

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

RTANEWS

FEBRUARY 15, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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AFGHANISTAN LEVERAGES THE 37TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SOVIET WITHDRAWAL TO CONSOLIDATE NATIONALIST LEGITIMACY WHILE ATTEMPTING TO PIVOT TOWARD ECONOMIC NORMALIZATION AND SOCIAL RECONCILIATION.

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

Broadcasts on February 15, 2026, are dominated by the state-sponsored celebration of the 37th anniversary of the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) is aggressively utilizing this historical milestone to reinforce a narrative of "triple independence"—having defeated the British, the Soviets, and most recently, the U.S.-led coalition. This historical framing is not merely commemorative but serves as a foundational pillar for current governance, positioning the IEA as the sole legitimate guardian of Afghan sovereignty against a century of perceived external aggression.

Beyond the nationalist rhetoric, a significant shift in domestic policy is emerging: the institutionalization of social welfare for the families of former adversaries. By announcing

equal pension distributions for the widows and orphans of both mujahideen and former government security forces, the IEA is attempting a calculated strategy of national reconciliation to mitigate internal instability. This is coupled with a push for economic "self-reliance," highlighted by critical infrastructure projects like a major cement factory and agricultural export initiatives designed to bypass international isolation and sanctions regimes.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **State Commemoration of Soviet Defeat:** The IEA held high-level ceremonies marking the 37th anniversary of the **February 15, 1989**, Soviet withdrawal, framing it as a [victory of faith over technology](#).
- **Reconciliation Through Social Welfare:** In a significant policy shift, leadership announced the distribution of billions of Afghanis to families of martyrs, specifically including the families of [former government police and army](#) members.
- **Industrial Expansion in the North:** Work commenced on a major cement factory project in **Harvard province** (as reported in transcript) designed to produce [3000 tons daily](#), meeting 60% of domestic demand.
- **Agricultural Export Modernization:** The IEA is promoting a transition from raw to processed fruit and nut exports (raisins, almonds, walnuts) to secure [better international market prices](#).
- **Regional Diplomatic Engagement:** The United Arab Emirates (UAE) formally expressed condolences for [landslides in Kapisa province](#), signaling continued, albeit limited, regional humanitarian recognition.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization

- Military leaders, including Mohammad Yaqoob Mujahid, emphasized that the current peace is the result of **Jihad**, warning that the state remains prepared to [protect sovereignty at all costs](#).
- The narrative portrays a transition from active battlefield operations to a state of **defensive vigilance**.

Macroeconomics & Trade

- The Ministry of Industry and Commerce is focusing on **import substitution**, particularly in construction materials, to reduce reliance on foreign markets [impacted by sanctions](#).
- Emphasis is placed on the private sector and domestic investment to stabilize the [devastated national economy](#).

Critical Infrastructure Security

- Construction of a secondary road linking **Jabal Saraj** is underway, with the Ministry of Public Works emphasizing [transparency and quality standards](#).
- [The Gazni Public Health Directorate received 33 types of medicines](#) to bolster local healthcare capacity.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Graveyard Narrative as State Religion

The broadcasts obsessively link the Soviet defeat to the recent U.S. withdrawal, creating a unified timeline of resistance. This narrative serves to distract from current economic hardships by framing poverty as a necessary sacrifice for "the dignity of independence." By

celebrating the [collapse of the Soviet empire](#) as a direct result of Afghan resistance, the IEA seeks to project a level of geopolitical influence that far exceeds its current diplomatic standing.

Pragmatic Reconciliation vs. Ideological Purity

The move to provide for the families of "police and army members of the previous administration" is a tactical trend toward **domestic stability**. Recognizing that millions of Afghans remain disenfranchised, the IEA is using [financial incentives](#) to prevent the emergence of organized domestic resistance, framing this not as a concession but as an act of Islamic mercy.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

- **Institutional Transition:** The IEA is struggling to transition from a decentralized militant group to a **bureaucratic state**. Reports on road construction and factory projects are intended to demonstrate administrative competence [despite international isolation](#).
- **Social Integration:** A persistent underlying theme is the need to integrate different ethnic and tribal factions under a single Islamic identity to avoid the [infighting that plagued previous regimes](#).
- **Natural Disasters:** Landslides in Kapisa highlight the state's ongoing vulnerability to **extreme weather** and the lack of robust disaster response infrastructure, necessitating [external condolences](#) rather than internal assistance.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

- **Hostile Threat Matrix:** The world is framed as a hostile arena where major powers perpetually seek to "subjugate" Afghanistan. The US, UK, and Russia are all portrayed as failed aggressors [defeated by Afghan faith](#).
- **Limited Multilateralism:** The IEA is pursuing a "neighborhood first" policy, focusing on trade with regional neighbors while remains **deeply skeptical** of the United Nations and Western institutions [perceived as biased](#).
- **Sanctions Evasion:** Economic reports emphasize self-sufficiency in cement and agricultural processing as a direct method to [counteract global economic pressure](#).

