

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

PRESSTV

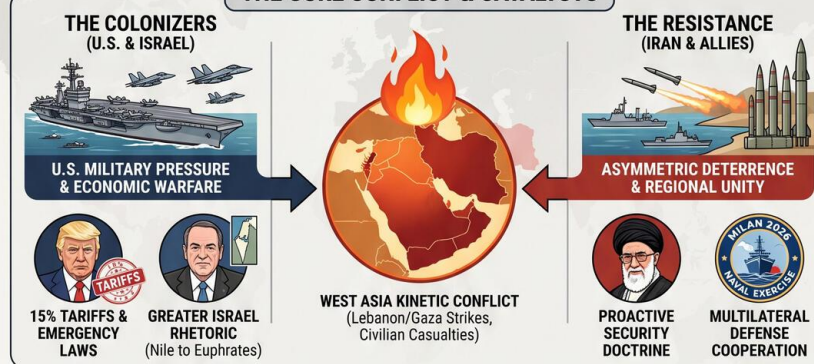
FEBRUARY 21, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

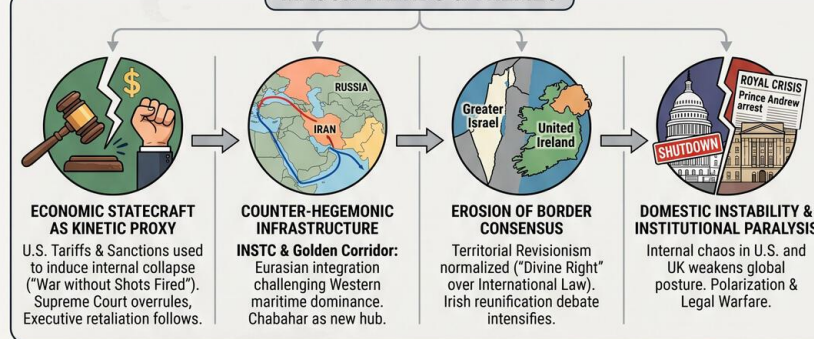
CENTRALIZED ESCALATION IN WEST ASIA AMID U.S. ECONOMIC HEGEMONY CHALLENGES AND REGIONAL ALLIANCE SHIFTS

February 2026: A World on the Brink - Key Themes, Trends, and Forecasts from the Report

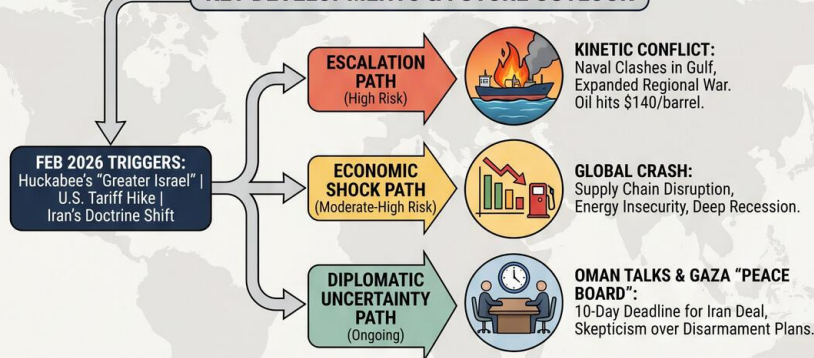
THE CORE CONFLICT & CATALYSTS



MAJOR TRENDS & THEMES



KEY DEVELOPMENTS & FUTURE OUTLOOK



STRATEGIC FORESIGHT & CONCLUSION:

A **Bifurcated Global Order** emerges. The era of unquestioned U.S. hegemony is fracturing amidst energy volatility, weaponized trade, and the rise of Eurasian integration. The risk of unintended, catastrophic conflict is at its peak, driven by performative rhetoric and structural shifts. The world is at a crossroads between managed decline and open warfare.

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DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

The reporting cycle of February 21, 2026, is dominated by a sharp escalation in West Asian tensions, driven by provocative diplomatic rhetoric regarding "Greater Israel" and a hardening of Iranian security doctrine. A significant catalyst is the public endorsement by U.S. Ambassador Mike Huckabee of Israeli territorial expansion from the [Nile to the Euphrates](#), a statement that has unified regional actors in condemnation and fueled a narrative of "unmasked" Zionist expansionism. This diplomatic friction coincides with intense kinetic activity, as Israeli air strikes on [southern and eastern Lebanon](#) continue to inflict high civilian casualties, further destabilizing the 2024 ceasefire agreement.

