

Geo-World: Conflict & Protest May

GEOSTRATEGIC ANALYSIS

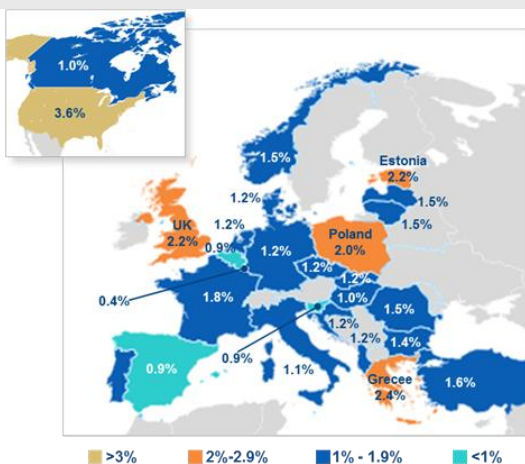
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May 2017

Tensions surrounding the North Korean nuclear test program remained in the spotlight becoming one of the main US foreign policy concerns. The US formally announced its support for the Syrian Kurdish in the fight against ISIS. The campaign to seize Raqqa is accelerating. Recent peace talks in Syria as well as the “de-escalation zone” agreement reduced conflict intensity in May, but it remains far from being solved. The NATO issue on defense spending continued to produce some noise among its members. Instability rose in Morocco. There were still some hotspots Eastern Europe and Latin America, while Europe and Asia remained stable.

Concerns about North Korea nuclear program intensified

Figure 1 NATO Defense Spending (% GDP)



Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

North Korea launched a new successful mid-range missile test challenging international powers

North Korea’s latest successful test and its mass production of a new anti-aircraft weapon system concern the US and its neighboring countries.

US supported Kurdish forces advance on Raqqa (ISIS)

US backed forces (the Kurdish YPG) continued receiving military equipment to accelerate the seizing of Raqqa.

NATO summit ends with some friction

President Trump reminded allies that spending should reach 2% of GDP.

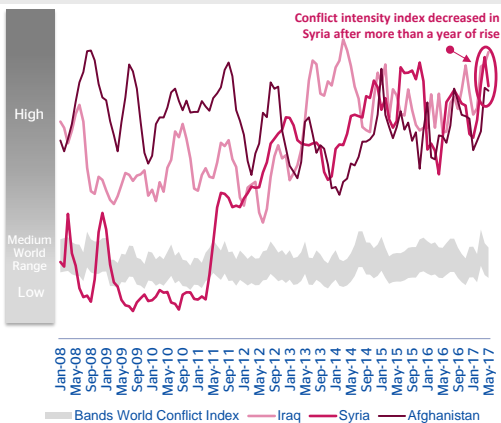
The BBVA Research World Conflict Intensity Index¹ slightly decreased during May. The main developments during the month were:

- **In Asia, tensions increased in North Korea** after it launched a new successful **mid-range missile test**, which proves it has developed the capability to carry a large-scale intercontinental nuclear warhead. The missile plunged into the Sea of Japan, thus posing a new challenge to the region and the US administration. Moreover, North Korea ordered the deployment of a new anti-aircraft weapon system. Neighbouring Japan and South Korea have called for further sanctions against North Korea. Meanwhile, **geopolitical tension in the South China Sea rose**, given the US navy’s resumption in challenging Chinese claims after a US military aircraft was intercepted by Chinese fighters flying over Chinese waters, and a **US warship set sail near the islands claimed by Beijing**. Those were the first operations conducted under the Trump Administration aimed at questioning China’s claim of sovereignty over the disputed area. **China and the Philippines met** in order to increase cooperation and stability in the region.

1: Details about methodology can be found in the following link: [Methodology, tracking protests and conflicts](#).

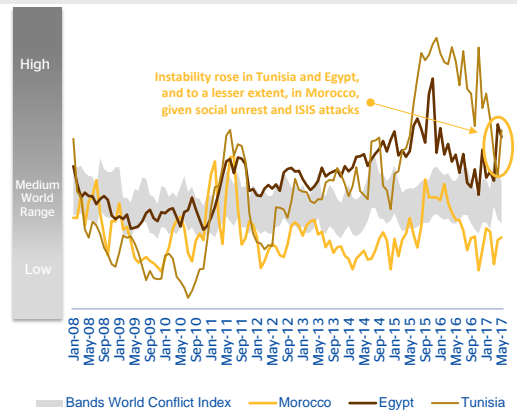
- **The campaign for Raqqa continues as the US is accelerating its support for Syrian Kurdish forces. This came after the US Pentagon’s top officials communicated with Turkey on the US intention of supporting the YPG in the campaign for Raqqa. On the other hand, at the beginning of May, Russia, Turkey and Iran signed an agreement to establish four “de-escalation zones” across Western Syria to reorganize their operations and limit US policy options in Syria. Despite the fact that ISIS is losing ground in Syria and Iraq, the group conducted several attacks abroad, such as the ones in Egypt, the Philippines and Manchester.**
- **At the NATO Summit, one of the main issues was NATO defense expenditure. President Trump said that NATO countries should meet a defense spending level, which is equivalent to that of 2% GDP. There is no penalty for not reaching that level. As of 2016, only five countries are spending more than 2% of their GDP on defense, including Poland and Estonia who are threatened by Russian aspirations. When compared to 2009, in 2016 NATO total military spending/GDP decreased to 2.43% from 3.29% whereas Russian military spending rose to 5.3% from 4.1% in the same period (Russian data is estimated by SIPRI).**

