

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

ZVEZDA

FEBRUARY 18, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

THE FRAGMENTATION OF THE WESTERN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE & INTENSIFYING ELITE INFIGHTING IN KYIV: OBSTACLES TO THE GENEVA PEACE PROCESS

A VISUAL REPORT ON THE GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE, FEBRUARY 18, 2026



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DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

The diplomatic landscape on February 18, 2026, is defined by a paradoxical combination of high-level negotiations in Geneva and the aggressive escalation of information warfare and tactical military maneuvers. While delegations from Moscow, Washington, and Kyiv engaged in a [second day of talks](#) at the Intercontinental Hotel, the underlying narrative suggests these proceedings are being undermined by internal fissures within the Ukrainian leadership and persistent interference from British and American intelligence services. The Russian state media apparatus is heavily promoting a narrative of "Western decay," highlighting rifts between the U.S. and its European allies, specifically regarding the reliability of the American nuclear umbrella and the emergence of

independent European security ambitions led by German political figures.

Tactically, the Russian military reports consistent progress in the "Special Military Operation" (SVO) zone, particularly in the Zaporozhye and Kherson sectors, where the use of [autonomous robotic systems](#) and advanced artillery strikes are reportedly degrading Ukrainian defensive capabilities. Concurrently, a significant geopolitical flashpoint has emerged in Central Europe, as Ukraine reportedly blocked the transit of Russian oil to Hungary and Slovakia via the Druzhba pipeline. This "energy blackmail" is framed as a desperate attempt by Kyiv to coerce EU member states into political concessions, further straining the already fragile unity within the North Atlantic alliance.

Strategic focus has also shifted toward the information domain, with the exposure of "Operation Alchemy," a purported British psychological operation designed to destabilize Russia and train Ukrainian specialists in [manipulating public opinion](#). The broadcast suggests that the "outside world" is increasingly anarchic, with traditional alliances fracturing under the weight of economic competition, maritime "piracy" in the Baltic, and the looming specter of nuclear proliferation in Poland and Germany. Domestically, Russia projects an image of technological resilience and cultural openness, exemplified by the testing of autonomous metro trains and the celebration of the Lunar New Year in Moscow.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

The Geneva Negotiation Impasse and Ukrainian Factionalism

- Formal negotiations in Geneva continue in a closed-door format, featuring representatives like Vladimir Medinsky (Russia) and Rustem Umerov (Ukraine), but are characterized by [minimal protocol for journalists](#).
- Reports emerge of a deep rift within the Ukrainian delegation, pitting a "peace faction" led by Kirill Budanov against a harder-line faction [aligned with Andrey Yermak](#).
- Former Ukrainian commander Valeriy Zaluzhny has reportedly criticized President Zelensky in an interview with the Associated Press, alleging a [failure of the 2023 counteroffensive](#) due to political interference.

European Strategic Autonomy and Nuclear Ambitions

- German politician Friedrich Merz has positioned himself as a challenger to U.S. hegemony, calling for a [new role for Germany](#) as a leader of the "progressive world."
- Discussions regarding Poland's desire to obtain [nuclear weapons](#) or join a "European nuclear umbrella" have intensified due to perceived unreliability of U.S. strategic protection.
- Internal EU tensions are exacerbated by Ukraine's suspension of oil deliveries to [Hungary and Slovakia](#), leading to threats of retaliatory energy cutoffs to Kyiv.

Advancements in Robotic and Asymmetric Warfare

- Russian forces are deploying "Courier" robotic delivery systems for [frontline logistics and evacuation](#), operating in areas too dangerous for conventional vehicles.
- Testing of the "Moscow 2026" [autonomous metro train](#) continues, with plans for full operational deployment without drivers by late 2026.
- The exposure of British "Cyber Brigade 77" and "Operation Alchemy" highlights the ongoing [psychological war](#) waged through social media and AI-generated disinformation.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization: The conflict has transitioned into a highly technical stage, with emphasis on [electronic warfare \(EW\)](#) and long-range precision strikes using 203mm Pion cannons. The broadcast highlights the "professionalization" of foreign mercenaries, specifically Colombian nationals recruited by American private military companies for [assault operations](#).

