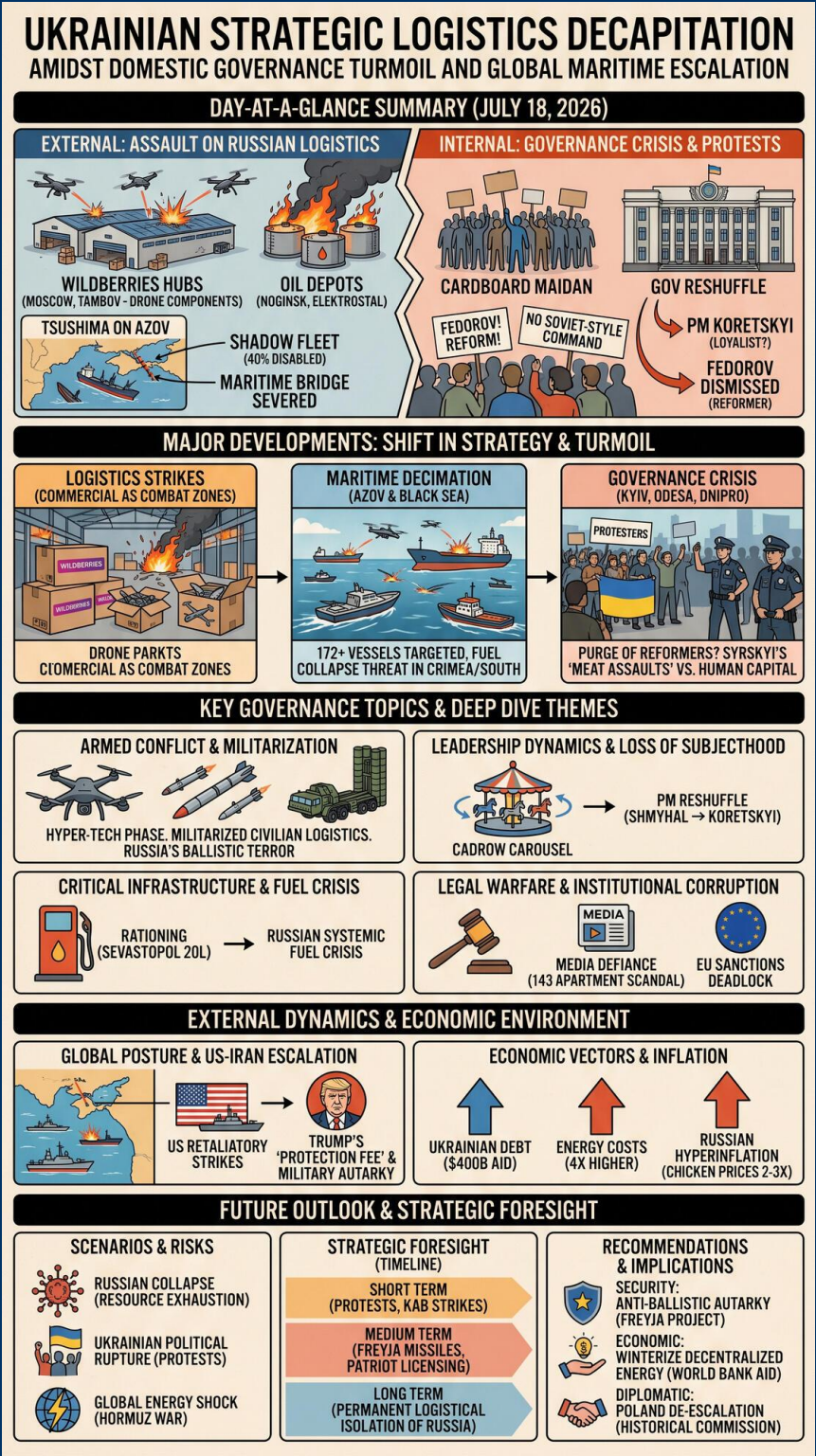


TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

ESPRESSO

JULY 18, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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UKRAINIAN STRATEGIC LOGISTICS
DECAPITATION AMIDST DOMESTIC
GOVERNANCE TURMOIL AND
GLOBAL MARITIME ESCALATION

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

July 18, 2026, marked a significant shift in Ukrainian military strategy, transitioning from a focus on oil refineries to a broad-spectrum **assault on Russian logistics**. The striking of Wildberries warehouses in Moscow and Tambov—hubs previously ignored but now identified as critical conduits for **dual-use drone components**—demonstrates a new intent to paralyze the Russian military-industrial complex at its distribution points. Simultaneously, the "Tsushima on Azov" operation has reportedly **disabled up to 40% of Russia's shadow tanker fleet**, threatening to induce a total fuel collapse in occupied Crimea and southern Russia. This military assertiveness is designed to exacerbate mounting Russian internal instability, characterized by fuel rationing in Sevastopol and a burgeoning "Internal Smut" (internal strife) among Kremlin elites.