Figure 2 BBVA Research Middle East Conflict Intensity Index 2008-17
(Number of conflicts / Total events)



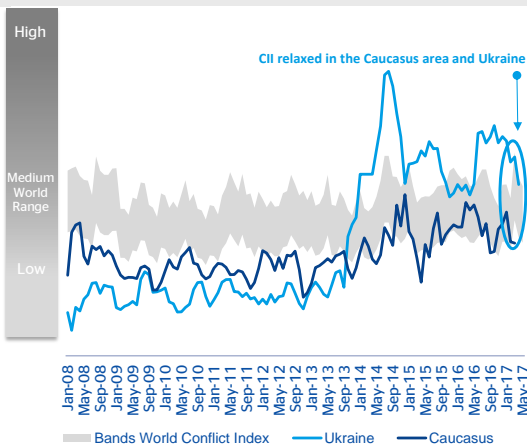
Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Figure 3 BBVA Research North Africa Conflict Intensity Index 2008-17
(Number of conflicts / Total events)



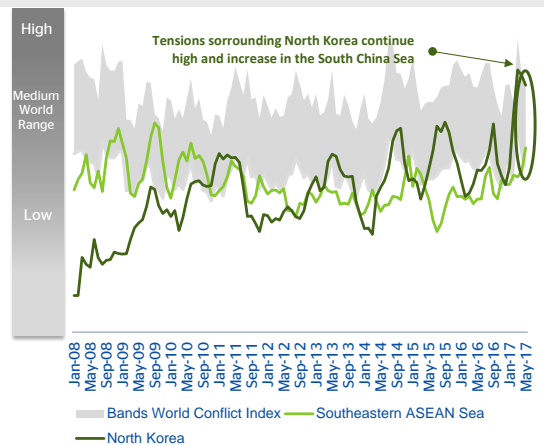
Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Figure 4 BBVA Research Eastern Europe Conflict Intensity Index 2008-17
(Number of conflicts / Total events)



Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Figure 5 BBVA Research Asia Conflict Intensity Index 2008-17
(Number of conflicts / Total events)

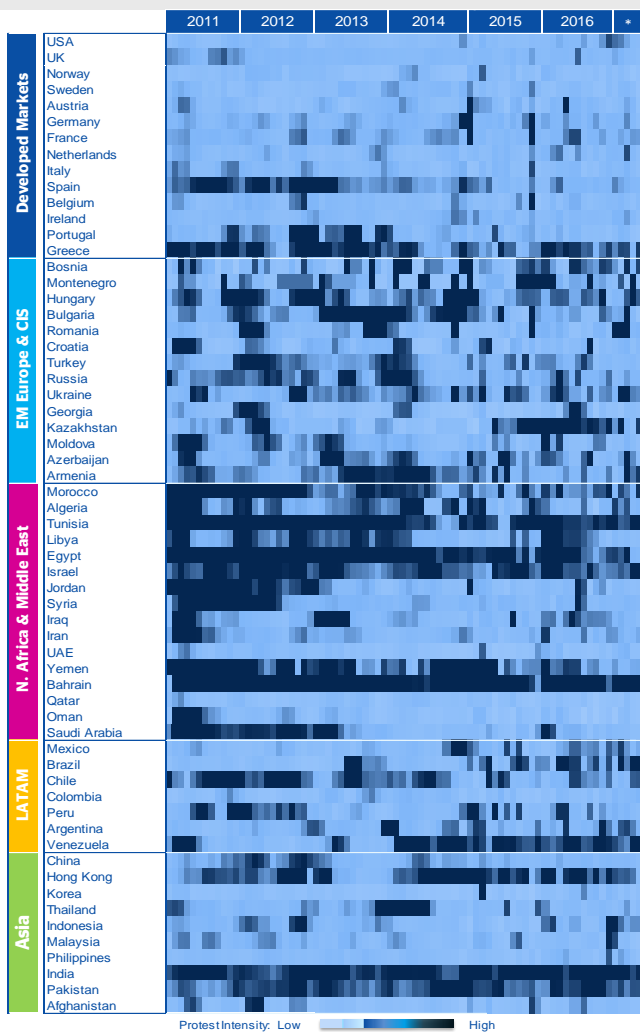


Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Social unrest eased off during the month

The World Protest Index mildly decreased during May (as shown by our BBVA Research World Protest Intensity Index²). According to the BBVA Research World Protest Intensity Map, the key takeaway facts were:

Figure 6 BBVA Research World Protest Intensity Map Jan 2011 – May 2017
(Number of protests / Total events)



Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Summary

There is still no end in sight for the civil conflict in Syria but the campaign, with US support, will accelerate. The North Korean nuclear program has become one of the main priorities in the international arena causing great concern for the US and neighbouring countries. In addition, friction between NATO allies has become more evident.

2: Details about methodology can be found in the following link: [Methodology, tracking protests and conflicts](#).

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