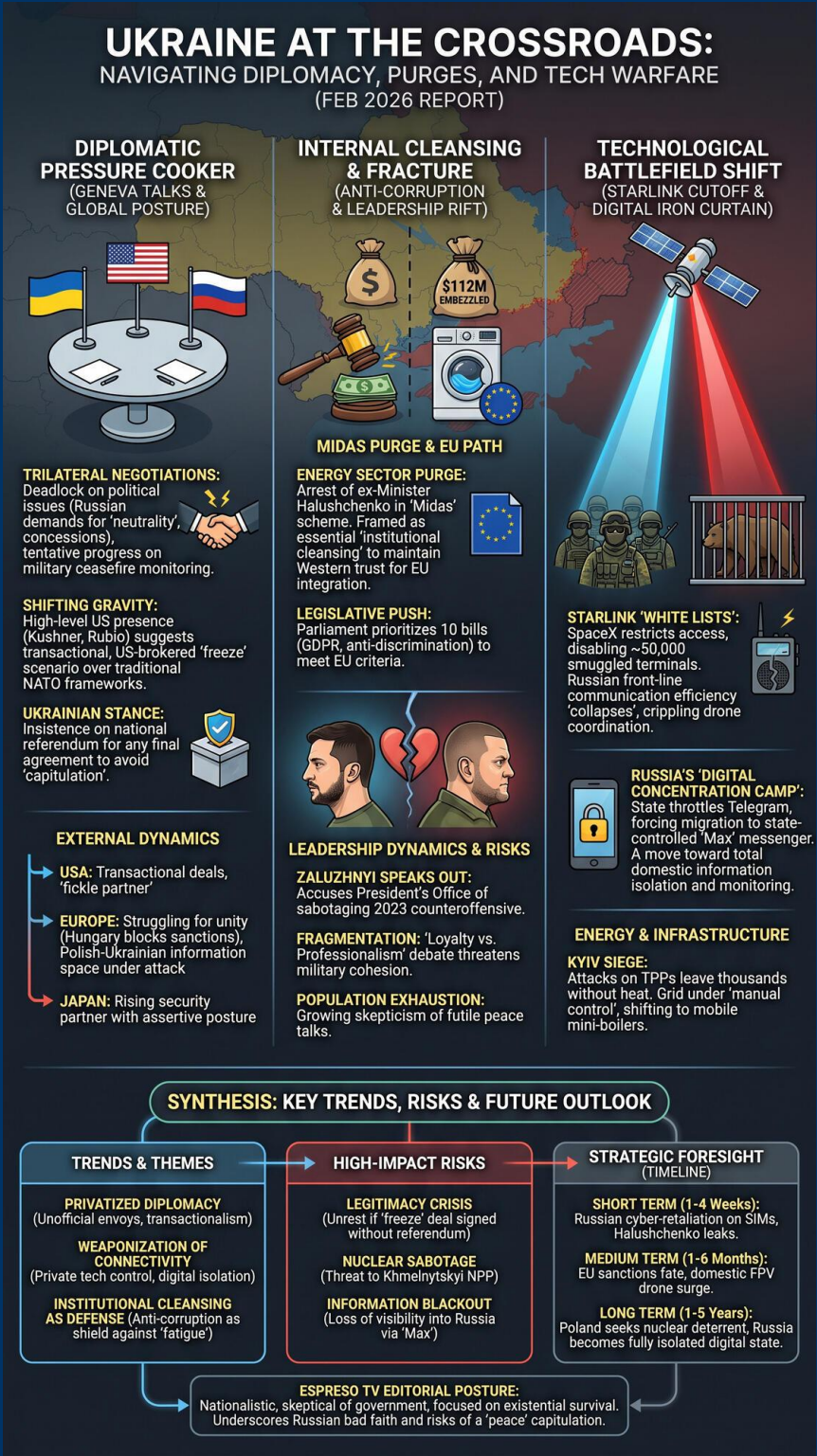


TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

ESPRESSO

FEBRUARY 18, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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UKRAINE NAVIGATES A
CONVERGENCE OF TRILATERAL
PEACE NEGOTIATIONS IN GENEVA,
INTERNAL ANTI-CORRUPTION
PURGES IN THE ENERGY SECTOR,
AND A TACTICAL
COMMUNICATIONS ADVANTAGE
FOLLOWING THE DISRUPTION OF
RUSSIAN STARLINK ACCESS.

