



MONTHLY INSIGHTS

March 2016

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A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE ANALYTIC COMMUNITY

We are pleased to send out this monthly update summarizing some of Wikistrat's activities during March.

This month, Wikistrat focused on the turbulent reality in the Middle East and the collateral effect of events there on Europe. With a simulation relevant to Russia's announced withdrawal from Syria, the growing tension between ISIS and Turkey, the aftermath of Iran's elections and ISIS activity in Belgium, Wikistrat analyzed most of the impactful events taking place in the region. This report also includes our reflections on the domestic situation in Brazil, which is currently experiencing economic crisis, political turmoil and public unrest.

As always, you are welcome to comment, suggest activities or share your insights with us.


Dr. Shay Hershkovitz
Chief Strategy Officer and Director of the Analytic Community

WIKISTRAT'S PUBLICATIONS

The Telegraph

Mission accomplished in Syria? Sort of, Mr Putin

Russia's first intervention in the Middle East since the end of the Cold War has been a success for Moscow, but the ghosts of the Soviet Union's ill-fated adventure in Afghanistan still linger.

By Roland Oliphant, Moscow

3:41PM GMT 15 Mar 2016

A recent war game run by Wikistrat, a think tank, simulated just such a nightmare scenario, and its results appear to confirm many of those fears about a second Afghanistan.

Analysts found that as Russia rushed to respond to unforeseen circumstances in Syria, "greater battle field options led to Pyrrhic victories, such that withdrawal makes sense," said Mark Galeotti, the New York University professor who led the war game.

And while military officials in Moscow would never admit it, evidence from Syria suggests mission creep had already started.



Dr. Shay Hershkovitz
Chief Strategy Officer and Director of Analytic Community at Wikistrat inc.

Imagining Strategy: Using Imagination in Strategic Planning

Games are a serious matter. Yes, they are fun. But more importantly, they enable the player (whether a toddler or an adult) to experience a story and to actively write it as they go. Games are a great way to experience a certain scenario (fiction or nonfiction) – even more so than reading a book or watching a movie. Games require active involvement. They don't have a preset end. They force the player to take responsibility and determine the course of events and the end results. This responsibility creates a strong psychological element of real-time decision-making and the need to cope with the results of one's actions.



Jelena Petrovic, PhD
ATA Team Leader at Wikistrat

Ahead of the Information Curve: Crowdsourced Wargames

Governments, especially defense and intelligence agencies, routinely plan for both likely and improbable events. Though intelligence gathering and analysis form the core foundation of these efforts, all organizations are looking to include a wider range of inputs and methods to more accurately forecast responses to likely scenarios. Wargaming involves assembling groups of analysts into designated teams tasked with roleplaying a particular actor, and responding to the moves of the others in a dynamic simulation of situations.



RUSSIA'S SURPRISE MOVE IN SYRIA



Wikistrat recently ran a crowdsourced wargame entitled “Russia’s Surprise Move in Syria”. The simulation – which was followed by the *Financial Times*, the BBC, *TIME*, *The Economist*, *The Telegraph*, The Hill, Quartz, Vice and *The New York Times* – was based upon a scenario in which the aftermath of an anti-Assad coup causes Russia to send additional forces to Syria.



Dates: March 8–11



Purpose: To explore the political and military implications of a further Russian intervention in Syria in case of an anti-Assad coup, and to assess the plausibility of such a move



Participation: 60 community analysts



RUSSIA'S SURPRISE MOVE IN SYRIA

President Putin's decision to begin the withdrawal of most of his forces from Syria is sensible. Had the Russians suffered a severe reversal in Syria, Putin would likely have been tempted to intervene more deeply, not to withdraw. Even if in the long term this were to Russia's detriment, his unwillingness to look weak would push him this way. Thus, it is a sensible measure on his part to scale back the Syrian commitment before this dilemma presents itself.

Russian
Engagement
and Influence

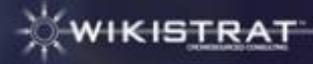
- The wargame showed that any further Russian engagement in Syria would not bring any lasting victory, but would increase losses and weaken Russia's regional position. Yet the Russian willingness to endure such losses and to commit its forces directly into Syria has made Moscow a more significant player in the region.

The Kremlin's
Motivations

- Moscow's intervention was never just or even primarily about Assad and his future, or even necessarily about Russia's position in Syria. It was more about forcing the West to abandon its efforts to diplomatically isolate Moscow, reopening dialogue over Ukraine and distracting a restive Russian public. All of these aims have been accomplished.



THE BRUSSELS ATTACK – IS IT EUROPE’S NEW REALITY?