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The Afghan economic environment is characterized by a forced pivot toward domestic production and regional barter-style trade as a response to global financial exclusion. While the state reports significant progress in infrastructure, the underlying reality remains one of extreme poverty and dependency on traditional agricultural cycles.

- **Cement Production:** Planned output of **3000 tons daily** from the new factory aims to save foreign exchange [expended on imports](#).
- **Welfare Spending:** An estimated **13 to 14 billion Afghanis** is allocated for widows and orphans [annually](#).
- **Commodity Prices:** The Ministry of Commerce has met with traders to discuss controlling prices of **raw materials** ahead of the [Ramazan season](#).

- **Export Sector:** Transitioning from raw fruit to [processed agricultural goods](#) to improve value-added revenue.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Leadership presence in these broadcasts is focused on presenting a unified, pious, and competent front, with a focus on administrative oversight rather than internal politics.

- **Mullah Hanafiy (Deputy PM):** Positioning himself as the architect of [national reconciliation](#) through welfare reform.
- **Mohammad Yaqoob Mujahid (Defense Minister):** Acting as the primary **ideological enforcer**, maintaining the jihadist fervor required to sustain the IEA's military wing [during peacetime](#).
- **Nouruddin Azizi (Minister of Industry):** Tasked with the **economic survival** mandate, negotiating with domestic traders to prevent price spikes [during religious holidays](#).

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

The network's editorial priority is nationalist indoctrination. The **Lead Story** across multiple broadcasts is the Soviet withdrawal anniversary, which occupies nearly 70% of total airtime. This is framed through a **fear-inducing yet triumphant** lens, reminding the public of the horrors of occupation while celebrating the victory. **Buried Stories** include the specifics of the ongoing economic crisis, the lack of international recognition, and the severe humanitarian needs in Kapisa beyond the token UAE condolence. A **Conspicuous Omission** is the status of girls' education and women's professional rights,

which are entirely absent despite their central importance to international aid negotiations.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The subtext of the broadcasts is a world order divided between the "pure" Afghan state and "corrupt" external empires. Former invaders are portrayed with a mix of contempt and grudging respect for their technological might, which was ultimately "useless" against the IEA.

- **Russia (Soviet Union):** Framed as a **defeated, inept superpower** whose legacy is one of "brutality and failure" [resulting in millions of deaths](#).
- **United States:** Portrayed as the **modern successor to Soviet failure**, currently "defeated and retreating" into global irrelevance [after a 20-year struggle](#).
- **UAE:** Framed as a **supportive, compassionate neighbor** through its timely response to natural disasters [in Kapisa](#).
- **The UN:** Portrayed as a **weak and biased actor** that only "condemned" the Soviet occupation while doing little to [actually aid the mujahideen](#).

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

- **Narrative Seeding:** The IEA is actively seeding the concept of "Economic Jihad," where domestic production is equated with [religious duty](#).
- **Revisionist History:** The Soviet and US wars are merged into a single "Century of Victory," erasing internal Afghan divisions and the role of non-Taliban resistance groups in the [defeat of the USSR](#).

- **Propaganda of Inclusion:** [Heavy emphasis on paying families of former enemies is a clear psy-op aimed at preventing the formation of a Fifth Column within the country.](#)

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Internal Consolidation:** The IEA will successfully use welfare payments to neutralize the families of former government security personnel, significantly **reducing the risk** of an organized domestic insurgency in the short term.
- **Economic Divergence:** Afghanistan will increasingly rely on **regional trade hubs** (like the UAE and potentially China/Russia) for critical commodities as Western sanctions remain in place, leading to a long-term [de-coupling from Western financial systems](#).

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Expect a surge in nationalist fervor and potentially increased social order following the February 15 celebrations. Potential for **price volatility** as Ramazan approaches [despite government price controls](#).

Medium Term (1-6 Months): The completion of the road projects in Parwan and the ramping up of the cement factory will provide **visible benchmarks** for government efficacy [to the local populace](#).

Long Term (1-5 Years): Afghanistan will likely achieve **partial self-sufficiency** in basic industrial goods, but the long-term viability of the regime will depend on its

ability to manage the massive [pension burden](#) without international aid.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The current stability of Afghanistan is precariously balanced between nationalist pride and systemic economic failure.