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

February 18, 2026, was defined by a high-stakes trilateral meeting in Geneva involving delegations from Ukraine, the United States, and Russia. While the military track showed [constructive progress](#) regarding ceasefire monitoring, the political track remains deadlocked over Russian demands for Ukrainian territorial concessions and "neutrality." The presence of high-level US figures, including **Jared Kushner** and **Marco Rubio**, suggests a significant shift in diplomatic gravity toward a US-brokered settlement, though Ukrainian leadership continues to insist on a referendum for any final agreement.

Domestically, Ukraine is embroiled in a massive anti-corruption purge within its

energy and justice sectors. The arrest of former Energy and Justice Minister **Herman Halushchenko** in the "**Midas**" case has exposed a [multimillion-dollar laundering scheme](#) involving offshore funds and high-ranking political associates. This internal cleansing is being framed as essential for maintaining Western trust and facilitating EU integration, even as the energy grid remains under constant threat from Russian kinetic strikes and systemic decay.

On the military front, a major tactical development emerged with the reported cutoff of Russian access to **Starlink** terminals. The implementation of "white lists" by **SpaceX** reportedly caused the [Russian front line to "collapse"](#) in terms of communication efficiency, as an estimated 50,000 terminals obtained via gray imports were disabled. Simultaneously, Russia is tightening its domestic information space, slowing down **Telegram** to force users onto the state-controlled "**Max**" messenger, signaling a move toward a total "digital concentration camp."

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Trilateral Geneva Consultations:** Negotiations between Ukraine (Umerov, Budanov), the USA (Vitkov, Kushner), and Russia (Medinsky) conclude their latest round with a [deadlock on political issues](#) but tentative agreement on military monitoring.
- **The Starlink Cutoff:** Russian forces face a massive communications crisis after **SpaceX** restricted terminal access to [verified "white lists"](#) of users, primarily impacting Russian units using smuggled equipment.

- **Halushchenko Prosecution:** Former high-ranking minister Herman Halushchenko is held in custody with a [200 million UAH bail](#) on charges of leading a criminal organization that embezzled \$112 million from the energy sector.
- **Russian Digital Isolation:** The Russian government has begun the [systemic throttling of Telegram](#) to migrate the population to a domestic, fully monitored platform named "Max."
- **EU Integration Legislative Push:** The Ukrainian parliament is prioritizing [10 key bills](#) ranging from personal data protection (GDPR) to anti-discrimination to meet EU membership criteria.
- **IOC/IPC Policy Reversal:** The International Paralympic Committee's decision to allow Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete under [their national flags](#) in 2026 has sparked outrage and accusations of "creeping rehabilitation" of the aggressor.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization

- Ukraine has achieved a record [de-occupation of 201 square kilometers](#) in the last week, even as Russia makes incremental gains in Rivne and threatens the Pokrovsk-Sloviansk axis.
- The shift in Russian tactics toward [mass drone strikes](#) (over 600 in 48 hours) is being met by a 92% success rate from Ukrainian air defenses.

Leadership Dynamics & Governance

- The **Halushchenko** case is testing the "loyalty vs. professionalism" paradigm within the **Zelensky** administration, with critics arguing that [loyalty-based appointments](#) facilitated the "Midas" corruption scheme.
- Former Commander-in-Chief **Valerii Zaluzhnyi** has broken his silence in an interview, accusing the President's Office of [sabotaging the 2023 counteroffensive](#) by dispersing forces against military advice.

Information Warfare & Disinformation

- Russian intelligence is reportedly using ["itinerant protesters"](#) in Poland to spread narratives that Ukraine is a "corrupt country" and that humanitarian aid is being stolen.
- The Kremlin is preparing to justify a [protracted war and high expenditures](#) to its population by institutionalizing "traditional values" and tightening censorship.

Energy & Critical Infrastructure Security

- Attacks on the **Darnytsia TPP** and other nodes have left over [1,100 residential buildings in Kyiv](#) without heating during sub-zero temperatures.
- Ukraine's energy sector is undergoing a ["manual control"](#) phase to balance loads, while the government attempts to replace centralized heating with mobile mini-boiler houses funded by the EU.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Privatization of Diplomacy

- The Geneva talks represent a hybrid form of statecraft where [unofficial US envoys](#) (Kushner) operate alongside traditional military leaders (Umerov). This suggests a parallel track of "transactional diplomacy" favored by the current US political climate, potentially bypassing established NATO frameworks.
- The focus on [technical monitoring](#) of a ceasefire suggests the international community is moving toward a "freeze" scenario rather than a comprehensive peace treaty, a trend deeply unpopular with the Ukrainian public.

