

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

SYRIANNEWS

FEBRUARY 16, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

SYRIA'S POST-REGIME CONSOLIDATION:

SOFT POWER & GULF CAPITAL AMIDST MILITARY FRICTION (FEB 2026)

1. INSTITUTIONALIZING THE "NEW SYRIA"



UNIFIED ISLAMIC
DISCOURSE CHARTER



MEDIA CODE OF
CONDUCT

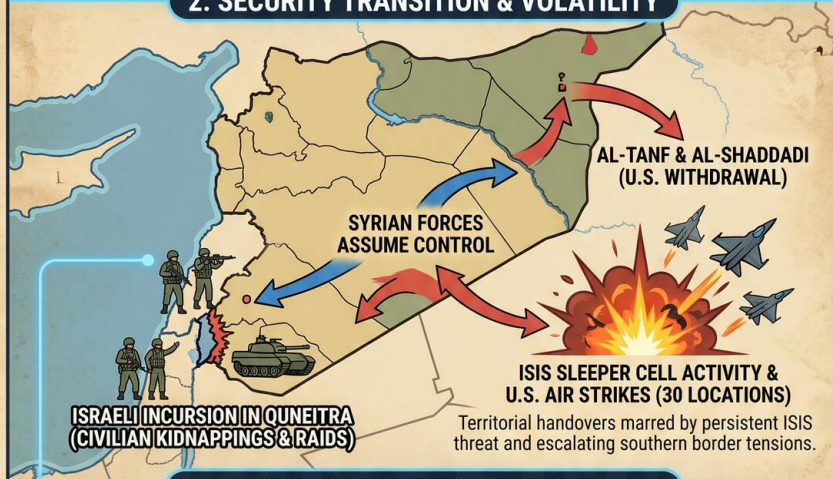


\$5.3 BILLION

SAUDI INVESTMENT & DIGITAL PARTNERSHIP (ELM)

Centralizing religious narrative, professionalizing press, and pivoting to Gulf economic model for stability & digitization.

2. SECURITY TRANSITION & VOLATILITY



3. DOMESTIC REALITIES & FUTURE RISKS



ECONOMIC HARDSHIP
& BREAD PRICES



RISK ASSESSMENT

- Israeli Annexation Risk (High)
- ISIS Desert Resurgence (Moderate)
- Economic Collapse (Moderate)



STRATEGIC FORESIGHT:
ENERGY & NUCLEAR
AMBITIONS



IDLIB TEACHERS' STRIKE
& SOCIAL UNREST

Internal fragility persists with economic pressure, strike actions, and high risks of regional military escalation.



GAPS: RUSSIAN
INFLUENCE UNKNOWN

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SYRIA'S POST-REGIME CONSOLIDATION: SOFT POWER GOVERNANCE VIA RELIGIOUS CHARTERS AND GULF CAPITAL AMIDST REGIONAL MILITARY FRICTION

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

February 16, 2026, marks a pivotal moment in the self-described "New Syria" under the leadership of President Ahmed al-Sharaa. The day's coverage focuses heavily on the institutionalization of the new state through two major regulatory frameworks: a comprehensive **Media Code of Conduct** and the **Unified Islamic Discourse Charter**. These initiatives represent a strategic push by the transitional authorities to centralize narrative control and standardize religious practice to project a "moderate" and stable image to the international community. This domestic consolidation is being explicitly linked to a major diplomatic and economic pivot toward the Gulf, evidenced by a **5.3 billion dollar investment package** from Saudi Arabia and strategic technology partnerships aimed at digitizing Syrian government services.

Simultaneously, the security landscape remains highly volatile. The broadcast details a significant shift in the northeast and south, with Syrian forces assuming control of **Al-Tanf and Al-Shaddadi** following coordinated U.S. and Coalition withdrawals. However, this transition is marred by persistent **ISIS sleeper cell activity**, which prompted intensive U.S. Centcom air strikes across 30 locations during the reporting period. Furthermore, a **surprise Israeli military incursion** in Quneitra, involving the storming of homes and the kidnapping of civilians, underscores a fragile southern border where regional tensions threaten to derail the state's focus on reconstruction and IDP repatriation.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Institutionalization of State Ideology:** The government launched the "Unified Islamic Discourse" charter and a new Media Code of Conduct, seeking to regulate religious rhetoric and professionalize the press as tools for [national stabilization](#).
- **Saudi-Syrian Strategic Pivot:** A landmark [5.3 billion dollar](#) developmental partnership with Saudi Arabia was announced, alongside contracts with the Saudi firm **Elm** for digital government infrastructure [and IT solutions](#).
- **Coalition Force Reductions and Handovers:** Syrian forces officially took over the **Al-Shaddadi** base in Hasakah and **Al-Tanf** following U.S. withdrawals, marking a major shift in [territorial sovereignty](#).

