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Report: Russia Less Peaceful Than North Korea

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Russia's low ranking in the Global Peace Index is largely due to the country's powerful defense industry. Above, a Kalashnikov rifle.

North Korea might be an authoritarian state that harshly punishes dissent and operates gulag-like labor camps, but it's more peaceful than Russia.

At least, that was the conclusion reached by the Australia-based Institute for Economics and Peace, which ranked Russia 153rd out of 158 nations in its sixth annual Global Peace Index. North Korea ranked 152nd.

"Russia's lowly position in the GPI can in large part be attributed to its powerful and sophisticated military sphere and defense industry," wrote the authors of the index, which was released Tuesday.

Violence in the North Caucasus, terrorism and a high homicide rate also contributed to

Russia's rating.

Russia had the lowest rank in Central and Eastern Europe and came in even below the authoritarian regimes of Central Asia. Ukraine, by comparison, was ranked 71st, while Belarus was ranked 109th. The United States came in at 88th.

Not surprisingly, the top 10 was dominated by small, Western democracies. Iceland was ranked the world's most peaceful country for the second year in a row, while Somalia retained its spot as the world's least peaceful country.

Russia has historically placed at the very bottom of the index. In 2007, the first year the index was published, Russia was ranked 117 out of 120. Last year, it was ranked 147 out of 153.

Russian officials made no immediate comment on the results, but they have complained in previous years that similar surveys are biased against Russia.

The index, a joint project between the institute, the Economist Intelligence Unit and international experts, combines 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators, including violent crime rates, military expenditures, political instability and possession of heavy weapons.

The brainchild of Australian philanthropist and entrepreneur Steve Killelea, it has been endorsed by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and the Dalai Lama, according to the institute's website.

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