However, these tactical successes are contrasted by **intense domestic political**

instability within Ukraine. The dismissal of popular Digital Transformation and Defense reformer **Mikhailo Fedorov** has triggered a "Cardboard Maidan" of protests, signaling a widening chasm between the presidency and a civil society weary of "Soviet-style" military command under General Syrskyi. This governance crisis, involving a **rapid PM reshuffle** and the elevation of Serhiy Koretskyi, suggests internal factional struggles that could undermine the very systemic efficiency Fedorov came to represent. Globally, the re-ignition of **hostilities between the US and Iran** in the Hormuz Strait and stalled EU sanctions packages indicate a fracturing international order where local conflicts are increasingly weaponized for broader geopolitical leverage.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Strategic Logistics Strikes:** Ukrainian forces targeted massive **Wildberries distribution centers** in the Moscow and Tambov regions, identifying them as primary hubs for [sanctioned drone components](#) and dual-use electronics. Combined with hits on oil depots in Noginsk and Elektrostal, this represents a deliberate effort to **cripple the Russian military-industrial complex** by striking distribution and storage rather than just production [logistics warehouses](#).
- **Maritime Decimation ("Tsushima on Azov"):** A coordinated drone campaign in the Sea of Azov and Black Sea has targeted over **172 Russian vessels** in two weeks, specifically focusing on the shadow fleet of tankers and tugs. Analysts claim **40% of the small tanker fleet** is now disabled, effectively severing the maritime bridge to Crimea and southern military groupings [shadow fleet decimation](#).

- **Ukrainian Governance Crisis:** The dismissal of Mikhaïlo Fedorov has sparked civilian protests in Kyiv, Odesa, and Dnipro. Critics and protesters view the move as a **purge of харизматичний (charismatic) reformers** in favor of loyalists like General Syrskyi, who is increasingly characterized as a **Soviet-style commander** who prioritizes "meat assaults" over human capital [Cardboard Maidan reactions](#).
- **Middle East Conflict Re-ignition:** The US-Iran maritime truce has collapsed following Iranian strikes on three commercial vessels. The resulting **US retaliatory strikes** on Iranian drone and missile sites have effectively ended negotiations for a final peace deal, with Donald Trump reportedly demanding a **20% "protection fee"** for commercial shipping in the Hormuz Strait [Hormuz Strait escalation](#).
- **Institutional Corruption Defiance:** Eight independent Ukrainian media outlets defied a Pecherksy Court ban to report on DBR (State Bureau of Investigation) head Sukhachov's brother, who allegedly purchased **143 luxury apartments** at a fraction of their market value. This act of **journalistic solidarity** highlights a growing resistance to judicial censorship [143 apartment scandal](#).

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization The war is entering a hyper-technological phase where **automated drones** and long-range precision strikes (e.g., the Freyja and Flamingo missiles) are becoming the primary strategic tools. Russia is retaliating with **S-400 missiles in ballistic modes** and KAB gliding bombs to terrorize border cities like Sumy and Odesa [S-400 ballistic usage](#). Militarization of

civilian logistics (Wildberries) has turned commercial hubs into legitimate military targets [logistics militarization](#).

Leadership Dynamics & Governance Ukraine's executive branch is under fire for "institutional instability." The **rapid replacement of the Prime Minister** (Denys Shmyhal replaced by Serhiy Korytskiy) and the sidelining of European Integration leads like Taras Kachka are viewed as "television season" politics rather than strategic governance [PM reshuffle logic](#). The concentration of power in the Office of the President is causing a **loss of governmental subjecthood** among ministers [loss of subjecthood](#).

Critical Infrastructure & Energy Security Russia is facing a **systemic fuel crisis**, with rationing in Sevastopol (20L per car) and threats of water shortages. This is a direct consequence of Ukrainian strikes on refineries and the shadow fleet [Russian fuel rationing](#). Ukraine remains dependent on **EU/US energy aid** to survive the upcoming winter as Russia prepares to target power stations again [winter energy threats](#).

Legal Warfare & Regulatory Risk The EU's **21st sanctions package** is currently deadlocked. Austria is demanding the removal of Raiffeisen-linked entities from sanctions lists, while Greece is protecting its maritime shipping interests in Russian oil [sanctions deadlock](#). Within Ukraine, the use of **court-ordered reporting bans** on corruption cases suggests an "autocratic drift" that civil society is currently contesting [media censorship attempts](#).

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Logistics of War: Commercial Hubs as Combat Zones The targeting of Wildberries is the culmination of a narrative that **entire national economies** in a total war are military-industrial complexes. Espresso commentators argue that every Russian purchase, even a tram ticket, supports the "aggression machine" [tram ticket narrative](#). The erasure of the distinction between civilian and military logistics is a primary trend, forcing Russia to either abandon hubs or heavily defend thousands of mundane commercial warehouses.