- **Escalation in the South:** Israeli occupation forces conducted a [sudden military raid](#) in the village of Ghadir al-Bustan, Quneitra, involving home invasions and the arrest of young men, signaling heightened border friction.
- **Counter-ISIS Operations:** U.S. Centcom reported [10 air strikes](#) against 30 targets, resulting in the death or capture of 50 ISIS operatives, as the group attempts a "silent return" in the Syrian desert.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization: The state is navigating a delicate security transition as it fills the vacuum left by departing Coalition forces. While the government celebrates the [return of sovereignty](#) in Hasakah, the reliance on external air support against ISIS remains evident. The Israeli incursion in Quneitra highlights a lack of conventional deterrence in the south [on the border](#).

Diplomacy & Statecraft: Syria is aggressively pursuing regional legitimacy. The focus is on the **Saudi-Syrian partnership** as a pillar of the "New Syria" [reconstruction era](#). This includes cooperation on atomic energy and oil field surveys, signaling a desire to re-enter the global energy market under [Saudi-led frameworks](#).

Leadership Dynamics & Governance: President Ahmed al-Sharaa is consolidating power by positioning himself as a "moderate" reformer. His speech at the **Islamic Discourse Conference** emphasized the need for a state that manages religious diversity while strictly enforcing a [unified national identity](#). A new decree also **decentralized powers** to provincial governors to expedite local [administrative recovery](#).

Social Order & Civil Unrest: Despite the narrative of national unity, fractures persist. In **Idlib**, teachers recently concluded a [14-day strike](#) over wages, forcing the local administration to promise pay raises. Public sentiment regarding **bread prices** remains a point of friction, with reports of price hikes causing [local dissatisfaction](#).

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Weaponization of "Moderation": The primary thematic pillar of the day is the formalization of "Moderate Islam" as a state-sanctioned identity. The Islamic Discourse Charter is not merely religious; it is a governance tool designed to neutralize extremist narratives and previous regime structures. By co-opting 1,500 religious leaders into a [unified framework](#), the Al-Sharaa administration is attempting to prevent the religious fragmentation that fueled the previous civil war, while also making the country more palatable to **Gulf donors**.

Gulf-Led Modernization and Digitization: Syria is moving toward a "State-as-a-Service" model through Saudi technical assistance. The contracts with **Elm** for digital government services indicate a shift away from traditional bureaucracy toward a Gulf-inspired administrative model. This suggests that the "New Syria" aims to be an [economic and technical satellite](#) of the Saudi-led regional bloc.

Territorial Sovereignty vs. Reality: There is a clear tension between the "victory" narrative of taking over bases like Shaddadi and Al-Tanf and the reality of continued foreign military intervention. While the Syrian army [projects strength](#), the high frequency of

Coalition air strikes and Israeli ground raids reveals that the state's **monopoly on violence** is still theoretical in several key border zones.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

The internal stability of Syria is currently anchored in the **Ahmed al-Sharaa transition**, which is characterized by a rapid overhaul of institutions. The government is actively purging "baid" (previous regime) influences, particularly in the media and religious sectors. However, institutional decay is evident in the **Hasakah flood response**, where teams are struggling with basic infrastructure to [prevent road closures](#) and aid delivery to camps.

Society remains polarized along economic lines. The broadcast highlights the success of the **Damascus International Book Fair** as a sign of cultural revival [after liberation](#), but this contrasts with reports of **food insecurity** and the "hunger" experienced by many in the north [during the campaign](#). The state's ability to maintain its mandate will depend on whether the promised **Saudi billions** translate into lower bread prices and consistent [electricity and services](#), which are currently described as lacking in regions like Rif Damascus.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

Syria's global posture is currently defined by **aggressive regionalism**. The international system is framed as a source of necessary capital (Saudi Arabia) and technical expertise (Germany/IAEA). The **Syrian-German energy project** at Rostock [on energy](#)

[efficiency](#) suggests an openness to Western technical cooperation even while military tensions with U.S.-led structures fluctuate.

