

GEOSTRATEGIC ANALYSIS

Geo-World: Conflict & Social Unrest - February Update

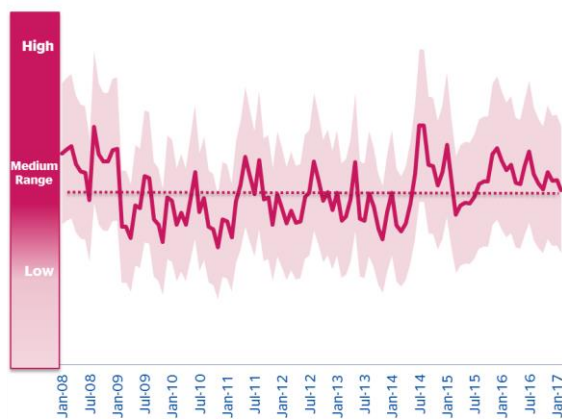
Álvaro Ortiz / Tomasa Rodrigo/ Joaquín Turina

While ISIS lost ground in Syria and Iraq, Al-Qaeda resumed its offensive operations, consolidating its strength during February. Meanwhile, tensions between Russia and Ukraine stabilized after last month's sharp conflict escalation. Geopolitical tensions in China could intensify as uncertainties regarding the US policy stance in the region remained and North Korea remains testing. Algeria continued to deteriorate while Egypt improved. Social unrest increased in some Latin American countries, while Europe and Asia continued calm with focused and controlled hot spots.

Al Qaeda strengthened and the Russian-Ukraine conflict relaxed

Figure 1

**BBVA Research world conflict index 2008-17
(cumulative number of conflicts/ total events)**



Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Important setbacks to ISIS in Syria and Iraq during the month

Pro-regime forces recaptured Palmyra, Turkish-backed militias seized Al-Bab and the SDF advanced in Ar-Raqqa. In Iraq, the ISF continued seizing key areas around Mosul.

Al Qaeda resumed its offensive in Syria

As ISIS weakened, Al-Qaeda took the opportunity to consolidate its strength in northern Syria.

Tensions between Russia and Ukraine stabilize after last month's sharp escalation

Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France reached a deal to de-escalate the conflict, although it is still fragile

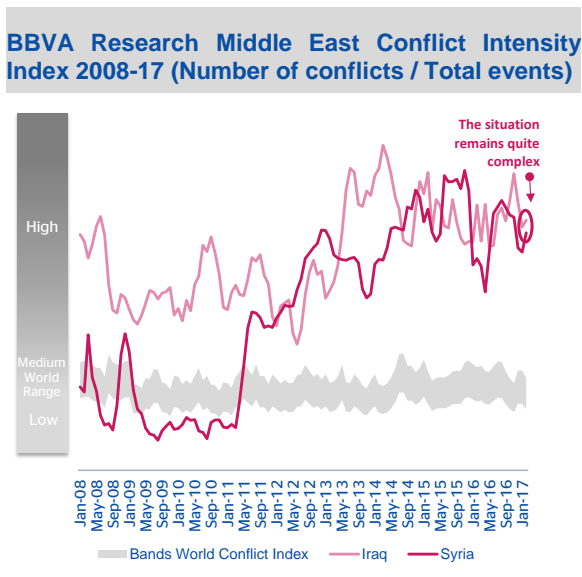
The BBVA Research World Conflict Intensity Index¹ eased off during in February, approaching to its long-term average (1980-2015). The main developments during the month were:

- ISIS continued losing ground during the month in Syria and Iraq.** Pro-regime forces recaptured Palmyra in Eastern Homs Province, Turkish-backed militias seized the city of Al-Bab and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) advanced in Ar-Raqqa. Meanwhile, in Iraq, the Iraqi Security Forces continued seizing key areas around Mosul. While ISIS weakened, **Al Qaeda consolidated its strength and resumed offensive operations** against the regime in Syria during February, posing increasing threats in the region. **Uncertainties about the Turkey and the US military strategies remain** as the US support to the YPG looks to be alive and Turkey's backed forces directed to Manbij (Northern Syria). The **Russian air campaign intensified**, conducting heavy waves of airstrikes against critical civilian infrastructure in southern and northern Syria during the month.

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

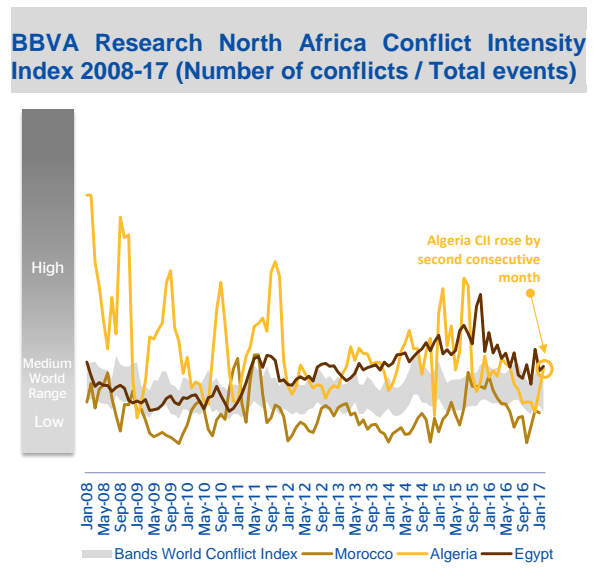
- **In Eastern Europe, the conflict in Eastern Ukraine stabilized** after the [sharp increase in violence](#) at the end of January/early February. After two weeks of intense fighting, the foreign ministers of Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France met in Munich and reached a deal, although the ceasefire remains fragile and the Ukrainian army accused pro-Russia rebels of breaking it just hours after it came into effect.
- **The South China Sea tensions continued mounting.** North Korea continued to challenge the main powers by launching ballistic missiles, with two of them landing in Japan's territorial waters. This development raises questions about the potential US responses given the uncertainty surrounding the new Trump Administration's stance on China. Besides, China has commented against any deployment of weapons in the region. Also in **North Korea**, the assassination of Kim Jong Nam, the exiled half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, by poisoning in a crowded Malaysian airport led to a rise in geopolitical tensions between North Korea and Malaysia.