The Weaponization of Connectivity

- Starlink has transitioned from a purely commercial service to a [strategic weapon of control](#). The ability of a private entity (SpaceX) to effectively blind an army by toggling access via "white lists" sets a precedent for future conflicts.
- Conversely, Russia's attempt to migrate its population and military to the ["Max" messenger](#) demonstrates a "Digital Iron Curtain" strategy, where connectivity is permitted only within a state-monitored vacuum.

Institutional Cleansing as a Defense Mechanism

- The high-profile prosecution of **Halushchenko** is being utilized as a "shield" against Western "Ukraine fatigue." By showing that ["untouchables" can be jailed](#), the Ukrainian government aims to counter Russian propaganda that portrays the state as an irredeemable kleptocracy.
- However, the revelation that [British and Ukrainian officers](#) were harassed by SBU operatives during the 2023 offensive signals a dangerous undercurrent of internal political score-settling that threatens military cohesion.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

Ukraine: The nation is facing a widening rift between the military elite and political leadership. The **Zaluzhnyi** interview has reignited public debate over the [failure of the 2023 counteroffensive](#), with accusations that the President's Office prioritized political optics over military strategy. The **Halushchenko** arrest further complicates the landscape, as it implicates [business partners of the President](#), potentially eroding the administration's mandate. The population is showing signs of exhaustion, with 51% of viewers in one poll believing that a [Zelensky-Putin meeting](#) will not happen or will be futile.

Russia: The Russian domestic environment is transitioning into a total [digital concentration camp](#). The state's move to throttle Telegram and bypass US-linked satellite communications indicates a leadership that is increasingly paranoid about internal dissent and technological dependence. Despite propaganda of "eternal war," the economic reality is grimmer, with the [budget deficit for](#)

[January](#) already reaching half of the planned annual total.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

The international system is being portrayed as increasingly **transactional and multipolar**. The **United States**, under a perceived Trump-influence doctrine, is pushing for [quick resolutions](#) and transactional deals (e.g., Marco Rubio promising Orbán "a new golden age" for access to energy markets). **Europe** is struggling to find a unified voice, with **Hungary** continuing to [block the 20th sanctions package](#) until the very last minute.

New alliances are forming around **technology and energy**. **Japan**, following a [landslide conservative victory](#), is moving toward a more assertive military posture and closer integration with US-led security architectures. Simultaneously, **Poland** and **Ukraine** are being linked in a single [information and defense space](#), though this bond is under constant attack from Russian hybrid operations designed to inflame historical tensions.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The global economic outlook is heavily weighed by energy security and the cost of military industrialization. While **Ukraine** has received unprecedented aid ([over 345 billion Euros](#) since the invasion began), its domestic industry is pivoting toward an [export-focused military model](#) to sustain its economy. Russia's economy, conversely, is suffering from severe

structural rot and the high cost of maintaining a mercenary-style army.

- **Energy Commodities:** Brent crude is showing a **10% increase**, trading at **\$67.50** per barrel, while WTI is at [\\$62.39](#).
- **Russian Budget Crisis:** The Russian Ministry of Finance reported a [1.7 trillion ruble deficit](#) in the first month of 2026 alone, against a 3.5 trillion plan for the year.
- **Ukrainian Banking:** Business lending in Ukraine [rose by 21%](#) in 2024, with household loans up 38%, indicating surprising resilience.
- **Defense Spending:** European defense budgets grew from 215 billion Euros in 2021 to [360 billion Euros](#) in 2025.
- **Russian Bankruptcies:** Two major Russian oil companies [declared bankruptcy](#) recently, signaling that sanctions and refinery strikes are reaching a tipping point.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

The transcripts reveal a period of intense institutional churn and the removal of figures once considered "untouchable."