Simultaneously, the U.S. domestic environment is portrayed in a state of institutional conflict and economic volatility. President Donald Trump has actively challenged a Supreme Court ruling that struck down his [global tariffs](#), immediately

retaliating by raising duties to 15% and invoking emergency trade laws. This move, combined with a 10-day ultimatum issued to Iran to reach a [nuclear deal](#), suggests an administration leveraging high-stakes economic and military pressure to secure foreign policy outcomes. The broadcast frames this as "economic statecraft" aimed at inducing internal collapse within adversary nations, particularly Iran.

In the background, a structural shift toward a multipolar order is evident through the promotion of the [International North-South Transport Corridor \(INSTC\)](#). Iran is positioning itself as a central logistics hub for Eurasia, specifically through the ports of Chabahar and Bandar Abbas, as a strategic counter to Western maritime dominance. This infrastructure push, combined with the [Milan 2026](#) naval exercises involving Russia and Saudi Arabia, signals a deepening of regional security cooperation that seeks to render U.S. military presence in the region "unjustified."

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

The "Greater Israel" Diplomatic Firestorm

- U.S. Ambassador Mike Huckabee endorsed a vision of Israel spanning from the Nile to the Euphrates, prompting [widespread condemnation](#) across the Arab world.
- The Palestinian Foreign Ministry characterized the remarks as a direct call to [violate state sovereignty](#) and support ethnic cleansing.
- Analysts link this rhetoric to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's "New Middle East" map presented at the UN, which [erased Palestine](#).

U.S. Trade Wars and Constitutional Crisis

- The U.S. Supreme Court struck down global tariffs, ruling that President Trump [overstepped his authority](#) under the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act.
- Trump immediately circumvented the ruling by [increasing tariffs to 15%](#) and invoking Section 122 of the 1974 Trade Act.
- The administration claims these measures are necessary for "economic statecraft" to pressure rivals like [Iran into submission](#).

Iranian Security Doctrine and Nuclear Negotiations

- Iran denies that the U.S. has demanded [zero enrichment](#) in current Oman-mediated talks, though a 10-day deadline from Trump looms.
- Tehran has reportedly shifted its doctrine toward [preemptive and proactive](#) military strategies in response to threats.
- Iran designated all [EU air and naval forces](#) as terrorist organizations in a "tit-for-tat" move following EU actions against the IRGC.

Global Infrastructure and Multipolarity

- Iran is accelerating the [Golden Corridor](#) project, connecting India to Russia through Iranian rail and port networks.
- The port of [Chabahar](#) is being developed as a "maritime capital" to facilitate trade for landlocked Central Asian states.
- The [Milan 2026](#) exercise highlights growing naval cooperation between Iran, Russia, and Saudi Arabia.

The Gaza "Board of Peace" and Regional Resistance

- The U.S.-led "Board of Peace" is criticized by Palestinian and Pakistani opposition groups as a [disarmament trap](#) rather than a reconstruction plan.
- Pakistan faces [domestic backlash](#) for participating in the Washington session, with critics fearing it undermines support for Palestinian resistance.
- Resistance groups in Gaza and Lebanon maintain that weapons are [tied to the occupation's existence](#) and will not be surrendered.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization

- Ongoing Israeli air strikes in Lebanon, targeting areas like the [Bekaa Valley](#) and refugee camps, have caused over 370 deaths since the 2024 agreement.
- The U.S. has conducted [43 attacks](#) against vessels in the Eastern Pacific since September 2025, resulting in 148 deaths under the guise of narcotics interdiction.

Diplomacy & Statecraft

- The "Oman Mediator" talks remain the primary channel for U.S.-Iran nuclear discussions, with Iran expected to submit a [draft deal](#) within days.
- The Good Friday Agreement and the right to [self-determination](#) are central to the debate over Irish reunification, fueled by post-Brexit economic realities.

Energy & Critical Minerals

- The potential closure of the [Strait of Hormuz](#) is identified as a systemic risk, with 20% of global oil and 1/5th of LNG passing through the waterway.
- Hungary has threatened to block a [90 billion euro loan](#) to Ukraine unless the Druzhba pipeline is reopened.