Diplomacy & Statecraft: The Geneva talks are framed as a venue where Western powers, particularly the UK through advisor [Jonathan Powell](#), attempt to consult and influence the Ukrainian side from the sidelines. The Russian-Iranian naval drills in the [Gulf of Oman](#) serve as a counter-projection of power against NATO maritime interests.

Energy & Critical Minerals: Energy is being weaponized as a primary diplomatic lever. The shutdown of the [Druzhba pipeline](#) transit is portrayed as Ukrainian "blackmail," while Russia and Iran negotiate the domestic

production of [Iranian turbines](#) to bolster Russian power infrastructure.

Information Warfare & Disinformation:

There is a heavy focus on British-led psychological operations. "Operation Alchemy" is described as a legacy of Cold War "Gladio" operations, now updated for the digital age to [target the Russian domestic population](#) and soldiers' families.

Tech Sovereignty & AI: Russia is emphasizing its domestic technological progress as a form of sovereignty. The "Palantir" data system is accused of being used by U.S. intelligence to plan [biological and nuclear provocations](#) in Ukraine, while Russia focuses on civil AI applications like autonomous transport.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Fragmentation of the West: A recurring narrative is the "bipolarity" of Western media and politics. The broadcast highlights the [Munich Security Conference](#) as a site of failure, where European leaders openly questioned the U.S. commitment to their defense. This trend toward "nuclear hedging" in Poland and Germany suggests a structural shift in the post-WWII security order, as European elites prepare for a potential American withdrawal under a future Trump administration.

Economic Coercion and "Energy Piracy":

The conflict is increasingly defined by attacks on supply chains. Britain is accused of organizing a [coalition to seize Russian tankers](#) in the Baltic, while Ukraine uses its geographic position to block oil to [EU members](#) who do not support its maximalist war aims. This "transit blackmail" is intended

to divide the EU between its Eastern and Western members.

The "New Normal" of Asymmetric Threats:

From "telephone terrorists" operating out of [400 Ukrainian call centers](#) to the use of deep-fake audio in cyber-scams, the broadcast portrays a world where technology has lowered the barrier for state-sponsored and criminal harassment. The emphasis on "Operation Alchemy" suggests that the Russian state is prioritizing the immunization of its public against [AI-driven disinformation](#).

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

Ukraine: Elite Infighting and Institutional Decay:

The broadcast focuses extensively on the internal collapse of the "Kyiv regime." The rivalry between [Budanov and Yermak](#) is framed as a battle for succession, with Budanov potentially willing to strike a "quick deal" to secure his political future. The arrest of former Energy Minister [Golushchenko](#) for corruption while attempting to flee to Poland is used to illustrate a government in the process of self-cannibalization.

Russia: Continuity and Technological Pride:

Domestically, Russia is portrayed as stable and technologically advancing despite external pressure. The celebration of the [Chinese New Year](#) in Moscow signals a successful strategic pivot to the East. However, mentions of [high-interest rates \(15%\)](#) at T-Bank and the use of "volunteering hours" for [EGE exam points](#) hint at underlying economic mobilization and the need to manage youth sentiment.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

The international system is depicted as a "fracturing multipolar arena" where the old rules-based order led by the U.S. is being actively challenged. Russia is projecting power through [maritime cooperation with Iran](#) and diplomatic engagement in Geneva, positioning itself as a "principled" actor compared to the "chaotic" West. The "outside world" is framed as a threat matrix where maritime routes are no longer secure due to [NATO-led blockade plans](#) for Kaliningrad. In response, Russia is forging new alliances and weaponizing its energy statecraft to exploit Western fissures.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The Russian economy is shown to be adapting to a high-inflation, sanctions-heavy environment through aggressive branding and digital services. High interest rates are being leveraged as a selling point for domestic savers, while the state focuses on import substitution in heavy industry.