- **Herman Halushchenko:** The primary loser of the day. Once the Energy and Justice Minister, he is now [jailed and accused](#) of being a "Level 3" operative in a massive corruption hierarchy.
- **Timur Mindich:** Identified as the [alleged organizer](#) of the "Midas" criminal group; he reportedly fled Ukraine before charges were filed.
- **Sanae Takaichi:** Big winner in Japan. Her landslide victory signals a [pro-security, conservative shift](#) in the Pacific theater.

- **Valerii Zaluzhnyi:** Re-emerging as a [major political factor](#). His decision to air grievances against the President's Office indicates he is positioning himself for a post-war or political role.
- **Andrii Yermak:** Under intense scrutiny. Though he has resigned as Head of the President's Office, [searches were conducted](#) at his premises in connection with the Midas case.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

Espresso TV's editorial posture is **nationalistic, skeptical of government transparency, and focused on existential survival**. The "Lead Stories" were clearly the **Starlink disruption** and the **Halushchenko arrest**, both framed as "cleansing" events—one clearing the technical front, the other clearing the domestic rear. The Geneva talks were covered with significant skepticism, with the network emphasizing **Russian bad faith** and the risk of a "capitulation" disguised as peace.

Buried Stories: Minor mention was made of [LITHUANIA'S struggle](#) to fulfill its defense production goals, and the potential bankruptcy of **Ukrenergo** was downplayed in favor of the criminal investigation. **Conspicuous Omissions:** There was almost no mention of the humanitarian situation in Russian-occupied territories (except for child tracing) or the status of the "grain corridor" alternatives.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The broadcasts frame the world as an arena where technical competence and moral clarity are in short supply.

COUNTRIES

- **United States:** Portrayed as a powerful but **fickle partner**. The administration is seen as competent in military track negotiations but potentially **corrupt or transactional** in political track negotiations. "The US is interested in Russia [not losing the war](#) because they fear social unrest."
- **Hungary:** Framed as a **traitorous outlier** within the EU. Orbán is seen as a "Level 1" obstacle to European security, motivated by a [cynical transactionalism](#) with Trump and Putin.
- **Japan:** Portrayed as a **rising friend** and a model of how a pacifist nation can reform its "pacifist Article 9" to [confront modern aggression](#).

LEADERS

- **Vladimir Putin:** [Portrayed as a weak and irrational dictator who has "failed to repeat" anything but defeat. He is a leader whose signature isn't worth the paper](#) it's written on.
- **Elon Musk:** Portrayed as a **chaotic and unreliable** "boy" who can "throw out anything tomorrow," yet whose technology is the [lifeline of the front](#).
- **Volodymyr Zelensky:** Framed as a **principled but embattled** leader who is struggling to control a "mafia-state construct" within his own government.

NON-STATE & CORPORATE ACTORS

- **SpaceX:** Framed as a **corporate superpower** with the ability to determine the outcome of battles, more effective than many state actors.

- **Russian Orthodox Church (ROC):** Portrayed as a **hybrid warfare tool**, placing "spy nuns" and "[giant temples](#)" [near NATO radars](#) in Scandinavia.

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

- **Domestic Propaganda (Russia):** The Kremlin is seeding the narrative that [Telegram doesn't matter](#) for the military, even as their own soldiers admit it's one of the "two pillars" of the front.
- **Psychological Operations (Poland):** Russian-funded groups are performing "[classic propaganda stories](#)" in Polish hotels and streets to provoke anti-Ukrainian sentiment, specifically targeting humanitarian aid efforts.
- **Media Manipulation:** The creation of "**Newsmax Ukraine**" is viewed with suspicion as a potential vehicle for [money laundering](#) and the promotion of "Balkan-style" Russian narratives in the West.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Ceasefire "Freeze":** A temporary ceasefire based on technical monitoring (military track) is the most likely outcome of the Geneva talks, likely taking effect by [mid-April or May](#) to accommodate political timelines in the US and EU.
- **Russian Military Decentralization:** The loss of Starlink and the slowing of Telegram will likely force the Russian military to revert to "[TAPIK](#)" [wire-based communication](#) and localized commands, severely slowing their reaction time to Ukrainian maneuver warfare.

