

Empire Metrics and Maps

Reckoning empires by death tolls and territory

Historians count roughly 70 empires that have ruled multiple people groups across large regions of the world for distinct periods of time. In this brief, you'll find metrics and maps of some of them to help picture the social cost of rulers' efforts to secure and expand their realms, increase their wealth, and magnify their glory.

Longest Lived Empire: Roman imperialism, including the Eastern Byzantine Empire, set a mark for longevity, influencing the world directly or indirectly for some 1,500 years. Recall that the Romans gave us our words for emperor and dictator.

Largest Empires: Two major historical empires vie for the largest in size. The Mongolian empire (1206-1368 AD) was the largest contiguous land-based empire the world has seen. At its peak Mongols governed from Asia to central Europe, ruling 100 million people and 18% of the world's land mass. The death toll of their brief brutal reign was 40-60 million. Its founder, Genghis Khan, divided it among four sons scarcely 20 years after it began, and the aggregate four empires dissolved within 200 years.

By contrast, the steam-powered, canon-boasting British Colonial Maritime Empire at its peak governed 500 million people and 24% of the earth's land mass, marking it as the largest empire ever, geographically. It lasted in one form or another for about 400 years. Some say its death toll due to all causes exceeded 100 million, a number impossible to confirm with confidence. But a lot of people died, often hidden behind Britain's veil of colonial civility.

The Longest Lasting Empires

The table on the next page highlights one reckoning of the ten longest lasting Empires since the time of Rome. Some of the empires in the table were relatively small and less well known, making longevity, rather than size or degree of influence, their main hallmark.

Generally speaking, historians have established that once you get past the top ten most enduring empires, longevity drops dramatically. For example, in China, thirteen imperial dynasties spanned nearly 4000 years from 2020 BCE to 1912 CE, but apart from the first three of them, which lasted 600 years on average, the duration of the other ten Chinese dynasties was half that.

In India, the ancient Maurya Empire (322–185 BCE) loosely unified much of what we know today as India, but later empires were smaller, and failed to evoke a pan-India vision until the Muslim Mughal Empire arrived (1526-1769), only to be dissolved by British Crown Rule.

The point I'm making is that massive efforts to unify the "known world" emerged in many cultures and regions throughout history. There's something universal about aspiring to unite lots of people under a central administration with a vision for greater prosperity. All these efforts have proven unsustainable and devastatingly costly in terms of human lives and suffering.

The Ten Longest Lasting Empires Since the Time of Rome

Empire	Formed	Ended	Approx. Yrs. Duration
Western + Eastern Roman Empires	27 BCE	1453 AD	1426
Kush Empire (Sudan, Africa)	1069 BCE	350 AD	1419
Maritime Republic of Venice	690	1797	1107
Holy Roman Empire	800	1806	1006
Silla Empire of Korea	57 BCE	935 AD	992
Ethiopian Empire	1270	1935	665
Khmer Empire (Cambodia)	802	1431	629
Ottoman Empire (Muslim Turks)	1300	1922	622
Kanem African Empire (Chad, Libya, Niger)	800	1390	590
Spanish-Portuguese Colonial Empire	1415	1999	584

Adapted from: <https://history.howstuffworks.com/world-history/10-long-lived-empires.htm>

Imperial Death Tolls

Many tallies can be found of deaths resulting from empire building. Historical records are inconsistent and vary a lot. Some include deaths due to war-induced famine and disease, while others don't. The tallies are rife with debatable issues. Ideological viewpoints often colors estimates, making them impossible to compare, or simply unreliable. Another variation is the distinction between military deaths during conquests and deaths perpetrated on empires' own citizens in order to hold onto power following a conquest.

The table on the next page is a rough attempt to tally total deaths attributable to some major empires. My goal isn't to quibble over numbers but to characterize the human cost of large past empires. Beyond these numbers stretch long trails of traumatized and broken lives—families and individuals indelibly marked for generations by roots of bitterness and desires for revenge that invariably propelled new waves of death and destruction.

Historical Empires & Wars Ranked by Death Toll

Empire / War	Date	Est. Total Deaths	Sources/Comments*
Islam	750-1258	100+ M	<i>Forcefully conquered other religions & pagans.</i>
British Empire	c. 1583-1981	100+ M	<i>Rough estimate, various sources</i>
Soviet Russia	1917-87	72-90 M	<i>Inc. 6-10 M during the Revolution</i>
World War II	1939-1945	70-85 M	<i>Largest estimates include deaths by disease & famine</i>
Mongolian Empire	1206-1368	40-60 M	https://necrometrics.com/pre1700a.htm#Aurang
The Americas	1519-1800s	10-50 M	<i>Inc. violence & disease. Some challenge the highest estimate</i>
Chinese Communists	1949-87	22-77 M	<i>Some challenge the highest estimate</i>
Taiping Rebellion	1850-64	20-30 M	<i>Civil War reduced China's population by 5-10%</i>
Roman Empire	300 BC – 500 AD	13+ M	https://necrometrics.com/romestat.htm
Tamerlane Conquest	1369-1405	7-20 M	<i>Timur, a Turkic Mongol, conquered under Islam</i>

* Additional notes and links are found below.

