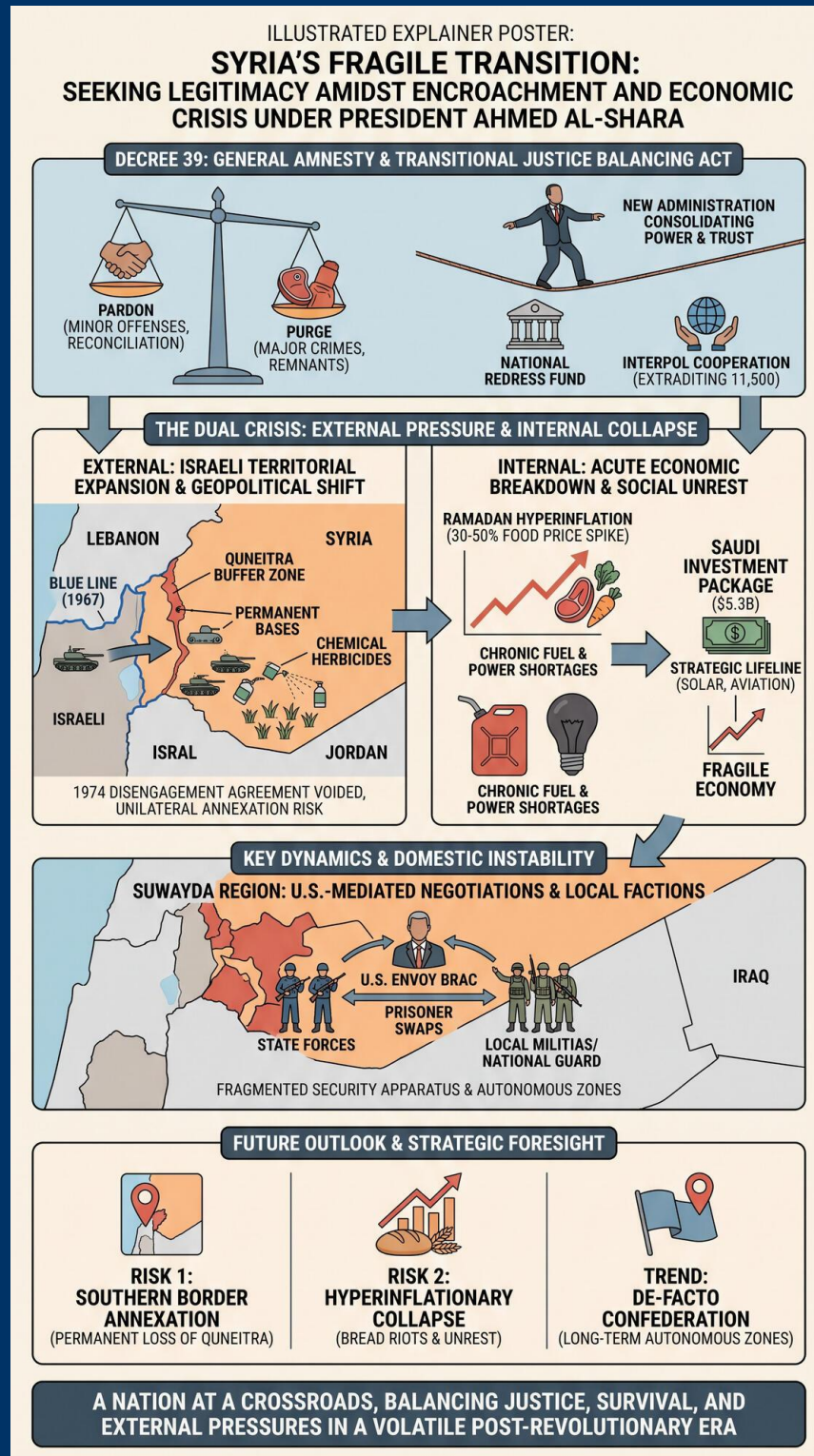


TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

SYRIANNEWS

FEBRUARY 20, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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SYRIA SEEKS LEGITIMACY THROUGH TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AMID ISRAELI TERRITORIAL ENCROACHMENT AND ECONOMIC VOLATILITY

