

Geo-World: Conflict & Protest February

GEOSTRATEGIC ANALYSIS

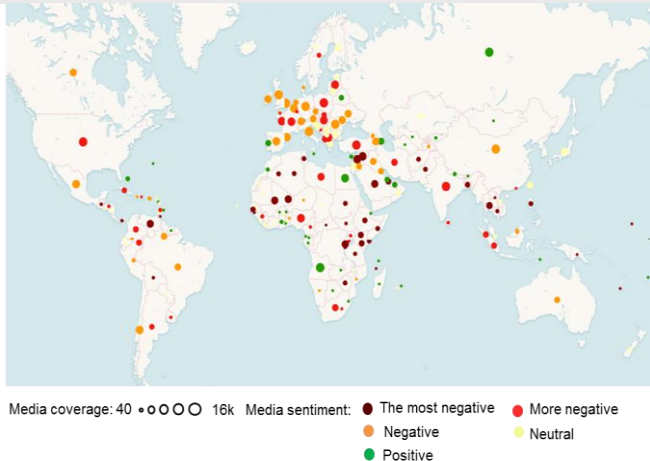
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February 2018

The President of Russian Federation addressed the Federal Assembly. In the speech, Putin underlined the Russian increasing aspirations to take a lead in global affairs. The speech could have reflected Russian domestic political climate or the rivalry between Washington and Moscow, or both. U.S. President Trump had defined Russia as a rival in his State of the Union speech. Meanwhile, the security and humanitarian issues in Syria increasingly became one of the top agendas of the leading powers of the world. The détente in Korean Peninsula contains the risks in the region. Social unrest decreased in February in Latin America and some Asian countries. Europe remained calmed and North Africa and Middle East continued as the main hot spots.

Putin’s State of the Nation Speech gave birth to new geopolitical discussions

Figure 1 Media coverage (observation’s size) and sentiment (observation’s colour) of Putin’s State of the Union speech over the world



Source: www.gdelt.org & BBVA Research

Putin’s speech highly drew attention over the globe

Russian President Putin brought forward Russia’s new weapon systems and readiness to ensure balance of power.

The humanitarian crisis in Syria dominates the regional agenda

Civilians have been killed under Assad regime’s bombardements to seize East Ghouta - eastern Damascus. UN has stepped in to stop the violence.

South-North Korea crisis eased to moderate levels

South Korean President will send a delegation to North Korea after the North participated Winter Olympics.

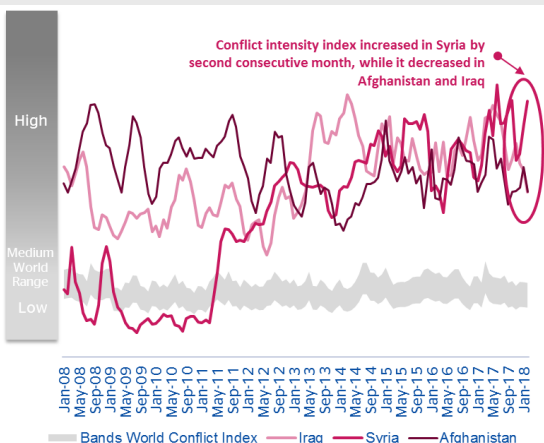
The BBVA Research World Conflict Intensity Index¹ kept stable during February with respect to January levels. The main developments during the month were:

- Russian President Vladimir **Putin delivered the Address to the Russian Federal Assembly** (State of the Nation Speech). Almost half of the speech was about Russia’s geopolitical strategies and ways to contain NATO expansion as President Putin argued. Especial attention was paid to the section introducing Russia’s new ballistic missiles (which could be equipped with nuclear warheads). Putin claimed that **Russia started to develop new types of strategic arms**. He also talked about new intercontinental hypersonic-speed (faster than speed of sound) missile adding that “We will make necessary efforts to neutralize the threats posed by the deployment of US global missile defense system”. However, President Putin also underlined that **these weapon postures are not for aggressive purposes but to ensure balance of power**. He also highlight that **Russia is interested in normal and constructive cooperation with the US and the EU**. Later, US Pentagon Spokesperson commented on Putin’s speech saying, “The American people should rest assured that we are fully prepared.” It should be noted that **Russia’s presidential elections are on March 18**. The tone of the speech could be related with domestic politics, but it also reflects increasing Russia-US rivalry at a global scale.