ISIS’s Goals

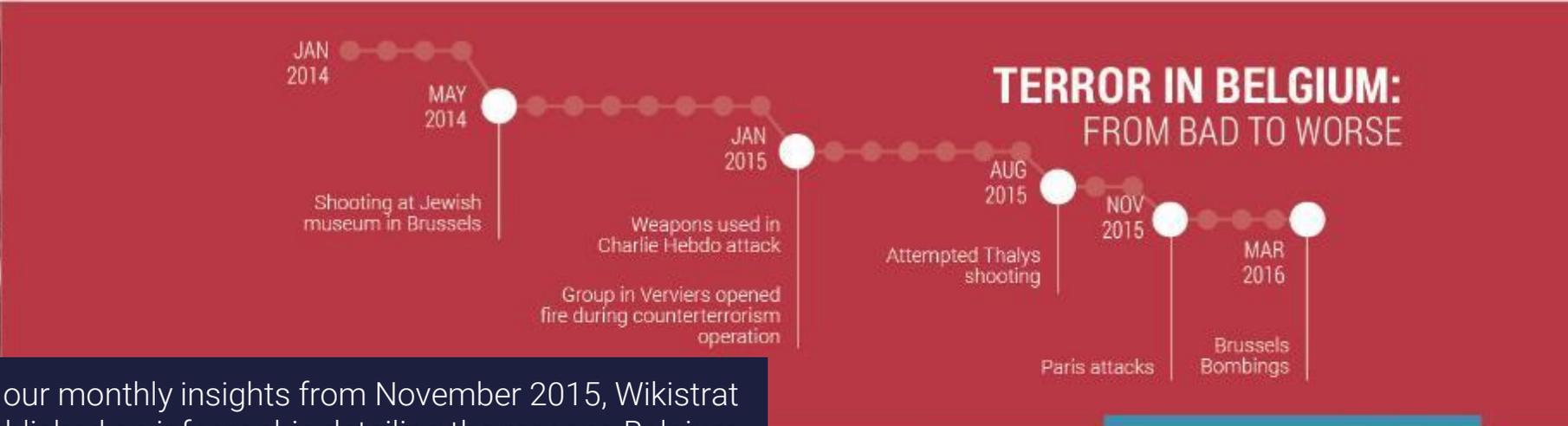
- In our “2016 Predictions” report, we warned about how ISIS would launch a “wave of attacks [designed] to tear apart the social fabric of societies and polarize intercommunity relations (i.e., Muslims vs. non-Muslims) up to the point of fomenting civil war.”
- ISIS’s recent setbacks in Syria and Iraq are forcing the organization to counter perceptions of its growing military weakness by conducting violent actions which foster a perception of power and efficacy.

An Opportunity for the EU

- The recent attacks in Paris and Brussels have underscored the structural problem of having open borders without a uniform governing framework thereof. Thus, the attacks present an opportunity for EU politicians to demand more control and increase interstate corporation.

Privacy vs. Security

- We expect that the recent wave of attacks will increase the pressure on communications and information companies to provide greater access to government agencies seeking operational information. This will increase public demand for products providing better privacy settings.

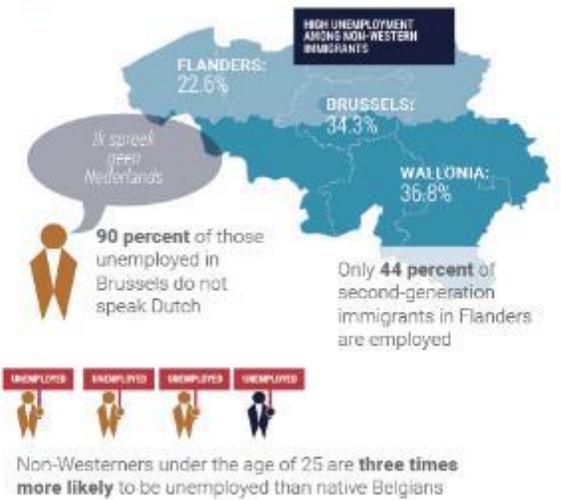


BELGIUM: THE TERROR NEST OF EUROPE?

In our monthly insights from November 2015, Wikistrat published an infographic detailing the reasons Belgium has become the “terror nest” of Europe.

ROOT CAUSES

1 Unemployment among non-Western immigrants



2 Joining a militant group is an alternative to drugs, petty crime and street violence



3 Permissiveness of authorities who have allowed groups like Sharia4Belgium to operate



4 Fragmented administration hinders counter-radicalization initiatives. The Brussels region alone has:



5 Government has not cracked down on illegal arms trade until recently

- **90 percent** of weapons circulating in Belgium estimated to come from Balkans
- Until 2006, **only a (fake) Belgian ID was required to buy a gun**
- **5,700** instances of illegal firearms confiscated ever year
- **1,600–2,100** weapons reported stolen every year

Sources: *Belgie, Frontal, Vives, Mark, The Impact of the Crisis on the Belgian Economy, Demographic, Policy, Statistics, V&A, Vlaamse Volksraad, I&D*

This infographic is based on insights from Wikistrat's counterterrorism research conducted in November 2015.
 • The Paris Attacks – A SWI & CIS Study
 • GWCT Analysis of ISIS Strategy



TURKEY'S POLICY TOWARDS ISIS

The most crucial step at hand for Turkey-EU cooperation on ISIS is to create a new and better intelligence-sharing agreement between the two. This would mean a better personal data protection law for Turkey that eventually becomes the legal basis for faster and better transfer of criminal data, as well as an EU-Turkish joint counterterrorism early-warning system.