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

Syria stands at a critical juncture as the new administration under President Ahmed al-Shara attempts to consolidate power and public trust through the issuance of Decree 39 of 2026, a **general amnesty** intended to facilitate national reconciliation and transitional justice. This legislative maneuver aims to balance the "rule of law" with "humanitarian dimensions" by pardoning minor offenses while excluding "major crimes" committed during the previous regime's tenure. However, this push for domestic stability is being undermined by a **dual crisis**: an acute economic breakdown characterized by rampant Ramadan inflation and chronic fuel shortages, and a significant escalation of Israeli territorial encroachment in the southern Quneitra region.

The internal security landscape remains volatile, particularly in Suwayda, where the government is engaged in delicate **U.S.-**

mediated negotiations and prisoner swaps with local armed factions. Simultaneously, the state is aggressively pursuing the extradition of "Assad regime remnants" from neighboring states to fulfill its transitional justice mandate. The convergence of these events suggests a government struggling to manage the high expectations of a post-revolutionary population while defending its borders against an expansionist Israel that has reportedly declared the 1974 disengagement agreement null and void. The day's events highlight a fragile transition where **foreign investment**, particularly from Saudi Arabia, is being leveraged as a lifeline against a backdrop of persistent institutional decay and social unrest.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

Presidential Amnesty and Transitional Justice Implementation

- President Ahmed al-Shara issued [Decree 39 of 2026](#), granting a general amnesty for various crimes to reduce prison overcrowding and foster social reintegration.
- The Ministry of Justice clarified that the amnesty excludes **major crimes** and violations against Syrian citizens, focusing instead on reformative justice [and documenting regime crimes](#).
- Efforts are underway to reactivate **Interpol cooperation** to extradite approximately 11,500 "remnants" of the former regime currently residing in Lebanon, Russia, and the UAE [to face trial](#).

Israeli Territorial Expansion in Southern Syria

- Israeli forces have reportedly moved past the 1967 "Blue Line," seizing agricultural land and **establishing military bases** in the Quneitra buffer zone [ignoring previous agreements](#).
- Reports indicate the use of **chemical herbicides** by Israeli aircraft to destroy Syrian crops in Quneitra, causing widespread alarm among local farmers [and environmental damage](#).
- Israel has allegedly declared the 1974 Disengagement Agreement "finished," signaling a permanent shift in the **geopolitical status quo** of the Golan Heights [region](#).

U.S. Mediation and Instability in Suwayda

- A prisoner exchange involving 30 government personnel and 61 civilians is being mediated by **U.S. Envoy Thomas Brac** to de-escalate tensions in Suwayda [between the state and local groups](#).
- Local leadership in Suwayda, including the Al-Atrash family, is navigating a thin line between government integration and the influence of **militant factions** like the "National Guard" [and external actors](#).

Economic Hardship and Strategic Foreign Investment

- Syria and **Saudi Arabia** signed a strategic package worth **\$5.3 billion** focusing on solar energy, infrastructure, and aviation to stimulate the crippled economy [and energy sector](#).

- Ramadan has triggered a **30-50% spike** in food prices, leading to public outcry over the government's "free market" policies and lack of price controls [during the holy month](#).
- Severe shortages of domestic heating gas and electricity continue to plague the population, despite government promises [of imminent relief](#).

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Legal Warfare & Regulatory Risk

- The government is establishing a **National Redress Fund** to compensate victims of the previous regime, a key pillar of its transitional justice [framework](#).
- The Ministry of Justice is purging "remnants" of the old regime from the judicial system to ensure the **impartiality** of new courts [and trials](#).