- **Fiscal Collapse of the Welfare State:**

The state may lack the funds to sustain the massive **14 billion Afghani** pension commitment. Triggers: Decrease in agricultural exports or failure of industrial projects. Likelihood: High. Impact: Extreme internal social unrest. Mitigations: Seeking [direct foreign investment](#) in minerals.

- **Infrastructure Sabotage:** New roads and factories are **prime targets** for remnants of ISIS-K. Triggers: Successful high-profile attack on the Parwan road. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Major loss of government mandate. Mitigations: Increased [military vigilance](#).

- **Natural Disaster Catastrophe:** Landslides in Kapisa show the state is **unprepared for large-scale environmental shocks**. Triggers: A severe spring flood season. Likelihood: High. Impact: Humanitarian disaster leading to displacement. Mitigations: Strengthening [regional aid ties](#).

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- **Female Economic Participation:** The broadcasts entirely ignore how the exclusion of half the population from the workforce affects the ["Economic Jihad" goals](#).

- **Banking Liquidity:** [While cement factories are touted, there is no explanation for how large-scale industrial projects are financed without access to international banking.](#)

- **Ethnic Fractionalization:** The narrative of a "unified Afghan people" obscures ongoing **ethnic tensions** in northern provinces [between different tribal groups](#).

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

- **Reconciliation as Hidden Purge:** The pension program for former enemies may not be an act of mercy but a method to **identify and track** potential dissidents for future neutralization once the state has sufficient data.

- **Industrial Failure Masked as Success:** The cement factory in "Harvard province" could be a **potemkin village**, where the stated 3000-ton capacity is a fabrication to project strength during the anniversary [commemorations](#).

- **Black Swan Event:** A sudden, catastrophic failure of the **Salang Tunnel** or major road link during winter could decapitate the state's ability to supply the north, leading to a **regional secessionist movement** during an economic low point.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- Monitor the **pension rollout** as a key indicator of regime stability; failure to pay will likely lead to rapid military desertions and civil unrest.

- Acknowledge the **UAE's humanitarian channel** as a viable non-political route for addressing disaster relief without formal recognition of the IEA.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- Significant opportunity exists in the **agricultural processing** sector (fruit drying/packaging) if export channels through regional hubs can be secured.
- Expect increased **regulatory pressure** on domestic traders as the government seeks to enforce price caps [during Ramadan](#).

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Legislative activity is focused on social welfare directives and price controls rather than formal parliamentary debate.

- **BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:** [Martyr Family Pension Directive](#): Establishes equal payments for families of deceased from both sides of the conflict.
- **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:** [Ramazan Market Regulation Meeting](#): Ministry of Industry met with chamber of traders to mandate price controls on essential goods.

KEY STORIES

- **37th Anniversary of Soviet Withdrawal:** Major state ceremonies held across the country to celebrate the defeat of the "Red Army" in 1989 [after a decade-long war](#).
- **Cement Factory Commencement:** Launch of a major industrial project in "Harvard province" aimed at producing **3000 tons of cement per day** [within 14 months](#).

- **Medicine Distribution in Ghazni:** Delivery of **33 types of medicines** worth \$9600 to the Public Health Directorate [to improve patient care](#).
- **Parwan Road Construction:** Ministry of Public Works inspection of a new road project connecting **Jabal Saraj** [to improve local logistics](#).
- **Kapisa Landslide Condolences:** UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed formal sympathy for victims of [landslides in capisa province](#).
- **Widow and Orphan Pension Program:** Announcement that **14 billion Afghanis** will be distributed to martyrs' families [from both current and former forces](#).
- **Agricultural Export Push:** National effort to transition to **processed fruit exports** (raisins, nuts) to maximize international revenue [amid sanctions](#).
- **Price Controls for Ramazan:** Ministry of Commerce met with trader leadership to ensure **sufficient goods are available** and prices do not rise [during the upcoming holy month](#).

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Today's Media Trends is a public interest experiment in applying deep thematic trend analysis to television news coverage from around the world to explore how responsibly applied advanced AI can help journalists and scholars better understand the overarching trends, themes and patterns of our global world.

No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

Each morning, in collaboration with the Internet Archive's TV News Archive, we apply Google's Gemini 3 to deeply examine

yesterday's coverage from each television news channel to tease out the overarching themes and trends of its news coverage into a richly annotated thematic analysis. Each high-level insight is connected back to the original broadcast, allowing journalists and scholars to understand the dominate themes and trends and instantly click out to the underlying sources for details.

By helping journalists and scholars see the broader trends and patterns of global news coverage, this analysis helps them identify relevant stories and coverage they might not otherwise have encountered and uncover connections, emphases and narrative shifts

that enable more comprehensive reporting and deeper, evidence-based research.

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