Legal Warfare & Regulatory Risk

- A complaint was filed with the ICC accusing [FIFA and UEFA presidents](#) of aiding war crimes by allowing Israeli clubs to compete in settlements.
- A British court granted bail to the [Filton 24](#), with judges ruling that the "prescription" of Palestine Action was a disproportionate attack on free speech.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

Economic Statecraft as Kinetic Proxy

The U.S. administration is increasingly using **unilateral economic measures** to achieve objectives traditionally reserved for military intervention. U.S. Treasury Secretary Bessent reportedly admitted that the U.S. [crushed the Iranian economy](#) to trigger domestic protests, framing it as "economic statecraft" without "shots fired." This trend toward total economic warfare is mirrored in the rapid re-imposition of tariffs following judicial setbacks, indicating a policy where the economy is the primary theater of battle.

The Erosion of the Post-War Border Consensus

A recurring theme is the **normalization of territorial revisionism**. From the "Greater Israel" rhetoric to the "de facto annexation" of

the [West Bank](#), and even historical analysis of the partitioning of Ireland and Indonesia, the broadcast suggests that internationally recognized borders are increasingly subject to the "divine right" or "geopolitical necessity" of major powers. This trend creates a "frontier narrative" where international law is secondary to established facts on the ground.

Counter-Hegemonic Infrastructure Development

A strategic pivot toward **Eurasian integration** is being built through hard infrastructure. The Golden Corridor and the INSTC are presented not just as trade routes, but as a "gateway between dreams and power" that connects China, Russia, and India through [Iranian territory](#). This represents a long-term structural threat to Western-dominated maritime corridors like the Suez Canal and the Strait of Malacca.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

United States: Institutional Paralysis

- The U.S. government is described as [completely dysfunctional](#), with a shutdown reportedly causing confusion at major airports.
- Intense polarization between the executive and the judiciary is evident in the tariff battle, while "campaign paymasters" like [Miriam Adelson](#) are accused of steering foreign policy.

United Kingdom: Royal and Constitutional Crisis

- The arrest of [Prince Andrew](#) (Andrew Mountbatten) on suspicion of misconduct in public office and ties to Jeffrey Epstein is framed as a potential "scapegoat" move to protect broader elite networks.
- In Northern Ireland, the election of a Republican first minister and the [limbo of the executive](#) have pushed the debate over Irish unity into a critical phase, with demographic changes favoring a nationalist majority.

Iran: Resistance through Unity

- President Pazeshkian emphasizes [national unity and solidarity](#) as the key to overcoming global pressure.
- The 47th anniversary of the [Islamic Revolution](#) is portrayed as a massive show of public support that undermines U.S. hopes for regime change.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

The international system is framed as a **bifurcated arena** between "The Resistance" (led by Iran and its allies) and "The Colonizers" (U.S. and Israel). The U.S. global posture is characterized as a "crashing empire" asserting itself through [crude force and coercion](#). In contrast, Iran's posture is portrayed as "proactive deterrence," seeking to build a [multilateral world](#) where regional states manage their own security. The Milan 2026 exercises serve as a symbolic rejection of extra-regional interference, specifically arguing that the security of the [Indian Ocean](#) should be in the hands of its littoral states.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The global economic environment is characterized by **energy insecurity and weaponized trade policy**. The U.S. administration's use of tariffs and economic sanctions has disrupted traditional supply chains, while European nations face a "prolonged energy crisis" as interest shifts from [Washington toward Beijing](#). Financial markets are increasingly sensitive to the risk of an "all-out war" that could trigger a global crash.

Key Economic Vectors

- **Energy Volatility:** Predictions suggest oil could hit [\\$140 per barrel](#) if kinetic conflict occurs in the Persian Gulf.
- **Tariff Escalation:** Trump's 15% tariff is a significant jump from the previous [10% duty](#), threatening to increase consumer costs within the U.S.
- **Defense Spending:** The U.S. Department of Defense was reportedly funded to the tune of [\\$900 billion](#) to support regional war efforts.
- **Logistics Shifts:** The INSTC offers a 20-day transit from [St. Petersburg to Bandar Abbas](#), half the time of the Suez Canal route.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Strategic personnel shifts in this cycle are dominated by the degradation of traditional institutional power in the West and the rise of nationalist leaders in the East.