Notes:

Deaths due to Islam. Islamic sources downplay deaths due to Islamic expansion. Conservative non-Islamic sources produce much higher counts by including estimates of Muslim slave trading deaths, Christian martyrs deaths, and specific instances of jihad, as well as deaths of Hindus and Buddhists. See: http://www.cspipublishing.com/statistical/tears_of_jihad.html

Indian sources estimate a loss of 80 million Hindus over 800 years of Muslim incursions in what Indians view as the largest holocaust in history. See: <https://www.sikhnet.com/news/islamic-india-biggest-holocaust-world-history>.

In the name of Islam, Timur conquered Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Central Asia, S. Caucasus, and parts of Pakistan, India, and Turkey. I listed him separately because many lists do likewise, but that obscures the fact that he conquered as a Muslim.

Deaths Due to Communism. The Harvard-published *Black Book of Communism* cites a mid-range estimate of 94 million government-instigated deaths under the Soviet Union. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Black_Book_of_Communism.

Colonization of Americas. The New World had a high estimate indigenous population of 50 million. Some estimates are much lower. A consensus view counts less than 2 million indigenous people after western soldiers arrived. Merely subtracting this total from the largest indigenous population estimate

produces a larger holocaust than seems accurate. In any case, the deaths are due to warfare and disease brought by Spaniards, Portuguese, French, Dutch, British and others, including American frontier forces.

China. Tallying deaths due to China's communist revolution under Mao is virtually impossible due to lack of data and the fact that China obscures the record to avoid criticism. Even so, recent scholars lend credence to estimates of 35-45 million who died from famine alone under Mao's internal policies. See: <https://u.osu.edu/mclc/2018/02/08/who-killed-more-hitler-stalin-or-mao/>.

The Decline of Imperial Violence

The most recent empires were comparatively smaller and shorter-lived than ancient empires. Japan's imperial foray lasted barely 50 years until WW II brought it to a halt. The Soviet Union collapsed after 68 years. Hitler's *Third Reich* ruled 12 years, but governed foreign nations only half that time.¹

Violent deaths due to imperial wars have generally declined over time. Steven Pinker sees this as part of a broader evolutionary trend of declining human violence of all kinds. He believes this reflects the influence of democratic processes that have slowly emerged over time.² His conclusion rocked the perspective of a lot of people, and some challenged Pinker's data. Pinker himself acknowledged the trend lines he identified are not statistically predictive of the future.

Pinker concluded the human species has found ways to diminish deaths by warfare and other human causes to allow an ever increasing proportion of humanity to live in relative peace. He summarizes this decline "is an accomplishment we can savor, and an impetus to cherish the forces of civilization and enlightenment that made it possible."³

When I looked at maps of past empires, they reminded me of disease-like blights on the expanse of the planet we call home. Yet, empires have undoubtedly bequeathed to us highways, shipping lanes, railroads and global communications that knit together disparate nations and peoples. Empires long fostered international trade and enhanced humanity with spectacular legacies of art and architecture, medical knowledge, literature, math, science, religion and philosophy in humanity's unending quest for purpose and meaning.

My next briefs focus on the spiritual threads of purpose and meaning that grew out of the age of empires to widely impact the world for better or worse. In particular, I will be looking at the spirit of certain dark forces that enlarged humanity's ongoing war against itself.

¹ See "Empires with Expiration Dates," by Niall Ferguson, Hoover Institution Senior Fellow. He offers explanations for why modern empires are shorter-lived. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/14/empires-with-expiration-dates/>.

² Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, Penguin Books, 2011.

³ Ibid., p 696.

NOTE: Still to be developed for this brief are basic visual maps showing the territorial development and expanse of:

1. The Ancient Near East, 540 BCE
2. The Maura Empire of India, 250 BCE
3. Ancient Chinese Empires
4. Mongol Empire at Its Greatest Expanse
5. Muslim Mughal Empire, 1525-1760
6. Russian Empire
7. British Colonial Empire at Its Peak
8. Empires of Africa, 900-1500 CE

If anyone reading this is good at maps and interested in making a visually consistent series of the above maps, please contact me at: tom@messiahnow.com.

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