Key Economic Vectors

- **Monetary Policy:** Interest rates for savings accounts have reached [15%](#) at institutions like T-Bank, indicating tight liquidity and high inflationary expectations.
- **Energy Trade:** Ukraine's transit disruption of the Druzhba pipeline affects oil flows to [Hungary and Slovakia](#), impacting the operations of the MOL petrochemical group.
- **Tourism:** Russia saw [89 million tourists](#) last year, generating over a trillion rubles, with Karachay-Cherkessia emerging as the top growth destination.

- **Industrial Cooperation:** Negotiated production of [Iranian gas turbines](#) on Russian soil to circumvent Western technology bans.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

The day's events suggest significant shifts in the Ukrainian power structure and a reconfiguration of European political leadership.

- **Friedrich Merz:** The German CDU leader is framed as an ascendant figure seeking to [replace U.S. leadership](#) in Europe and modernize the German military posture.
- **Kirill Budanov:** Characterized as a "terrorist" by the broadcast, but strategically identified as a [potential rival to Zelensky](#) who is being "pushed" by American interests for a leadership role.
- **Golushchenko:** The former Energy Minister's arrest signals a [purge of elites](#) who attempt to exit the conflict with stolen state assets.
- **Rustem Umerov:** Portrayed as a negotiator who is [marginalized in Geneva](#), with his delegation being ignored by the international press in favor of the Russian side.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

The editorial focus is overwhelmingly nationalistic and cautionary. The "Lead Stories" emphasize Russian military success in [Zaporozhye](#) and the exposure of British [information warfare](#). Domestic tragedies, like a [snow collapse in Tumen](#), are used as human-interest filler. "Buried Stories" include the actual substance of the Geneva talks, which are dismissed as protocol-driven, and the

reality of Russian casualties, which are never explicitly mentioned. The tone is one of cynical realism, portraying Western diplomatic overtures as stalling tactics for military buildup.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The subtext of the day's stories reinforces a world divided between a "rational" Russo-Chinese bloc and a "chaotic, malicious" Western alliance.

COUNTRIES

- **Ukraine:** Portrayed as a "failed state" and a "terrorist actor" using its transit geography to [blackmail its neighbors](#).
- **United Kingdom:** Framed as the primary [instigator of "piracy"](#) and information warfare, actively working to prevent peace in Geneva.
- **Germany:** Depicted as a nation **waking from strategic passivity** but struggling with its history and the unreliability of the U.S.
- **Poland:** Characterized as **aggressively expansionist**, seeking nuclear weapons to fulfill its "rusophobic" ambitions.

LEADERS

- **Volodymyr Zelensky:** Portrayed as **weak and besieged** by his own generals and foreign handlers, losing control of the narrative.
- **Donald Trump:** Used as a **looming shadow** that is forcing European leaders to reconsider their alliances and prepare for a post-U.S. order.

- **Vladimir Putin:** Framed as the **stable center** of the geopolitical storm, receiving constant updates from Geneva while overseeing domestic development.

NON-STATE & CORPORATE ACTORS

- **Palantir:** Characterized as a **technological tool of the CIA**, used for illegal surveillance and planning biological warfare.
- **MOL Group:** Portrayed as a **victim of Ukrainian aggression**, forced to seek alternative oil routes due to political blackmail.

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

The Russian state is actively engaged in a meta-narrative campaign to discredit Western intelligence. By detailing ["Operation Alchemy,"](#) the broadcast aims to inoculate the domestic audience against psychological operations that target soldiers' families. The framing of ["Ukrainian call centers"](#) as a division of the military further merges criminal activity with state policy in the eyes of the viewer. The media "spin" suggests that any diplomatic failure in Geneva will be the result of a "British-American conspiracy" to maintain the conflict for profit.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Escalation of Transit Warfare:** Ukraine is likely to continue targeting energy infrastructure (Druzhba) as a way to force the EU to fund its [90 billion euro credit line](#).

