine was the bloodiest conflict in 2022, but in fact, more people died in Ethiopia where the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) has fought the Ethiopian Army, the latter supported by Eritrea, since late 2020,” said Davies.[\[3\]](#)

In spite of various advances in war fighting technologies, fighting has been characterised by attrition. This type of warfare has contributed to the high casualty numbers. The nature of the adversaries has also varied with non-state actors taking centre stage in most conflicts. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 being an exception but, in this war, too we have seen a hybrid conflict with proxies coming into play. However, with the conflict in Ukraine, high-intensity conflict returned to Europe, which had previously enjoyed several decades of relative peace and stability.

Violent conflict and confrontation are now at the centre stage in multiple parts of the world. Hamas’s 07 Oct 2023 attack on Israel, and the Israeli counteroffensive on Gaza, have raised the spectre of an expanded conflict in the Middle East with Iran and its puppets the three H’s; Hezbollah, Hamas and Houthis. Ukraine, which was firmly centre stage for over eighteen months has suddenly found that the spotlight has shifted though the conflict still carries on, unfortunately, the Ukrainian counter attack lacked both tempo and bite and it seems to be an unwinnable scenario.

There has been a surge in violence across Syria, including a wave of armed drone attacks that threatened US troops stationed there. In the Caucasus, in late September, Azerbaijan taking advantage of Russia’s preoccupation in Ukraine, seized the disputed Enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh—forcing an estimated 1,50,000 ethnic Armenians to flee their historical home in the territory and setting the stage for renewed fighting with Armenia.

In Africa, the civil war in Sudan rages on, conflict has returned to Ethiopia, and the military takeover of Niger in July was the ninth coup or attempted power grab in just over three years in West and Central Africa,[\[4\]](#) a region that over the last decade had made strides to shed its

reputation as a 'coup belt', only for persistent insecurity and corruption to open the door to military leaders.

In our own neighbourhood, Afghanistan under Taliban can be termed a 'terrorist state' and Pakistan believes in nurturing terrorists as a strategic tool of their state policy. There is a military junta in control in Myanmar, and as far as India is concerned, the Line of Control with Pakistan and Line of Actual Control with China continue to remain tense and terrorism sponsored by Pakistan persists though it is presently under control to a degree.

There are now concerns that Hamas's attack and the Israeli response in the Gaza Strip could provide a window of opportunity for the global jihadi movement to revive itself after years of decline. Al Qaeda and ISIS may now pose a fresh threat. FBI Director, Christopher Wray, told a United States Senate Committee that the terror threat has been raised to a "Whole other level" because of ongoing conflict in the region. "We assess that the actions of Hamas and its allies will serve as an inspiration, the likes of which we haven't seen since ISIS launched its so-called caliphate several years ago".[\[5\]](#)

### **The Study Report**

In fact, according to the study conducted by the Peace Research Institute Oslo, the number, intensity, and length of conflicts worldwide is at its highest level since before the end of the Cold War. They concluded that there were 55 active conflicts in 2022, with the average one lasting about eight to eleven years, a substantial increase from the thirty-three active conflicts lasting an average of seven years a decade earlier.[\[6\]](#)

Alongside war has come record levels of human upheaval. In 2022, a quarter of the world's population—two billion people—lived in conflict-affected areas. While the number of those forcibly displaced worldwide reached a record 108 million. These figures are all alarming to put it mildly.[\[7\]](#)

### **Need to Address the Drivers of the Conflicts**

Unfortunately, as fighting flares worldwide, the root causes of conflict remain unresolved and the focus seems to be only on the immediate cause. Simultaneously, positions are increasingly getting hardened and peace negotiations more difficult due to the intertwining of interests of those in a position to broker peace. The result is that voices are getting shriller, societies are being divided, resources are being diverted from development to aid, refugees are displaced, and as the rules of conflict are increasingly being cast away, innocents continue being caught in the cross fire.

Wars which were once rare are now common and from being mainly binary in nature are now multi-party. There is also the changing nature of conflict. Wars now tend to be fought between states and armed groups committed to different causes with access to relatively advanced weaponry and other forms of technology, as well as money and material from other states who function on a principal of 'plausible deniability'. The norms that shaped many earlier wars no longer exist.

Defeating the Hamas militarily is achievable but more difficult than crushing it on the battlefield is eliminating its radical ideology and narratives, which must be countered.

Globalisation of war has also led to greater complexities. Countries including US, Russia, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Qatar regularly become drawn in, whether indirectly or directly, as has been seen repeatedly in conflicts in the Middle East.

The more parties that are involved in a conflict, the harder it is to end it. With little clarity on the perceived end state, wars are now almost difficult to end. General VN Sharma while writing the foreword of *Armour 71*; had written that; “It is easy to start a war, but once started, it is difficult to terminate hostilities on terms advantageous to oneself. A good General must plan for the termination of conflict before starting one. A good General must also attempt to achieve the national aim with minimum loss of men and material, both of oneself and of the enemy. To motivate troops in battle, ‘hating the enemy’ must be avoided as the aim is never to destroy masses of the human population or to cause total distress to the civil population by levelling cities and destroying families”. India achieved this in its decisive victory in 1971.[8]

## **Conclusion**

A new approach to resolving and managing conflicts and their impact is therefore urgently needed. Debates at the United Nations are without outcomes. Deadlocks in the Security Council mean that the UN can neither offer solutions nor censure aggression. Negotiators instead of looking at the larger picture of stopping conflict and devising durable political solutions are congratulating themselves after plucking low hanging fruit such as export of grain through the Black Sea and permitting aid to reach Gaza. The unvarnished truth is that the UN is unfortunately increasingly lacking leverage and credibility with conflicting parties.

There has no doubt been an unprecedented churn in global violence that has shown no signs of abating and on the contrary the trajectory seems heading upwards. Unfortunately, the United Nations by the very structure of its Security Council is unable to arrest this trend.

Sadly, the world is increasingly being overwhelmed by a series of global crises as violence grinds on unabated while the shadow of an aggressive China is only getting darker. Unfortunately, we seem to be racing in the wrong direction.

## **Endnotes**

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[1] Number of deaths in armed conflicts has doubled, Uppsala University , 13 June 2023 <https://www.uu.se/en/news/archive/2023-06-13-number-of-deaths-in-armed-conflicts-has-doubled>

[2] New figures show conflict-related deaths at 28-year high, largely due to Ethiopia and Ukraine wars, PRIO, 7 June 2023, <https://www.prio.org/news/3058>

[3] Number of deaths in armed conflicts has doubled, Uppsala University , 13 June 2023 <https://www.uu.se/en/news/archive/2023-06-13-number-of-deaths-in-armed-conflicts-has-doubled>

[4] Niger coup: List of recent military takeovers in West and Central Africa, The Reuters, 27 July 2023 <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/recent-coups-west-central-africa-2023-07-26/>

[5] Stefania Palma, FBI says Hamas attack on Israel inspiring 'new level' of terror threat against US, Financial Times, 31 October 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/e1758abc-df4c-49d4-ad4f-3f7b5f143305>

[6] Emma Beals, Peter Salisbury, A World at War, 30 October, 2023 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/africa/world-war#:~:text=The study found that there,seven years a decade earlier.>

[7] Global Trends, UNHRC, <https://www.unhcr.org/in/global-trends>

[8] Cavalry Officers Association, Armour 71, December 22, 2022, DEFSTRAT Books

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