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Liberty Crossing Analysis

# Strategic Intelligence and Foreign Affairs Initiative Weekly Newsletter

Liberty University

Helms School of Government Students



# Table of Contents

*Weekly Newsletter.....1*

.....1

*Eastern European Crisis .....3*

    Analysis.....3

    Sources .....4

*Belt & Road Initiative.....4*

    Analysis.....4

    Sources .....4

*Texas Synagogue .....5*

    Analysis.....5

    Sources .....5

*Middle Eastern Affairs .....6*

    Analysis.....6

    Sources .....6

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## Eastern European Crisis

### Analysis

#### Russia

- All signs point to invasion of Ukraine.
- Most compelling evidence: Number of troops on border consistent with invasion force; Russian forces effectively encircle Ukraine; and numerous Russian covert/cyber plots.
- Dissenting evidence: Russian forces are still within their own borders; Russian diplomats have tried to exact concessions from US-NATO; and US-NATO is still attempting to engage in diplomacy.

#### Ukraine

- Ukraine not likely to be another Afghanistan
- Army is well trained and well equipped and receives military aid from most of Europe.
- Partisans, while rag-tag, possess the will to fight and resist Russia.

#### Belarus

- Joint Russian-Belarusian military exercises are very likely a pretense to host invasion forces.
- Russian troops in Belarus could become the focal point of invasion, should they thrust down from the north and circumvent Ukrainian defenses of Kiev.

#### Deterrence

- Sanctions in current form are not likely to be effective. Hitting Russian economy where it hurts (gas and oil) would blow back on Europe.
- Crucial nations such as Germany not likely to be on board with energy sanctions as it would severely destabilize prices and supply.
- Alternatives to Russian energy or current sanctions must be in place while striving for adequate deterrence.
- Talks with Qatar are currently ongoing.

#### Thought Bubble

- With the implosion of serious talks, Russian invasion is likely imminent. Russia is unlikely to completely subjugate Ukraine – a longer, drawn-out invasion hurts them as the weather will soon turn against them. Russia's ideal win here is quickly capturing and holding a significant chunk of Ukraine, then subjugating the remaining statelet thought isolating it from the rest of Europe.

## Sources

1. [Biden predicts Russia 'will move in' to Ukraine, but says 'minor incursion' may prompt discussion over consequences](#)
2. [Thousands of Ukrainians are training to protect their cities in case Russia invades](#)
3. [Germany will co-lead one area of work within Crimea - Kuleba](#)
4. [Russian moves more troops westward amid Ukraine tensions](#)
5. [Belarus president offers to host Russian nuclear weapons](#)

## Belt & Road Initiative

### Analysis

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) seeks to develop new trade routes to connect with the rest of the world. In addition to improving its infrastructure, the BRI will give China expanded economic and diplomatic power. This will allow China to persuade other nations to become dependent on it for trade and economic policy. For China, the BRI is its new Silk Road, and has already connected over 150 other countries and 32 international organizations.

However, the BRI faces opposition from nations including the United States, Russia, and India as it would decrease their trade relations with neighboring countries. The European Union (EU) has established the Global Gateway as a new strategy to counter the BRI through investment in environmentally sustainable and quality infrastructure. Several member states of the BRI disapprove of the high debt required to finance the infrastructure. However, the United States and EU need to find more innovative and creative ways of incentivizing other nations to trade with them instead of China.

### Sources

1. [What is China's Belt and Road Initiative?](#)
2. [China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative](#)
3. [Belt and Road Initiative](#)
4. [Syria Officially Joins China's Belt and Road, Seeking Lifeline](#)

[to Defy U.S. Sanctions](#)

5. [A Transatlantic Strategy to Check China's Belt and Road Initiative](#)

## Texas Synagogue

### Analysis

On Saturday, January 15, a team of FBI hostage rescuers and a crisis-negotiation unit entered the Congregation Beth Israel, a Jewish synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, after reports of a gunman with four hostages were made. The gunman, later identified by the FBI as British citizen Malik Faisal Akram, engaged in a ten-hour armed standoff with local police and federal agents. One of the hostages was released after six hours without injury. FBI Director Christopher Wray issued a statement regarding the incident, assuring the public that it was being treated as a terrorist act.

Director Wray stated that the FBI was concerned as to whether Akram possessed explosive materials capable of killing hostages and agents. No evidence was found of such claims, allowing federal agents to secure all four hostages and terminate Akram after ten hours. The incident occurred during a service at the synagogue which was being livestreamed on Facebook for public viewing. Authorities determined during the incident that Akram's motivation was securing the release of Pakistani neuroscientist Aafia Siddiqui, who was arrested for firing a weapon at law enforcement officers, alleging that she was his sister. Siddiqui's family and legal counsel disavowed Akram and his actions on Saturday. Akram's brother also stated that Akram suffered from mental health conditions. This incident has led the Jewish community, especially those in the Colleyville area, to recognize and acknowledge the need for increased security measures in their facilities.

### Sources

1. [FBI Storms Texas Synagogue to Release Hostages, Gunman Dead](#)
2. [Texas synagogue hostage-taker was British](#)
3. ['Being Jewish and alive shouldn't be a miracle': World reacts to Texas synagogue attack](#)
4. [Who is Aafia Siddiqui? Texas synagogue hostage-taker allegedly sought release of 'lady al-Qaeda'](#)

5. [Remarks by Director Christopher Wray to Anti-Defamation League on Hostage Incident in Colleyville, Texas](#)

## Middle Eastern Affairs

### Analysis

With recent withdrawal of coalition forces from most Middle Eastern operations, many countries and organizations are beginning to realize that they either need a new power to help them, or that they can strike out without much fear of American retaliation. Iran has increased its UAV warfare and beginning to flex its muscles with drone swarms and giving drones to terrorist organizations. A water crisis is pushing many areas of the Middle East to the brink of collapse both economically and humanitarially. The Red Dragon is begging to make its way into the region, not that the Eagle has left; China is approaching many Middle Eastern nations, including Syria, Saudi Arabia, and others open to economic and military treaties. With the absence of the United States, the Middle East is trying to find its new place in the world, some with treaties, some with violence, and others with their own path.

### Sources

1. [Iran's UAVs tip the balance of power in the Middle East](#)
2. [Middle East: Running out of water](#)
3. [Kurd's problems are long from over](#)
4. [China begins to creep in as US pulls out](#)
5. [Attacks continue in Middle East's Sparta](#)

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*"The question shouldn't be what we ought to do, but what we can do" – Rory Stewart*

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