- **Andrew Mountbatten (Prince Andrew):** Arrested and potentially removed from the [royal line of succession](#), signaling a major blow to the British monarchy's prestige.

- **Mike Huckabee:** As U.S. Ambassador, his "Greater Israel" rhetoric signals a [new level of American arrogance](#) and a departure from even nominal support for a two-state solution.
- **Masarol Pazan (Iranian President):** Reasserts control by emphasizing [safeguarding the nation's dignity](#) amid paralympic ceremonies, positioning himself as a leader of "steadfastness."
- **Michelle O'Neal:** Her position as [First Minister](#) in Northern Ireland is framed as a historic victory for Irish nationalism and a sign of terminal unionist decline.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

The editorial hierarchy gives **maximum prominence** to stories that highlight U.S./Israeli aggression and "Zionist expansionism." The "Greater Israel" comments were the lead story in multiple bulletins, used to discredit Western claims of seeking regional peace. Kinetic reports from Lebanon and Gaza are presented with high emotional weight, often through [individual survivor narratives](#), to frame the conflict as "systematic genocide." Economic stories focus on the self-inflicted wounds of Western sanctions and the benefits of Eurasian integration.

Buried Stories include the specifics of internal Iranian dissent, which are dismissed as [CIA/Mossad-funded](#) operations.

Conspicuous Omissions include any analysis of the security concerns driving Israeli policy or a balanced view of the U.S. legal arguments for the "Board of Peace" in Gaza. The reporting is heavily nationalistic and positions the "Resistance" as the only rational actor in an irrational global landscape.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The reporting portrays a global struggle between a decaying, corrupt Western hegemon and a rising, principled regional resistance.

COUNTRIES

- **Iran:** Portrayed as strong, principled, and a hub of stability. Quote: "Iran is no longer just a transit country, he has become a [player, root designer](#), an indispensable partner."
- **United States:** Portrayed as chaotic, aggressive, and corrupt. Quote: "The U.S. is a [crashing empire](#) crashing down and it's asserting its position by force."
- **Israel:** Portrayed as an expansionist "Zionist entity" devoid of legal or moral standing. Quote: "The regime has [biblical right](#) to the land stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates."
- **United Kingdom:** Portrayed as an "old colonizer" struggling with internal collapse and historical legacies. Quote: "Ireland was the British Empire's [first imperial colonial project](#)."

LEADERS

- **Donald Trump:** Portrayed as a "delusional partner" to Netanyahu, a "warmonger," and a compromised leader. Quote: "Trump increasingly [speaks like mafia done](#), to persuade Iran."
- **Ayatollah Khamenei:** Portrayed as a wise, fearless, and spiritually grounded leader. Quote: "Actions reflect the [teachings the divine prophets](#)."

- **Benjamin Netanyahu:** Portrayed as an extremist pursuing a "historical and spiritual mission" of conquest. Quote: "Netanyahu told Israeli media he [absolutely subscribed](#) to the Greater Israel vision."

NON-STATE ACTORS

- **Hamas/Hezbollah:** Framed as legitimate "resistance movements" defending sovereignty. Quote: "The [Hisbullah Resistance movement](#) has confirmed eight the victims were its fighters."
- **Palestine Action:** Portrayed as heroic kids fighting genocide. Quote: "Public understand that there is genocide... rather vote against this government's actions than to [prosecute a group of kids](#)."

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

The media environment is a battlefield of **competing historical narratives**. The broadcast uses "declassified" documents (e.g., [CIA in Indonesia](#)) and "Epstein files" to delegitimize Western institutions. The "Greater Israel" narrative is seeded as a verified strategic plan to mobilize regional anger. Conversely, Western media is accused of "narrative manipulation" by focusing on [Iranian reactions](#) rather than the initial provocations. The use of terms like "Norwegian concept" (Orwellian) to describe the [Gaza Peace Plan](#) ("war as peace") highlights the active framing of U.S. diplomacy as a form of psychological warfare.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Escalation of Kinetic Conflict:** Given the shift to a proactive security doctrine and the [threat of sinking ships](#), a naval engagement in the Persian Gulf or an Israeli strike on Iran is a high-probability hypothesis.
- **U.S. Constitutional Crisis:** The open defiance of Supreme Court rulings on [tariffs](#) suggests the Trump administration will continue to test executive limits, potentially leading to further impeachment efforts.
- **The End of "Greater Israel" Deniability:** The Huckabee comments may have permanently ended the era of U.S. "balanced" mediation, forcing Arab states to pivot more sharply toward a [Sino-Russian axis](#) for security guarantees.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks)

- The expiration of the [10-day ultimatum](#) to Iran will likely trigger fresh U.S. kinetic or severe economic actions.
- The bail hearing for the [Filton 24](#) will likely become a focal point for massive pro-Palestine civil unrest in the UK.