- **Political Crisis in Kyiv:** The **Zaluzhnyi-Zelensky** rift, combined with the **Halushchenko** fallout, will likely lead to a **cabinet reshuffle** or a significant challenge to the President's Office's power before the end of 2026.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

- **Short Term (1-4 Weeks):** Expect a Russian **retaliatory surge** in cyber-attacks on Ukrainian mobile networks (SIM cards) to regain drone control channels. Herman Halushchenko will likely [appeal his bail](#), leading to more leaks from the "Midas" investigation.
- **Medium Term (1-6 Months):** The [April elections in Hungary](#) and the US congressional pressure will define the survival of the 20th sanctions package. Ukraine will likely launch its first [domestic 20-million FPV drone](#) production initiative.
- **Long Term (1-5 Years):** **Poland** will likely formalize its quest for [nuclear deterrent status](#) or a "joint nuclear umbrella" with the UK/France as trust in US guarantees continues to waver. Russia will likely be a fully **digitally isolated state** with no access to Western mesh networks.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The transcripts identify several high-probability/high-impact risks that could alter

the trajectory of the war and domestic stability.

- **The "Freeze" Legitimacy Crisis:** If the Geneva talks lead to a territory-for-peace deal without a referendum, it could trigger **civil unrest** in Kyiv. **Triggers:** Signing of a "technical" ceasefire that ignores occupied cities. **Likelihood:** Medium-High. **Impact:** Catastrophic (Internal collapse). **Mitigations:** Immediate [national referendum](#) as proposed by Zelensky.
- **Russian Nuclear Sabotage:** Strikes on the **Khmelnyskyi Nuclear Power Plant** construction or grid nodes. **Triggers:** Russian front-line collapse due to Starlink disruption. **Likelihood:** Low-Medium. **Impact:** Regional catastrophe. **Mitigations:** Deployment of [anti-drone "nuclear domes"](#) and AI-controlled kinetic defense.
- **Polish-Ukrainian Supply Chain Break:** The inflaming of Polish protests by Russian "proxies." **Triggers:** Success of [Russian-funded "anti-corruption" protests](#) in Warsaw. **Likelihood:** Medium. **Impact:** High (Logistical strangulation). **Mitigations:** Better articulation of [Ukrainian economic contributions](#) to the Polish state.
- **Refinery Bankruptcies / Fuel Shortages:** A total collapse of the Russian oil refining sector leading to hyperinflation. **Triggers:** Continued Ukrainian [long-range strikes](#) on the Urals/Siberia complexes. **Likelihood:** Medium. **Impact:** Total Russian economic pivot to subsistence war. **Mitigations:** Russia moves to [printing money](#), causing internal instability.

- **Information "Blackout":** The total migration of Russian communication to the "Max" platform. **Triggers:** [Russian court rulings](#) banning Telegram. **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** Complete loss of Ukrainian visibility into Russian movements. **Mitigations:** Infiltration of "Max" by intelligence services.

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- **The "Mindich-Zelensky" Link:** The broadcast mentions Timur Mindich as a "former business partner" of the President but fails to explore the current **depth of influence** he may still hold over the administration.
- **China's Role in Gray Imports:** While Starlink cutoff is celebrated, the role of **Chinese middlemen** in the 50,000-terminal smuggling route is [under-analyzed](#).
- **Starmer's UK Stance:** The mention of **Jonathan Powell** meeting US envoys suggests a specific UK policy toward a Geneva deal that is [not fully detailed](#).
- **The Status of Russian "Trophy" Equipment:** There is little mention of how many Starlink terminals remain **functioning behind UA lines** but under Russian control.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

- **The "Midas" Case as a Political Purge:** A Red-Team analysis suggests that the **Halushchenko** arrest is not about corruption, but about **consolidating control** over the energy sector before a major reconstruction-era investment surge. By removing Halushchenko and targeting Yermak's associates, the administration may be attempting to "wash" its image for [100-million-dollar investment funds](#) that are currently hesitating.
- **The Starlink "Stalling" Tactic:** The Russian military may be **overstating** the impact of the Starlink cutoff to lure Ukraine into an overconfident offensive, while they transition to [proprietary satellite systems](#) they have been testing in Syria.
- **Black Swan Event:** A **Russian submarine-launched missile strike** against a UK vessel in the Black Sea ([as implied by British балістнк tests](#)) triggering a direct NATO-Russia naval skirmish.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- **Security:** Accelerate the [localization of FPV drone production](#) to decouple defense from unpredictable international satellite providers like SpaceX.
- **Economic:** Leverage the **Halushchenko** prosecution to demand the release of [90 billion Euros in EU aid](#), presenting the arrest as proof of institutional reform.