Critical Infrastructure Security

- Reconstruction efforts are prioritized in Idlib and Hama, including the **rehabilitation of the al-Rashid bridge** and rubble clearing [in liberated zones](#).
- The Ministry of Electricity is banking on the **Saudi solar initiative** to address a 67% deficit in the national power grid [infrastructure](#).

Supply Chain Resilience & Logistics

- Agricultural logistics are hampered by **exorbitant transport costs**, with a single truck trip from Nasib to Deir ez-Zor costing up to \$1,900 [impacting food prices](#).

- The influx of **Turkish flour** is reportedly causing the closure of domestic mills, creating a debate over import protectionism versus market liberalization [strategies](#).

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Paradox of Post-Revolutionary Justice

The administration is currently caught in a "pardon vs. punishment" paradox. While Decree 39 attempts to empty prisons and signal a new era of **mercy**, the population remains traumatized and demands retribution. This tension is epitomized by the public backlash against the TV drama "**The Caesar**," which families of the disappeared claim "commercializes" their suffering and employs actors who previously supported the Assad regime [causing profound social friction](#). Governance is currently a performance of legitimacy, where legal decrees are used to differentiate the new state from the "shameful past."

Israeli Expansion as a Non-Negotiable Reality

A chilling trend is the normalization of Israeli territorial expansion. Unlike previous skirmishes, the current reports describe **structural annexation**: the building of bases, the bulldozing of villages, and the use of chemical agents to clear land in what was once a protected buffer zone [under international law](#). The Syrian government's reaction is notably constrained, relying on diplomatic condemnations at the UN while privately acknowledging that Israel has **unilaterally abandoned** the 1974 disengagement framework [effectively redrawing borders](#).

Economic Desperation vs. Strategic Lifelines

The economic narrative is bifurcated. On the ground, the "Ramadan crisis" shows a population unable to afford basic protein, with meat prices reaching **700,000 SYP per kilo** in some regions [far exceeding average wages](#). Above this, the state is projecting an image of recovery through the **\$5.3 billion Saudi investment package and strategic energy deals**. This suggests a "trickle-down" reconstruction strategy that may take years to reach the average citizen, creating a dangerous gap that could fuel **future civil unrest**.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

Syria's domestic health is precarious. The transition from the "Assad era" to the "Shara era" has left an institutional vacuum currently being filled by **ad-hoc committees** and transitional justice bodies. Partisan polarization is evident in the Suwayda region, where local autonomy movements are resisting central government control, leading to a **fragmented security apparatus** where the U.S. and Jordan act as essential intermediaries [to maintain order](#). Institutional decay is most visible in the judicial and law enforcement sectors, where officials must prove they are not "remnants" of the previous system to retain their mandates [amid widespread purges](#). Public sentiment is shifting toward skepticism as the "revolutionary glow" fades and the reality of a bankrupt, energy-starved state sets in.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

The international system is framed as a **necessary but unreliable** partner. Syria is projecting a posture of "strategic maneuverability," actively seeking re-engagement with the Arab world (Saudi Arabia) and the West (Canada's easing of sanctions) while defending against what it calls "Zionist expansionism" [at the UN](#). The home nation is increasingly acting as a **diplomatic battleground** for US and Israeli interests, with the administration attempting to leverage U.S. mediation in Suwayda to gain broader Western legitimacy. However, the state's global posture is fundamentally defensive; it is reacting to Israeli territorial shocks while trying to secure the "economic lifelines" provided by Gulf [monarchies](#).

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The economic climate is defined by extreme volatility and structural realignment through foreign aid. Capital flows are dominated by the multi-billion dollar Saudi commitment, but these are long-term infrastructure plays that do not mitigate immediate **hyperinflation**. Market sentiment is bearish, as Ramadan spending has hit a ceiling of affordability for most [Syrian families](#).

- **Saudi Investment Package:** \$5.3 billion (approx. 5 billion SDRs) earmarked for solar energy, aviation, and infrastructure [reconstruction](#).
- **Inflation:** Food prices, particularly meat and vegetables, have risen **30-50%** in early Ramadan [across all provinces](#).