Figure 2



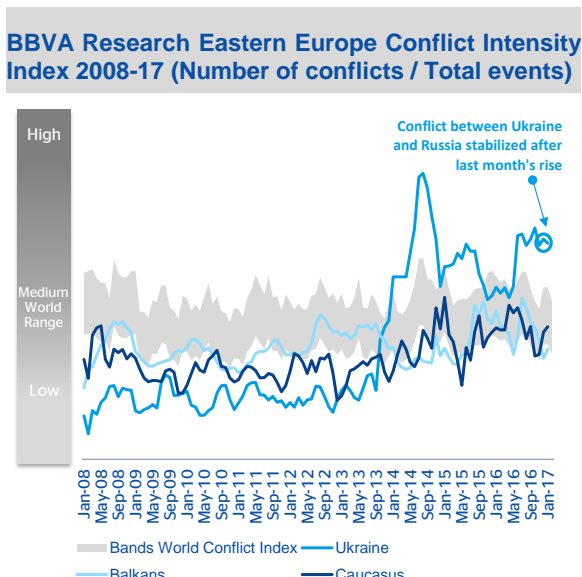
Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Figure 3



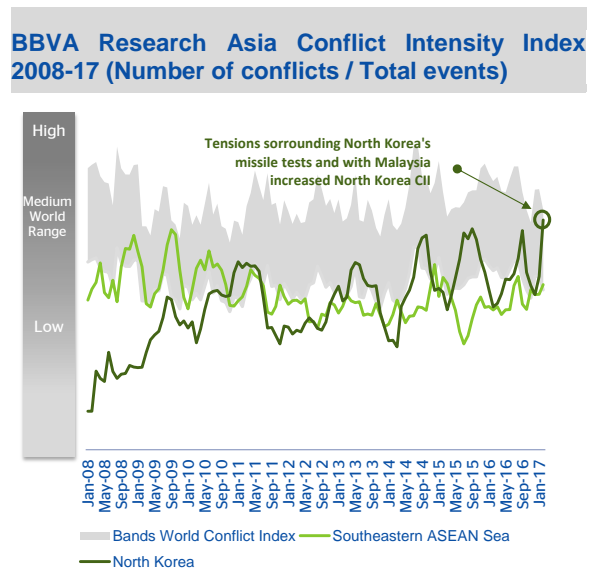
Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Figure 4



Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Figure 5



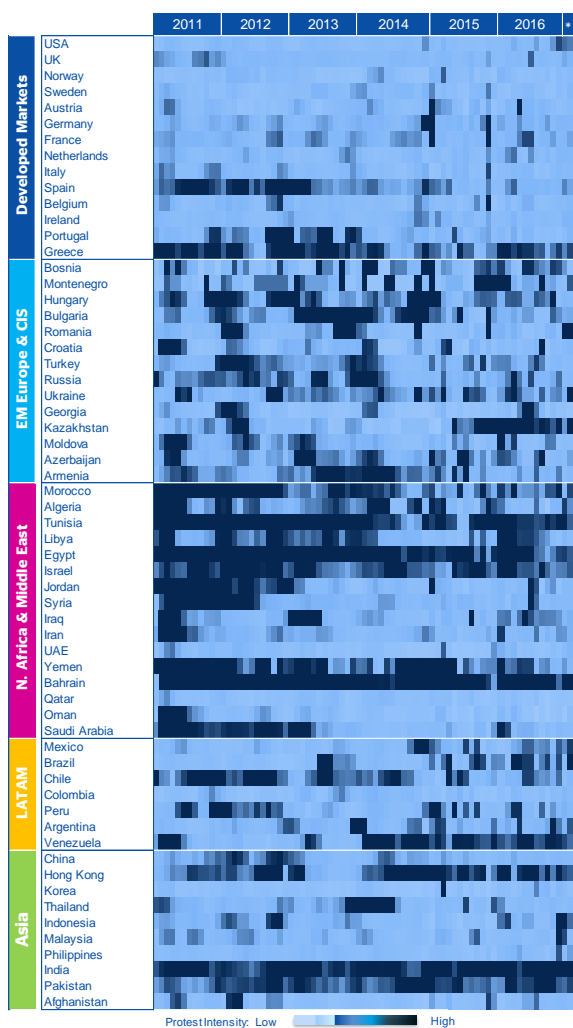
Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

... while social unrest recorded similar levels than previous month

The World Protest Index held steady 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 Feb 2011 – Jan 2017 (Number of protests / Total events)



Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Summary

The uncertainties about the new US Administration remain. The long-lasting political instability in North Africa and the Middle East is still alive. The Russian-Ukraine conflict stabilized but it is still unsolved. Instability in some Latin American have revived, but at lower levels than at the end of last year. Europe remained calm, but uncertainties about the several upcoming elections could increase and should be monitored.

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

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