Medium Term (1-6 Months)

- The [mid-term elections](#) in the U.S. will drive even more aggressive rhetoric as Trump seeks an "overwhelming majority."
- The [Milan 2026](#) exercise will likely formalize new maritime security agreements between Iran, Russia, and Saudi Arabia.

Long Term (1-5 Years)

- The full operationalization of the [North-South Transport Corridor](#) will structurally decouple Eurasian trade from Western-controlled routes.
- The "Greater Israel" push could lead to a [regional war](#) that fundamentally redraws the map of West Asia, as warned by regional analysts.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The current risk matrix is dominated by systemic geopolitical flashpoints and the potential for a "Black Swan" economic event.

- **Regional War Escalation:** A direct strike on Iran or an expanded invasion of Lebanon could trigger a multi-front conflict. **Triggers:** Expiration of nuclear ultimatum; assassination of [top Iranian leaders](#). **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** Catastrophic (humanitarian/economic). **Mitigations:** Successful Oman-mediated diplomacy.
- **Global Economic Crash:** Closure of the Strait of Hormuz causing oil to hit \$140/barrel. **Triggers:** Naval skirmishes in the Gulf; Iranian [retaliation for strikes](#). **Likelihood:** Moderate-High. **Impact:** Global recession. **Mitigations:** Strategic oil reserves release; maritime corridors protection.
- **U.S. Internal Destabilization:** Widespread civil unrest or paramilitary raids on [American streets](#) amid government dysfunction. **Triggers:** Government shutdown extension; legal battles over tariffs. **Likelihood:** Moderate. **Impact:** Severe (loss of state capacity). **Mitigations:** Legislative compromise on budget.

- **British Monarchy Collapse:** The Epstein files causing a terminal loss of public trust in the Royal Family. **Triggers:** New revelations of [misconduct by Andrew](#) or other royals. **Likelihood:** Moderate. **Impact:** Constitutional crisis in the UK. **Mitigations:** Rapid removal of Andrew from succession.
- **European Energy Supply Shock:** Permanent cutoff of Russian gas through Ukraine/Slovakia. **Triggers:** Ukraine refusing to reopen [Russian pipeline](#); Hungary blocking loans. **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** Severe (industrial shutdown in Europe). **Mitigations:** New LNG terminal completion.

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- **Israeli Domestic Reaction:** The broadcast fails to cover the internal Israeli debate regarding the "Greater Israel" comments, which may be more contentious than portrayed.
- **Iranian Economic Resilience:** While the U.S. claims to have "crushed" the economy, the broadcast ignores the specific [coping mechanisms](#) or black-market networks allowing the state to function.
- **Huckabee Statement Verification:** There is no independent confirmation that Huckabee's "Nile to Euphrates" comment represents **official U.S. policy** rather than hyperbolic personal rhetoric.
- **Gaza Reconstruction Fund Detail:** The source of the [\\$7 billion](#) pledged by "nine other countries" is not specified, leaving the legitimacy of the "Board of Peace" unclear.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

The "Managed Escalation" Hypothesis

Rather than an "accidental" slide into war, the current rhetoric from both Trump and Iran could be a highly choreographed **negotiating tactic**. The 10-day ultimatum and the proactive security doctrine may be designed to force a "win-win" deal in Oman that allows both leaders to save face before domestic audiences. A "Black Swan" event here would be an **accidental engagement** by low-level naval commanders that triggers the very war both leaders are trying to use as leverage.