- **Logistics Costs:** A \$1,900 transport fee per container from Jordan border to Deir ez-Zor is a major driver of **supply chain friction and commodity costs**.
- **Unemployment:** While not specifically quantified, reports of shuttered factories and "remnants" being purged from the workforce suggest a high **disruption to the labor market** [during the transition](#).

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Personnel shifts are focused on delegitimizing the old regime and professionalizing the new administration under President Shara.

- **President Ahmed al-Shara:** Attempting to solidify a "Father of the Nation" image through **Decree 39** while distancing the presidency from the tactical failures in Quneitra [and Suwayda](#).
- **Minister of Justice (Mazhar Louis):** Emerging as a key enforcer of the transition, overseeing the **purge of regime judges** and the pursuit of overseas criminals [via Interpol](#).
- **Thomas Brac (U.S. Envoy):** Effectively acting as a **shadow governor** or chief mediator in Suwayda, illustrating the high degree of foreign influence in Syrian internal security [management](#).

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

The network maintains a **nationalistic and reassuring** tone, heavily prioritizing the amnesty decree as a sign of state competence. The "Lead Stories" are consistently Decree 39, Saudi investment, and rubble clearing in Idlib—all symbolic of "progress." However, stories regarding **Israeli land seizures** and the **Suwayda prisoner swap** are handled

with visible caution, often framed through the lens of "foreign mediation" or "unprovoked aggression" to minimize perceptions of state weakness. A conspicuous omission is any detailed criticism of the **Ahmed al-Shara administration's failure** to control the Suwayda factions or the lack of a military response to Israeli incursions; these are buried under "diplomatic efforts" and "UN appeals."

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The geopolitical subtext suggests a Syria that is "open for business" with the Arab world but "at war" with Israel, while being "protected" by the U.S. in domestic mediations.

- **Israel:** Portrayed as **chaotic and predatory**. The narrative emphasizes their disregard for international treaties and use of "chemical warfare" (herbicides) against farmers. "Israel has declaring the 1974 agreement dead" [to seize land](#).
- **Saudi Arabia:** Framed as the **stable, principled benefactor**. Their investment is portrayed as a seal of approval for the new government. "The \$5.3 billion deal reflects deep fraternal ties" [and confidence](#).
- **United States:** Portrayed in a **complex, ambivalent** light. They are competent mediators in Suwayda but also facilitators of the "international system" that hasn't fully lifted sanctions. "U.S. Envoy Thomas Brac is central to the swap" [in the south](#).
- **Canada:** Characterized as a **friend** following their decision to lift certain sanctions, signaling a broader Western pivot toward the new regime [under Ahmed al-Shara](#).

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

Information warfare is currently localized in the **media-victimhood complex**. The government is using the launch of "Al-Suriyah" and strategic news loops to seed a narrative of "rebirth" and "justice." Conversely, families of victims are weaponizing social media to protest "The Caesar" drama, creating a **competing meta-narrative** that the revolution's values are being sold out for television ratings [and political optics](#). The meta-narrative of "Assad remnants" being a persistent threat is used by the state to justify purges and maintain emergency-like security measures despite the official transition [to civil law](#).

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Suwayda Sovereignty Crisis:** If the U.S.-mediated swaps do not lead to full integration, Suwayda could become a **permanent autonomous zone** or a spark for wider southern unrest as local groups seek greater leverage from the weakened center.
- **Israeli Annexation Escalation:** The move past the "Blue Line" is likely the first stage of a **permanent security zone** creation. Israel may seek to formalize a "new reality" in the Golan Heights before the Syrian government can fully rebuild its military [infrastructure](#).
- **Economic Tipping Point:** If the Saudi-funded energy projects do not show tangible results within six months, the Ramadan price shocks could transform into **bread riots** or mass protests against the "new" regime's perceived incompetence [and corruption](#).