The "outside world" in the south, however, remains a **hostile threat matrix**. Israel is portrayed as an aggressor taking advantage of the transitional period to seize land and kidnap civilians [in Quneitra](#). The Syrian posture here is defensive and rhetorical, lacking a clear military counter-escalation strategy. Meanwhile, the **Kurdish question** is being framed as an internal matter of "integration" into the new state, with rumors of PKK leadership [exiting Syria](#) to facilitate this transition.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The economic outlook is dominated by the prospect of massive **foreign direct investment** and the struggle with localized inflation. The state is positioning reconstruction as an investment opportunity rather than an aid-dependent process.

- **Saudi Investment:** \$5.3 billion committed to developmental projects and strategic partnerships [in the New Syria](#).
- **Digital Economy:** Major contracts with Saudi firm **Elm** for digitizing tax and customs [management systems](#).
- **Agriculture & Trade:** Bread prices in Idlib have reportedly "decreased" from 5,400 to 4,000 Syrian pounds for 1,200g, following [government intervention](#).
- **Energy Sector:** Coordination between the Atomic Energy Commission and the Syrian Petroleum Company to survey [newly liberated sites](#).

- **Trade Regulations:** 21 customs exemption requests were processed for industrial equipment, while 31 prohibited import [records were noted](#).

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

The administration is leveraging personnel changes to signal a break from the past and a move toward decentralization.

- **President Ahmed al-Sharaa:** Emerging as the undisputed "Father of the New Syria," focusing on [statecraft and religion](#).
- **Minister of Local Administration (Mohammed Anjrani):** Granted significant [new authorities to governors](#), allowing them to sign investment contracts independently.
- **Governor of Idlib:** Negotiated a successful end to the teachers' strike, positioning himself as a [capable local leader](#).
- **Minister of Media (Hamza al-Mustafa):** Appointed to oversee the new media landscape and enforce the [Code of Conduct](#).
- **Kurdish Factions:** Rumors circulate regarding the departure of "basic leadership" of the PKK/PYD from Syria to facilitate [state integration](#).

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

The network's editorial posture is **triumphalist and nationalistic**, with a heavy focus on "New Syria" and "Victory." The **lead stories** are consistently about institutional building: the Media Code, the Islamic Charter, and the Saudi deal. These are framed as the birth certificate of a modern

state. **Buried stories** include the logistical failures of the Hasakah flood response and the details of the "hunger" still affecting the population. The tone is **reassuring** regarding the economy but **alarmist** regarding Israel and ISIS. **Conspicuous Omissions:** There is almost no mention of the fate of former regime officials or the ongoing status of political prisoners from the transition period.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The "New Syria" is framing itself as a **sovereign, moderate, and business-ready** actor, while characterizing its neighbors and former allies based on their current utility to the Al-Sharaa administration.

COUNTRIES

- **Saudi Arabia:** Portrayed as a **strong, stable, and principled** partner. Quotes characterize the relationship as a "strategic partnership" and "fuel for a comprehensive renaissance" [in Damascus](#).
- **Israel:** Framed as a **hostile and inept** aggressor whose military actions are "reactions" to Syrian growth. They are referred to as the "Israeli occupation" that "kidnaps civilians" [in Quneitra](#).
- **United States/Coalition:** Portrayed with **skepticism**; they are recognized for counter-ISIS support but framed as "occupiers" who are finally [retreating and handing over](#) sovereignty.
- **Germany:** Framed as a **competent and technical** friend, providing the "Rostock" model for Syrian [energy infrastructure](#).

NON-STATE & CORPORATE ACTORS

- **ISIS (Daesh):** Portrayed as a **weak but persistent** threat attempting a "silent return." They are described as "remnants" being dismantled by [coordinated strikes](#).
- **SDF/Kurdish Factions:** Portrayed as a **chaotic** element currently in a state of "integration or departure" [from the national fabric](#).
- **Elm (Saudi Corporation):** Framed as a **competent corporate savior** bringing "digital solutions" to transform [Syrian bureaucracy](#).

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

The broadcast is a masterclass in **narrative seeding**. The state is using the "Islamic Discourse Charter" to define what is and is not "Syrian Islam," effectively preempting religious dissent. The Media Code of Conduct is presented as a "freedom-enhancing" tool, yet its focus on "responsibility" and "national principles" [for journalists](#) strongly suggests a new era of **enforced self-censorship**. The delta between the media spin of "economic boom" via Saudi funds and the ground truth of bread prices and strikes in Idlib indicates a significant **propaganda effort** to mask transitional instability with promises of future Gulf-funded prosperity.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Gulf Dependency:** Syria will likely become an economic protectorate of Saudi Arabia, trading digital and administrative sovereignty for the capital required to **suppress domestic unrest**.