The "Distraction" Hypothesis

The arrest of [Prince Andrew](#) and the "Greater Israel" firestorm might be a coordinated "dead cat" strategy to divert global attention from a looming **sovereign debt crisis** in major Western economies. By keeping the news cycle focused on royal scandals and "biblical" wars, elites may be buying time for a major currency reset.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- Prioritize the **neutralization of maritime flashpoints** in the Persian Gulf to prevent oil price spikes.
- Engage in **track-two diplomacy** with regional actors to clarify the "Greater Israel" rhetoric and prevent the collapse of normalization agreements.
- Prepare for **renewed refugee waves** from Lebanon if Israeli air strikes transition into ground incursions.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chain Diversification:** Reduce reliance on transit through the Strait of Hormuz and explore [INSTC alternatives](#).
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Audit trade operations for exposure to the new [15% U.S. global tariffs](#) and secondary sanctions against Iranian entities.
- **Risk Hedging:** Increase exposure to energy and critical mineral assets that are geographically removed from West Asian flashpoints.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Legislative activity centers on the weaponization of trade and the legal defense of protest rights.

• BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **U.S. 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act:** Misused to justify broad [tariffs](#); struck down by the Supreme Court but circumvented by the executive.
- **U.S. Section 122 of the 1974 Trade Act:** Invoked to impose [temporary 150-day tariffs](#) to bypass judicial rulings.
- **UK Occupied Territories Bill:** Proposed to ban businesses from operating in [occupied Palestinian lands](#); supported by 170 civil society groups.
- **HR7006 (U.S.):** A funding bill that reportedly gave [\\$900 billion](#) to the Department of Defense for regional conflict escalation.

- **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:**
 - **Oman Mediator Talks:** Ongoing sessions regarding [Iran's nuclear program](#) and potential draft deals.
 - **Gaza Board of Peace (Washington):** Attended by Pakistan's PM and U.S. leaders; focused on [disarmament-for-reconstruction](#).

KEY STORIES

- **Huckabee's "Greater Israel" Endorsement:** U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee endorsed the [biblical claim](#) to land from the Nile to the Euphrates, causing a regional diplomatic crisis.
- **U.S. Supreme Court Tariff Ruling:** The court struck down Trump's [global tariffs](#), leading to an immediate 15% increase and invocation of emergency trade laws.
- **Lebanon Massacre:** Israeli air strikes on southern and eastern Lebanon killed at least 12 people and [injured 30 others](#) on a single Friday evening.
- **Prince Andrew Arrest:** Andrew Mountbatten arrested at [Sandringham](#) over misconduct in public office and Epstein-related files.
- **Filton 24 Victory:** Pro-Palestine activists [granted bail](#) in the UK after a high court judge ruled their "terrorism" label was unlawful.
- **Milan 2026 Naval Exercise:** Over [70 countries](#) participating in a biannual exercise in Visakhapatnam, India, focused on collective maritime security.
- **INSTC Infrastructure Push:** Iranian and Indian navies cooperate to secure the [Indian Ocean](#) trade routes for the North-South corridor.
- **Oman Nuclear Negotiations:** Iran's Abbas Arakchi revealed a [draft deal](#) is being presented to the U.S. to ensure a peaceful nuclear program.
- **Pakistani Unrest over Gaza Plan:** PM Shehbaz Sharif faces [backlash](#) for participating in the U.S.-led "Board of Peace" for Gaza.
- **Druzhba Pipeline Threat:** Hungary's Victor Orban threatens to block EU loans to Ukraine unless [oil flows](#) are restored.
- **ICC FIFA/UEFA Complaint:** Accusations that football associations are [aiding war crimes](#) by allowing Israeli settlement clubs to participate.
- **Iranian Security Doctrine Shift:** Reports of Iran moving from a [defensive to a proactive](#) military posture.
- **Dublin and Paris Protests:** Thousands rally against ["Israeli genocide" and demand government accountability in major European capitals](#).
- **Najwa Survivor Narrative:** [A Palestinian woman survives being buried under rubble for a month](#), highlighting the human cost of the conflict.
- **Afro-Asian Conference History:** Documentary analysis of CIA [coups in Indonesia](#) used to contextualize current U.S. policy.
- **Gaza "Board of Peace" Details:** A 12-point plan promising [reconstruction in exchange for disarmament](#) of resistance groups.
- **Irish Reunification Debate:** Focus on the [economic and demographic](#) drivers of a United Ireland post-Brexit.
- **EU Forces Terrorist Designation:** Iran labels EU air/naval forces as terrorists in [retaliatory move](#).

- **Epstein File Releases:** Allegations that [confidential commercial info](#) was leaked to Epstein by royal members.
- **Chabahar Port Expansion:** Strategic positioning of Chabahar as the "[maritime capital](#)" of the Golden Corridor.

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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