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Anticipate a wave of **amnesty-related arrests** of those not covered by Decree 39, likely regime hardliners. Social friction will peak as "The Caesar" drama continues its Ramadan run. Expect further **small-scale Israeli advances** in Quneitra as they test Syrian and UN resolve.

Medium Term (1-6 Months): The first **extradition trials** of regime remnants from Lebanon or Jordan will serve as high-profile media events to bolster Shara's legitimacy. Foreign investment from the Saudi deal will begin flowing into **solar grid construction**, potentially easing fuel shortages by late summer.

Long Term (1-5 Years): Syria will likely become a **de-facto confederation** with significant autonomous zones in Suwayda and the north. Israel will likely maintain its new bases in Quneitra, creating a **permanent border shift** that international bodies will eventually recognize as a "frozen conflict" zone.

RISK ASSESSMENT

- **Southern Border Annexation:** High risk of Israel permanently seizing the Quneitra buffer zone. **Triggers:** Continued Syrian military weakness and declaration of the 1974 agreement as void. **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** Permanent loss of territory and strategic height. **Mitigations:** Urgent Russian or U.S. intervention to re-establish the disengagement [framework](#).

- **Hyperinflationary Collapse:** Risk of food shortages triggering mass civil unrest. **Triggers:** Failure of Ramadan price controls and fuel scarcity. **Likelihood:** Medium-High. **Impact:** Loss of government mandate and humanitarian crisis. **Mitigations:** Immediate emergency subsidies or expansion of the **National Redress Fund** to cover food costs [for the poor](#).
- **Failed Suwayda Mediation:** Risk of localized conflict between government and Hegari-led factions. **Triggers:** Collapse of the Brac-mediated swaps. **Likelihood:** Medium. **Impact:** Displacement of thousands and southern front destabilization. **Mitigations:** Formalizing **local autonomy** within a new constitutional framework [for Suwayda](#).
- **Institutional Remnant Sabotage:** Risk of "Assad era" loyalists sabotaging the new administration from within. **Triggers:** Purges of the judiciary and security lists. **Likelihood:** Medium. **Impact:** Assassinations or "deep state" blockage of reform. **Mitigations:** Accelerated vetting and **international monitoring** of the purge process [by the Ministry of Justice](#).
- **Environmental/Chemical Incident:** Escalation from Israeli herbicide use to more lethal agents or total crop destruction. **Triggers:** Israeli efforts to create a "no-man's land." **Likelihood:** Low-Medium. **Impact:** Long-term agricultural failure and border starvation. **Mitigations:** Deployment of UN agricultural **monitoring teams** in Quneitra [to document violations](#).

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- **Military Status:** There is zero mention of the actual **operational capacity** of the Syrian army to counter Israeli advances; the focus is exclusively on diplomatic appeals.
- **Russian Role:** Despite historically being a key player, **Russia's stance** on the current Israeli incursions or the Saudi pivot is largely ignored in the broadcasts.
- **Currency Data:** While meat and bread prices are quoted in millions, the **official exchange rate** and its stability are conspicuously absent from the economic segments.
- **Opposition in Suwayda:** The perspective of the **Hegari/National Guard factions** is filtered entirely through government terminology ("gangs," "militants"), leaving their actual demands unclear.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

- **The Amnesty as a Strategic Purge:** Decree 39 is not a gesture of mercy but a calculated effort to **clear the "fish" (security lists)** to identify and then systematically eliminate regime hardliners who remain in the country, using "transitional justice" as a cover for a political purge.
- **Saudi Investment as a Debt Trap:** The \$5.3 billion package is not a lifeline but a **sovereignty exchange**, where Syria's energy and aviation infrastructure is being pawned to Riyadh in exchange for political backing against both Iran and Israel.