- **Religious Standardization:** The Unified Discourse Charter will lead to the marginalization or arrest of independent clerics who refuse to align with the [Al-Sharaa model](#).
- **ISIS Insurgency 2.0:** As Coalition forces withdraw and the Syrian army struggles with logistical gaps, ISIS will likely escalate **guerrilla operations** in the Badia desert [against military infrastructure](#).

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Expect heightened **Israeli border activity** as they test the resolve of the new Syrian military presence in Quneitra. Domestic pressure may rise if teachers' wage promises [are not fulfilled](#).

Medium Term (1-6 Months): The first phase of **Saudi-funded digital infrastructure** will launch, likely beginning with the "digitalization" of [customs and taxation](#). Ramadan will serve as a test for the new "Unified Islamic Discourse."

Long Term (1-5 Years): Syria may attempt to develop **civil nuclear power** with Saudi funding and IAEA oversight, potentially altering the [regional energy balance](#).

RISK ASSESSMENT

- **Israeli Annexation/Incursion Escalation:** A significant risk exists for a permanent Israeli security zone in Quneitra. Triggers: Syrian military buildup near the Golan. Likelihood: High. Impact: High. Mitigations: Russian or Saudi [diplomatic mediation](#).

- **ISIS Desert Resurgence:** The "silent return" could become a loud one as Coalition forces depart. Triggers: Complete US withdrawal from Al-Tanf. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: High. Mitigations: Continued intelligence sharing and [air strike coordination](#).
- **Economic Collapse and Hunger Riots:** If bread prices rise again despite Gulf capital. Triggers: Delay in Saudi fund disbursement. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Extreme. Mitigations: Rapid [market subsidization](#).
- **Kurdish-Arab Ethnic Strife:** Transitioning SDF territory to Syrian army control. Triggers: Disputes over Hasakah oil fields. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Moderate. Mitigations: Integration of Kurdish leaders [into the state](#).
- **Religious Backlash:** Backlash from conservative clerics against the Unified Discourse Charter. Triggers: Arrest of a popular independent imam. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Moderate. Mitigations: Broad clerical [consultation workshops](#).

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- **The Status of Russian Influence:** The broadcast is curiously silent on Russia's role in the "New Syria," focusing entirely on Saudi and German partners.
- **Former Regime Loyalists:** No information on the military or political status of the remnants of the Al-Assad structure during this transition.
- **Sanctions Status:** The broadcast treats Saudi investments as a fait accompli, ignoring whether **international sanctions** (like the Caesar Act) still apply [to these transactions](#).

- **Water Crisis Specifics:** While floods are mentioned, the underlying **chronic drought** affecting the Euphrates basin is not addressed.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

Scenario 1: The Saudi Stalling Tactic. The 5.3 billion dollar deal could be a diplomatic "promise" rather than a reality, used by Riyadh to pull Syria out of the Iranian orbit without ever fully funding the reconstruction, leaving the [Sharaa administration](#) vulnerable.

Scenario 2: "Unified Discourse" as a Catalyst for Extremism. By forcing imams into a rigid state charter, the government may inadvertently drive devout populations into **underground, extremist mosques**, creating a more radical [opposition base](#).

Black Swan Event: A coordinated ISIS breakout from **Al-Hol camp** during a transition-period security lapse could lead to a massive territorial loss and the **collapse of the Sharaa government in Hasakah**.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- **Security:** Intelligence agencies should monitor the "silent return" of ISIS as Syrian forces take over Al-Tanf; a security vacuum is likely.
- **Economic:** Diplomacy should focus on clearing international sanctions obstacles to the [Saudi-Syrian developmental deal](#).
- **Diplomatic:** Establish a tripartite mechanism (Syria-Israel-Saudi) to de-escalate the [Quneitra border crisis](#).

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Tech/Supply Chain:** The **Elm digital contracts** create opportunities for subcontracting in Syrian government [IT modernization](#).
- **Energy:** The Atomic Energy Commission's search for [new survey sites](#) suggests future opportunities for uranium mining or energy infrastructure firms.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Media companies and NGOs must adapt quickly to the **new Code of Conduct** to avoid license revocation [in the New Syria](#).

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

The government passed several high-impact decrees focused on decentralization and institutional control, alongside religious and media reforms.