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

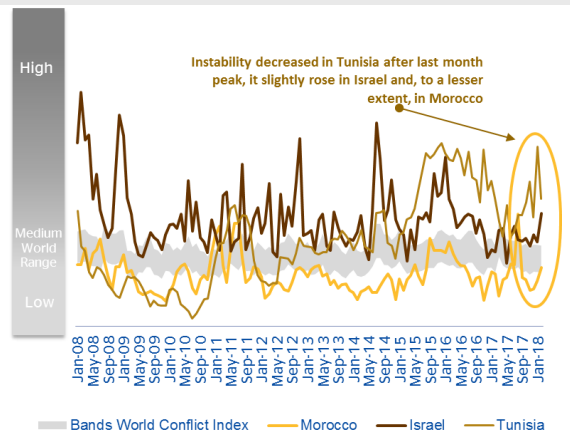
- **Conflict intensity index increased by second consecutive month in Syria** after the decrease of the index at the end of the year. Since February more than 18k people have been killed in East Ghouta (eastern part of capital city of Syria) under the fighting between Assad regime and rebels. The UN issued a resolution for an urgent ceasefire across Syria. However, **no success could be reached so far in terms of humanitarian relief**. There are also allegations on Assad regime's use of chemical weapons in Syria. The US, France and the U.K. warned that they could take action if the allegations are true. Uncertainties are on the rise. Meanwhile, Turkey cleansed border areas between its soil and Afrin. The operation against Kurdish YPG units continues with heavy fighting.
- **Tension surrounding North Korea eased off by third consecutive month** coming back to values of the world conflict index confidence bands (not reached since last June). After North Korea successfully participated in the Winter Olympics Games, **South Korea is planning to send a delegation to North Korea**, which could be considered as a very significant step to ease the tension to moderate levels. However, risks are far from over. **The US and South Korea had halted military exercises in the region to give a chance to Winter Olympics but the drills are expected to kick in late March or early April**. Positive remarks to contain potential disputes during the drills could also contain risks.

Figure 2 BBVA Research Middle East Conflict Intensity Index 2008-18
(Number of conflicts / Total events)



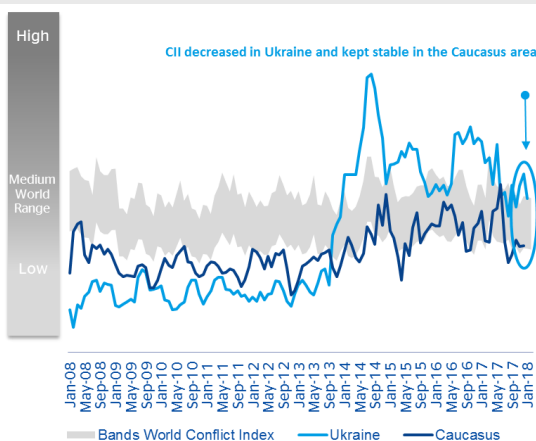
Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Figure 3 BBVA Research North Africa Conflict Intensity Index 2008-18
(Number of conflicts / Total events)



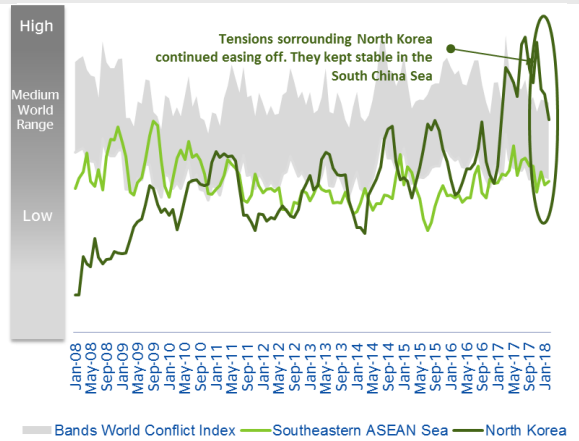
Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Figure 4 BBVA Research Eastern Europe Conflict Intensity Index 2008-18
(Number of conflicts / Total events)



Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Figure 5 BBVA Research Asia Conflict Intensity Index 2008-18
(Number of conflicts / Total events)

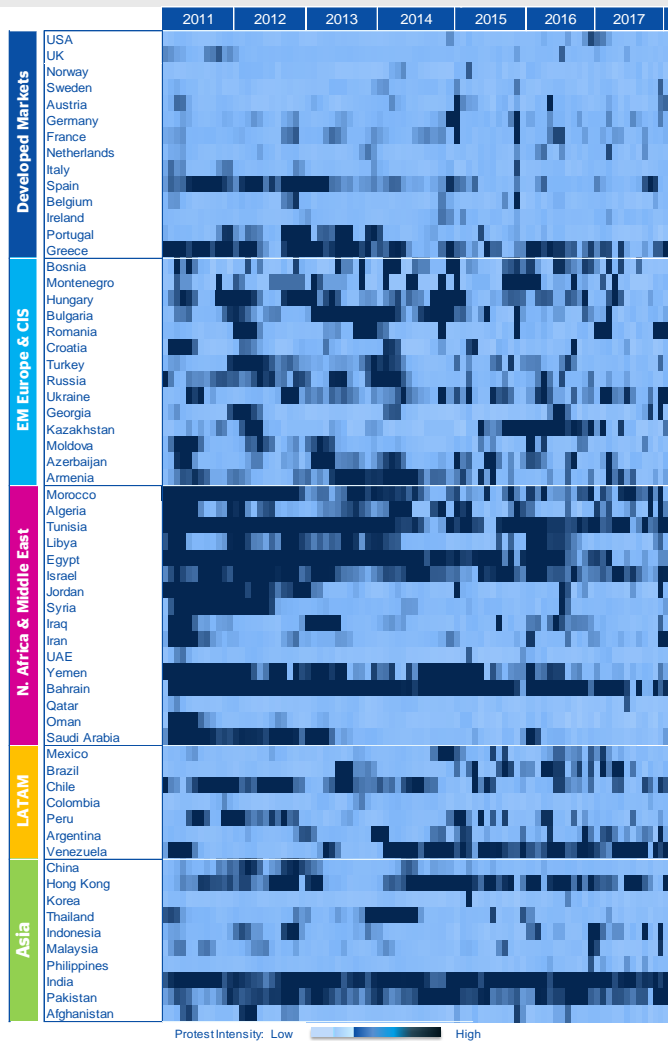


Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Social unrest eased off by second consecutive month during February

The World Protest Index decreased again during February (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 – Feb 2018 (Number of protests / Total events)



Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

- In regional terms, Europe and the US remained calmed. In Emerging Europe some particular hot spots continued, although the situation eased off compared to the first half of 2017. Middle East and North Africa continued into the spotlight. Protest index decreased in Latin America and in some of the Asian countries:
- In Europe, elections in Italy caused some social noise, increasing the social unrest index. On the other hand, it decreased in Germany and Greece. The index stabilized in Spain since January.
- In Emerging Europe, Romania is on its fourth month of protests due to political corruption. Russian index slightly increased given the State of the Union noise, while Ukraine’s tensions eased off during the month.
- In North Africa and the Middle East, social unrest index continued at its highest levels in Tunisia and Iran due to popular opposition to the regime. It decreased in Israel and Tunisia.
- In Latin America, protests are easing off all over the continent including in Venezuela, but in Peru, where they slightly increased given students protests over a new youth labor law.
- In Asia, tensions in Hong Kong eased off after last month spike. India and Pakistan are still the main hot spots in the region.

Summary

President Putin’s State of Nation speech highlighted Russia’s advanced weapon systems that could allegedly bypass Western security. Whether it is a domestic political rhetoric or the reflection of rivalry with the US is still unknown. Syrian war continued into the spotlight in the global political agenda. South Korea’s attempts to sustain the détente are noteworthy. Social unrest decreased in Latin America despite several electoral processes are open.

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