- **Black Swan - Israeli-Syrian Buffer State:** Israel's incursions may be a prelude to supporting a **breakaway Druze state** in the south (Suwayda/Quneitra), creating a permanent Zionist-aligned buffer zone that partitions Syria forever.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- **Security:** Immediately deploy civil defense units to Quneitra to counter herbicide impacts while avoiding direct military confrontation with Israel to prevent **total war**.
- **Economic:** Pivot from "free market" rhetoric to **emergency price controls** for the remainder of Ramadan to avoid a legitimacy-ending revolt.
- **Diplomatic:** Use the Canadian opening to push for a broader **reconstruction-for-reform** deal with the EU, leveraging the Saudi investment as a proof-of-concept.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chain:** High regulatory risk in the **flour and milling sector** as the government debates protectionist measures against Turkish imports.
- **Capital Allocation:** Opportunities exist in **solar and renewable energy** sub-contracting linked to the Saudi initiative, provided firms have robust vetting to avoid "remnant" sanctions.
- **Safety Standards:** Firms operating in southern Syria must prepare for **disruptive Israeli herbicide spraying**, impacting all agricultural and outdoor operations in the Quneitra-Suwayda corridor.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Legislative activity is centered on Decree 39 and the establishment of transitional justice bodies, which are being fast-tracked without the prior formation of a parliament, using "public interest" as a legal [justification](#).

- **BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:**

- **Decree 39 of 2026 (General Amnesty):** Pardons minor crimes and misdemeanors to promote reconciliation; excludes major regime crimes [and personal rights violations](#).
- **National Redress Fund Legislation:** Proposed law to allocate state and seized funds for victim compensation [and psychological support](#).

- **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:**

- **Ministry of Justice Press Conference:** Detail on the pursuit of 11,500 regime criminals through **Interpol and bilateral treaties** [with Lebanon and UAE](#).
- **Saudi-Syrian Investment Forum:** Formalization of **\$5.3 billion in strategic contracts** for energy and transport [sectors](#).

KEY STORIES

- **Presidential Decree 39 Issued:** A general amnesty pardoning minor crimes to ease prison conditions and aid national **reconciliation** [under Ahmed al-Shara](#).
- **Israeli Advances in Quneitra:** IDF forces cross the 1967 line, bulldoze land, and build **permanent military bases** while declaring the 1974 pact dead [and utilizing herbicides](#).

- **Saudi Strategic Deal:** A \$5.3 billion investment package signed in Damascus covering **solar power, aviation, and reconstruction milestones**.
- **U.S. Mediation in Suwayda:** U.S. Envoy Thomas Brac negotiates a complex **prisoner swap** between the Shara government and Suwayda local defense forces [to prevent escalation](#).
- **"The Caesar" Drama Backlash:** Families of the disappeared protest a new TV series depicting **regime torture**, alleging it exploits their pain for profit [and political gain](#).
- **Idlib Rubble Removal:** Large-scale operation in Idlib and Raqqa to clear debris and **repair critical bridges** as part of the "reconstruction phase" [led by the state](#).
- **Ramadan Price Crisis:** Massive inflation in Hama and Damascus as **meat prices hit 700k SYP**, sparking a debate on market intervention [and state subsidies](#).
- **Interpol Extradition Effort:** Syrian Ministry of Justice initiates files for **11,500 former regime officials** currently hiding in neighboring countries [to face new courts](#).
- **Canada Sanctions Shift:** Canadian government decides to lift certain **financial and medical sanctions** to support the Shara government's recovery [process](#).
- **Suwayda Mediation Incident:** Protests in Suwayda over the **kidnapping of local leaders** by the Hegari-aligned "National Guard," further complicating peace talks [with Damascus](#).

- **Rania al-Abassi Children Controversy:** A viral video claiming to show the children of disappeared **Dr. Rania al-Abassi** is debunked by families, highlighting the ongoing trauma of the missing [in the post-war era](#).
- **Turkish Flour vs. Local Mills:** Aleppo mills shut down as **cheap Turkish imports** saturate the market, prompting calls for protectionist industrial [policies](#).

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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