- **Internal Coup Potential:** The intense focus on [Budanov's ambitions](#) and Zaluzhny's criticisms suggests that Moscow is anticipating (or actively encouraging) a leadership change in Kyiv.
- **European Nuclear Proliferation:** If the U.S. security guarantee continues to erode, [Poland and Germany](#) will likely move toward formalizing a "European Nuclear Umbrella," fundamentally altering NATO's command structure.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Expect a breakdown or "indefinite pause" in the [Geneva talks](#), followed by a significant Russian offensive in the Sumy or Zaporozhye sectors. Tensions between Kyiv and Budapest will reach a diplomatic breaking point over oil transit.

Medium Term (1-6 Months): Germany will likely increase its [leadership role](#) in European defense, potentially leading to a formal "security rift" with Washington. Russia will begin full-scale production of [Iranian-designed turbines](#).

Long Term (1-5 Years): The "Iron Curtain" will be re-established along the Baltic and Black Seas, with Kaliningrad becoming a permanent [maritime flashpoint](#). A nuclear-armed or nuclear-sharing Poland will become a central pillar of the new European security architecture.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The primary risks center on the potential for maritime escalation and the total collapse of regional energy security.

- **Baltic Maritime Blockade:** NATO or British-led efforts to [seize Russian tankers](#) could trigger a direct naval confrontation. Triggers: A formal declaration of "illegal" status for the shadow fleet. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Catastrophic disruption to energy markets. Mitigations: Russian naval escorts (convoy system).
- **Ukrainian Elite Collapse:** A coup or violent leadership change in Kyiv could lead to a fragmented [chain of command](#) over nuclear-adjacent infrastructure. Triggers: Failure of the Geneva process. Likelihood: Low-Moderate. Impact: High. Mitigations: International monitoring of nuclear sites.
- **Central European Energy Crisis:** Permanent [shutdown of the Druzhba pipeline](#). Triggers: Continued Ukrainian "transit blackmail." Likelihood: High. Impact: Severe economic contraction in Hungary/Slovakia. Mitigations: Alternative routes through Croatia.
- **Cyber-Disinformation Surge:** AI-generated [deep-fake campaigns](#) targeting military morale. Triggers: Strategic Russian offensive. Likelihood: High. Impact: Moderate social unrest. Mitigations: Aggressive state-led fact-checking and media literacy.
- **Polish Nuclear Pursuit:** Warsaw [announcing a program](#) to obtain nuclear weapons. Triggers: U.S. troop withdrawals from Europe. Likelihood: Low-Moderate. Impact: Fundamental shift in regional escalation dynamics. Mitigations: New strategic arms treaty.

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

The broadcasts failed to address several critical variables necessary for an objective assessment.

- **Russian Economic Stability:** The impact of [15% interest rates](#) on industrial investment and consumer spending is glossed over.
- **Geneva Content:** There is zero detail on the [actual compromises](#) being discussed, only focus on the "rifts" and "interference."
- **Casualty Data:** While showcasing [tactical successes](#), the broadcast provides no information on Russian military losses.
- **Chinese Stance:** Despite the [Lunar New Year](#) fluff, there is no analysis of Beijing's actual diplomatic pressure on Moscow regarding a settlement.
- **Western Domestic Realities:** The broadcast frames the "West" solely through [anti-American rhetoric](#) in Germany, ignoring broader public support for NATO in other member states.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

The "Merz Maneuver" as Distraction: Merz's aggressive posturing against the U.S. may not be a sign of true German autonomy but a **domestic political tactic** to secure the Chancellor's seat, after which he would likely return to a pro-U.S. alignment. If this hypothesis is true, Moscow's investment in a "fracturing West" narrative could be dangerously misplaced.