- **BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:**
 - **Local Administration Decree:** Empowers provincial governors to independently sign investment contracts and manage local [development budgets](#).
 - **Unified Islamic Discourse Charter:** A new legal framework requiring all imams to align with state-sanctioned ["moderate" religious interpretations](#).
 - **Media Code of Conduct:** Sets legal standards for journalists, emphasizing "national responsibility" over [absolute press freedom](#).

• HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Islamic Discourse Conference:** Featuring 1,500 religious figures and President Al-Sharaa, finalizing the [Unified Charter](#).
- **Damascus Book Fair Presser:** Detailing the "cultural rebirth" and high attendance [post-liberation](#).
- **Syrian-Saudi Economic Summit:** Where the 5.3 billion dollar [partnership was formalized](#).

KEY STORIES

- **Saudi Arabia \$5.3 Billion Investment Deal:** Damascus and Riyadh formalized a massive investment package for reconstruction and development [across Syria](#).
- **Islamic Discourse Charter Launch:** President Ahmed al-Sharaa oversaw the signing of a charter aimed at centralizing religious authority and promoting ["moderate" Islamic values](#).
- **Israeli Raid in Quneitra:** Israeli forces stormed Ghadir al-Bustan, kidnapping young men and terrorizing families in a [pre-dawn military operation](#).
- **Media Code of Conduct Adoption:** A new code was received by the Minister of Media to regulate Syrian press and digital [content creators](#).
- **Hasakah Handoff of Shaddadi Base:** Syrian forces officially took over Al-Shaddadi from U.S. and Coalition forces in Hasakah [as they withdraw](#).
- **Al-Tanf Transition:** Coverage of the final stages of the U.S. pullout from Al-Tanf and the subsequent [national army takeover](#).

- **Centcom ISIS Air Strikes:** U.S. forces conducted 10 strikes against 30 ISIS targets, reportedly killing or capturing 50 [terrorist operatives](#).
- **Governor Decentralization Decree:** New powers were granted to provincial governors to bypass central bureaucracy for [investment projects](#).
- **Damascus International Book Fair:** The fair celebrated high visitor numbers and a 50% discount on books ordered by [Presidential decree](#).
- **Hasakah Flood Response:** Emergency teams raised earthen barriers to prevent floods from closing roads to [refugee camps](#).
- **Idlib Teachers' Strike Ends:** A 14-day strike in Idlib concluded after the administration promised wage [increases and reforms](#).
- **Elm Saudi IT Contracts:** The Syrian government signed strategic agreements with the Saudi firm **Elm** for digitizing government services and [national ID systems](#).
- **Barada River Cleanup:** A major maintenance project was launched to clean the Barada river branch under the [Bridge of Freedom](#).
- **Syrian-German Energy Cooperation:** A joint project with Rostock aimed at enhancing [energy efficiency in Syria](#).
- **Douma Mosque Restoration:** Civil society and the state began efforts to restore the Great Mosque of Douma, a symbol of the [revolutionary movement](#).
- **Kurdish Political Integration:** Rumors of PKK/PYD leadership withdrawal to facilitate Kurdish [integration into the state](#).
- **Refugee Return Surveys:** IDP surveys began at Al-Hol camp to facilitate the [repatriation of families](#).
- **Bread Price Subsidy in Idlib:** The local administration lowered bread prices to 4,000 SP following [public complaints](#).
- **Atomic Energy Commission Sites:** The Commission announced it will begin surveys at newly accessible [energy and resource sites](#).
- **Poultry Disease Refutation:** The Ministry of Agriculture refuted rumors of a deadly poultry disease spreading [through the country](#).
- **Medical and Pharmacy Licensing Exams:** National standardized exams were conducted for 600 pharmacy and [medical graduates](#).
- **Youth "Impact Makers" Club:** Completion of a training program for young social entrepreneurs at the [Damascus Book Fair](#).

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.

This report is entirely machine generated using Gemini 3 and may include errors and

omissions. Please verify all findings. No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

For questions or suggestions, please contact kalev.leetaru5@gmail.com. To learn more or subscribe to our free daily newsletters, visit <https://blog.gdeltproject.org/announcing-our-new-daily-todays-trends-on-capitol-hill-todays-media-trends-newsletter-briefings/>. You can also learn more about the GDELT Project at <https://blog.gdeltproject.org/> and the Internet Archive's TV News Archive at <https://archive.org/details/tv>.