- **Diplomatic:** Formalize the **referendum requirement** for peace talks to prevent a US-imposed "transactional freeze."

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chain:** Monitor Polish border stability closely; Russian hybrid operations are actively [targeting the "humanitarian corridor"](#) narrative.
- **Regulatory:** Prepare for the [GDPR-style personal data laws](#) in Ukraine, which will impose high penalties on non-compliant businesses.
- **Energy:** The shift toward [decentralized mobile boiler houses in Kyiv presents a major procurement opportunity for European engineering firms](#).

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

[The Ukrainian parliament is entering a critical session focused on alignment with European standards to ensure a clear path toward the 2027 membership goal.](#)

- **BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:**

- **Law on Personal Data Protection:** [Strategic intent is to implement EU GDPR standards](#), ensuring safe data transfer for international business.
- **Law on Advertising:** Aims to align Ukrainian media rules with European [anti-discrimination directives](#).
- **Civil Partnerships Bill:** Controversial legislation intended to recognize the [rights of military partners](#), viewed as a litmus test for European values.
- **Marriage at 14 Reform:** Proposed changes to the [Civil Code](#) to prevent child marriage, currently facing intense public and alternative project opposition.

- **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:**

- **Geneva Press Briefing:** Rustem Umerov and Steven Vitkov detailing the [military track progress](#) in peace talks.
- **Halushchenko Bail Hearing:** High-intensity court session revealing [SMS correspondence](#) regarding the torture of investigators.
- **Zaluzhnyi Interview:** A watershed media event in **Associated Press** that challenged the [Presidential narrative](#) of the war's 2023 trajectory.

KEY STORIES

- **The "Midas" Corruption Case:** Former minister Herman Halushchenko arrested for leading a \$112M embezzlement group linked to **Timur Mindich** and **Oleksiy Chernyshov**; bail set at [200 million UAH](#).
- **Starlink Russian Front Collapse:** SpaceX blocks 50,000 smuggled terminals via "white lists," crippling [Russian FPV drone command](#) and coordination in the Pokrovsk sector.

- **Geneva Trilateral Talks:** Two-day summit between USA, Ukraine, and Russia shows [technical military progress](#) but political deadlock over "Neutrality" and Donbas territory.
- **Kyiv Energy Siege:** Over [1,100 high-rise buildings](#) in Kyiv remain without heating after strikes on the Darnytsia TPP; EU funding mobile boiler replacements.
- **Zaluzhnyi Speaks Out:** Former top general Zaluzhnyi accuses Zelensky of [ignoring military advice](#) and allowing the SBU to harass his headquarters during the 2023 campaign.
- **Russia's Digital Iron Curtain:** Systematic [throttling of Telegram](#) and forced migration to the state-controlled "Max" platform for civilian and military use.
- **IOC Paralympic Flags Controversy:** International Paralympic Committee allows Russian athletes to [fly their flags](#) in 2026, causing a diplomatic row with Kyiv.
- **Polish Disinformation Campaign:** Russian intelligence using [fake protesters](#) to attack Ukrainian reputation in Poland over "stolen" humanitarian generators.
- **Japan Snap Election Result:** Sanae Takaichi leads the Liberal Democratic Party to a [constitutional majority](#), paving the way for Article 9 reform.
- **British Naval Drill in Black Sea:** Reports of the UK testing [ballistic capabilities](#) to protect grain routes from Russian interference.
- **Marco Rubio meets Viktor Orbán:** US Secretary of State promising ["a new golden age"](#) of relations if Hungary pivots toward US energy and away from Russian influence.

- **Russia Refinery Bankruptcies:** Two major oil plants [collapse financially](#) after Ukrainian drone strikes and export bans reach critical mass.
- **European GDPR Integration:** Ukraine's parliament [prioritizes 10 laws for EU integration, including controversial data protection rules](#).
- **Child Searching Efforts:** [Magnolia service reports over 300 requests to find children abducted or missing since the start of the war](#).
- **Skeleton Racer Disqualification:** [Vladyslav Heraskevych banned for a memorial helmet](#) honoring fallen Ukrainian athletes.
- **Sloviansk Front Intensification:** Russian forces crossing the **Siverskyi Donets** at Zakitne, threatening to bypass [Lyman's defenses](#).

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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