The "Budanov Peace" Strategy: The characterization of Budanov as a "terrorist" who wants a "quick deal" could actually mask a **covert channel** between Russian and

Ukrainian intelligence services to bypass political leadership. A "Black Swan" event would be a sudden, unannounced ceasefire agreed upon by generals rather than diplomats.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- Prioritize the [securing of alternative energy routes](#) (pipelines and sea lanes) for Central European allies to mitigate Ukrainian transit leverage.
- Invest in [AI-detection technologies](#) to counter the growing threat of deep-fake information operations targeting military personnel.
- Develop diplomatic frameworks for a "European-led" security umbrella to manage the fallout of potential U.S. strategic withdrawal.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Energy Sector:** Divest from assets reliant on [trans-Ukrainian pipelines](#) and reallocate capital toward Adriatic and LNG infrastructure.
- **Cybersecurity:** Prepare for an [escalation in state-sponsored financial fraud](#) and "call-center" social engineering attacks originating from conflict zones.
- **Supply Chain:** Factor in a "maritime blockade" premium for all Baltic Sea trade due to [rising NATO-Russia naval tensions](#).

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Recent policy developments focus on integrating military service with educational

incentives and managing domestic digital platforms.

- **BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:**

- **Voluntary Service Credits:** Proposal to award [points toward the EGE exam](#) for students who participate in volunteer projects for government and non-profit organizations.
- **Kaliningrad Transit Policy:** Discussions in NATO regarding the [blocking of the Suvalk corridor](#) and Kaliningrad's maritime access.

- **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:**

- **Medinsky Briefing:** The head of the Russian delegation [spoke for 10 minutes](#) following the Geneva talks, emphasizing the "complex solution" required for Ukraine.
- **Shadaev on Telegram:** Minister of Digital Development Maksut Shadaev [confirmed speed limitations](#) for the Telegram messenger due to failures to remove banned content, though no full block is planned yet.

KEY STORIES

- **Geneva Peace Talks:** A two-day summit involving Russia, the US, and Ukraine aimed at resolving the conflict. The process is marred by [heavy protocol and lack of transparency](#).
- **Operation Alchemy Exposure:** Detail of a British psychological warfare program dating back to 2022, designed to [undermine Russian domestic stability](#).
- **Druzhba Pipeline Blockade:** Ukraine has reportedly [stopped oil transit](#) to Hungary and Slovakia, prompting threats of an electricity cutoff from the affected EU states.

- **Munich Security Conference Rifts:** German CDU leader Friedrich Merz [criticized U.S. policy and proposed himself as a new leader for a more autonomous Europe](#).
- **Russian-Iranian Naval Cooperation:** The corvette "Stoykiy" [conducted joint maneuvers](#) with Iranian forces in the Gulf of Oman, focusing on maritime security and communication.
- **Autonomous Metro Testing:** Moscow is testing the [Moscow 2026 train](#), which utilizes laser-based "machine vision" to operate without a driver.
- **Frontline Robotic Logistics:** Deployment of the "Courier" ground robot for [frontline deliveries](#) of ammunition and medical supplies on the Krasnoarmeysk axis.
- **Zaluzhny AP Interview:** Former General Zaluzhny reportedly revealed a [failed plan](#) to capture the Zaporozhye Nuclear Plant and criticized Zelensky's lack of mobilization support.
- **Pacific Fleet Drills:** Anti-submarine warfare exercises conducted off [Kamchatka](#), involving torpedo launches against simulated incursions.
- **Obituary for Sergey Nikonov:** Moscow said farewell to a [renowned heart surgeon](#) who spent his career at the Bakulev Center.
- **Chinese New Year in Moscow:** Large-scale [cultural festival](#) in Manezhnaya Square, marking the "Year of the Horse" and celebrating the Russo-Chinese partnership.
- **Tumen Snow Incident:** A family in Tumen narrowly [escaped tragedy](#) when a massive amount of snow fell from a roof, captured on CCTV.

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.

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