ISIS's Ultimate Objective

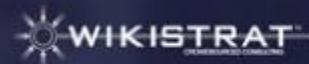
- ISIS seeks to benefit from Turkey's sectarian polarization to acquire financial and material support from wealthy sympathizers.
- Although ISIS has attacked Turkish security forces in the past, and still conducts suicide bombings within Turkish territory, the group's ultimate objective is to not disturb its "surrogate mother" – instead allowing it to remain healthy so recruitment and financing can continue without serious disruption.

The Extent of the Threat

- Ankara's biggest problem with ISIS is that it finds its natural habitat and center of gravity within Turkey and across its border. In that regard, it is much harder for Ankara to measure and plan for the true extent of the threat.



IRAN AFTER THE ELECTIONS



Wikistrat recently ran a crowdsourced exercise entitled “Iran After the Elections” to explore the possible implications and shifts resulting from Iran’s February 26 parliamentary elections.



Dates: March 4–April 4



Purpose: To assess the significance as well as the possible consequences of Iran's recent elections for its domestic and foreign policy



Participation: 40 community analysts



Iran's politics are moving to the center. The recent elections were a race between the government's supporters and its rivals among the conservative right. Furthermore, while moderate conservatives seem to have adopted a pro-reform agenda, centrist reformers have abandoned their previous calls for boycotting the elections as well as their demands for far-reaching political and civilian reforms.

IRAN AFTER THE ELECTIONS

Rouhani

- President Rouhani is likely to enjoy increased parliamentary support based on a coalition of moderate, centrist and independent MPs.
- The new Majlis could offer Rouhani a better opportunity to promote his agenda, especially concerning economic issues.

Social Media

- Social networks turned out to be highly effective in attracting voters' participation and laying the foundation for electoral campaigns. The use of social media mainly benefited moderate candidates suffering from limited exposure on traditional media, which is mostly controlled by the regime.

Foreign Policy

- The Majlis has little influence on strategic policymaking in Iran and elections are therefore unlikely to bring substantial foreign policy change.



IRAN AFTER THE ELECTIONS



Regime's Legitimacy

- Gains by moderates do not necessarily mean a failure for the regime. The relatively high turnout and the reformists' call for mass participation indicate that the majority of the Iranian public is ready to take part in politics despite the severe restrictions on participation.

The Public

- The results could indicate that given a real choice between hardliners and moderates, the Iranian public is more likely to choose moderation. Nevertheless, most power centers in Iran are not elected by the general public and are still controlled by hardliners. As long as this control prevails, a strategic change in Iran's domestic or foreign policy is unlikely.

Economy

- The Iranian economy continues to suffer from significant structural problems. The new Majlis might assist Rouhani's efforts in carrying out certain economic reforms, but substantial economic improvement relies heavily on solving major structural defects.



Brazil Political Turbulence: The Silver Lining to a Perfect Storm

Brazil is going through a “perfect storm”: a combination of an economic crisis, political turmoil and public unrest. Yet the recent situation has revealed positive structural changes unimaginable years ago. There are strong signs that the Brazilian public is restoring its trust in two institutions which are fundamental for any democracy: the Supreme Court and the Federal Police. And a rise in political awareness and a subsequent increase in expectations is a crucial phenomenon in any democracy.

Rousseff is Losing Allies

- President Rousseff’s days in office are numbered. In addition to demands from the public, there are members of her own Workers’ Party who perceive her to be a liability to the Party’s future – and who are thus working behind closed doors to have her resign.

The Military’s Reticence

- Despite calls from opposition figures and some parts of the public, Brazil’s military is unlikely to take any part in any political move, and has placed itself on the sidelines.

Opportunities for Investors

- Despite political turmoil, the sentiment of Brazilian investors is actually quite positive: They perceive the recent developments to be a move forward that will ultimately lead to Rousseff stepping down.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES: APRIL



ACTIVITY



METHODOLOGY



SIM'S OBJECTIVES



LAUNCH DATE

Russia's Withdrawal
from Syria: Why Now?

Voting

Assessing the reasons for and
impacts of Russia's withdrawal from
Syria

April 7

Red-Teaming
Kurzweil's Singularity
Thesis

Red-Teaming

Determining the validity of Kurzweil's
"technological singularity" thesis

April 13

Factors Impacting the
Euro

Adapted Crawford
Slip

Using the "Crawford Slip"
methodology to explore the factors
most likely to impact the euro
currency in the upcoming year

April 20



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