Human Capital vs. Soviet Attrition A central thematic pillar of the day is the **Syrskiy vs. Fedorov conflict**. It is framed as a clash between modern, tech-centric, "human-first" management and a "Soviet meat-grinder" mentality. Protesters claim that removing Fedorov is an attempt by the presidency to **purge potential political rivals** who possess the "charisma of success," even at the cost of defense efficiency [fear of new heroes](#).

Maritime Anarchy and the End of the "Shadow Fleet" The Azov Sea is no longer a Russian "internal lake." The "Tsushima" analogy is used to signal a **structural collapse** of Russian maritime power. By targeting tankers and tugs, Ukraine is not just hitting cargo but the **circulatory system** of the southern front. This trend toward "swarm" maritime drone attacks has rendered traditional naval defense obsolete [circulatory system strike](#).

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

Ukraine: The Rise of Civil Defiance The "Cardboard Maidan" represents a **resurgence of grassroots activism** fueled by social media and YouTube channels. This activism is specifically targeting the presidency's personnel decisions and the perceived return to "old-guard" military tactics. The journalistic defiance against the DBR reporting ban suggests that **elite corruption** remains the primary trigger for societal rupture during the war [resurgence of Maidan](#).

Russia: The "Internal Smut" and Economic Desperation Russian internal stability is fraying due to **resource scarcity**. The broadcast highlights Russian propagandists (Simonyan, Skabeyeva) who are now preparing the public for "worse times," including **water queues** and famine, while simultaneously trying to find "internal enemies" among oil company executives to blame for the fuel crisis [Simonyan's famine prep](#). Factional "spider battles" within the Kremlin are intensifying as the elite competes for a shrinking resource pool [spider battles](#).

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

The US-Trump Factor and Military Autarky The Ankara summit between Zelenskyi and Trump is portrayed as a shift toward **military technology self-sufficiency**. The reported "historical decision" to license **Patriot production in Ukraine** is framed as a US strategic move to exit direct provision while arming a "winning" ally [Patriot licensing](#). Simultaneously, Trump's transactional approach to the Hormuz Strait

("protection fees") signals a more isolationist, mercantilist US posture [protection fee logic](#).

EU Fragmentation and the "Polish Problem" EU-Ukraine relations are being strained by **historical revisionism**. Pro-Russian narratives are reportedly finding fertile ground in Poland, where the honoring of UPA heroes by Ukraine is being used to stall integration. Meanwhile, Austrian and Greek corporate interests are actively **sabotaging the EU's unified sanctions front**, proving that "bloc politics" is vulnerable to individual state economic blackmail [member-state sabotage](#).

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The economic landscape is defined by massive capital flows for Ukrainian defense and the structural degradation of the Russian fuel market. Markets are currently pricing in a **long-term disruption of the Hormuz Strait**, with potential 20% surcharges on maritime cargo. In Ukraine, despite the war, **agricultural exports** are recovering through river ports and rail, though 30% of export capacity remains hampered by port strikes [agricultural export status](#).

Key Economic Vectors:

- **Ukrainian Debt:** The World Bank provided a **\$3 billion support package**, part of a larger \$90 billion credit flow. Total international aid has reached **\$400 billion** over five years, which analyst Zhyvago describes as "survival money" rather than developmental capital [survival money](#).
- **Russian Hyperinflation:** Prices for basic goods like chicken have risen **2-3 times** in recent weeks, driven by the fuel crisis and logistics collapse [chicken price spikes](#).

- **Currency Pressure:** The Ukrainian Hryvnia is under "inevitable pressure" to fall unless western donors continue injecting liquidity to offset the **collapse of industrial production** [currency pressure](#).
- **Energy Costs:** Electricity prices in Ukraine are **four times higher** than pre-war levels, driving broad inflation in water, bread, and services [energy-driven inflation](#).

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

The current administration is undergoing a "cadrow carousel" (personnel merry-go-round), signaling a move away from independent experts toward loyalist managers.

- **Serhiy Koretskyi:** Named as the new **Prime Minister**. Transitioning from Naftogaz, he is viewed by the presidency as a "crisis manager" for the winter, though critics argue he lacks political subjecthood and will be a **loyal executor** of the President's Office [PM Koretskyi](#).
- **Mikhailo Fedorov:** Ousted from his defense/digital roles. He is the **primary loser** of the current cycle, with his dismissal sparking public unrest. Analysts suggest he was removed because his **popularity rivaled the President's** [Fedorov vs. Zelenskyi](#).
- **Yulia Svyrydenko:** Replaced as PM/First Vice PM; her removal is attributed to **unpopularity within the "Servant of the People" faction** and a lack of independent power base [Svyrydenko ouster](#).

- **General Syrskyi:** Remains in power despite fierce criticism. He is portrayed as the **principled "Soviet" loyalist** who the presidency trusts precisely because he has no political ambition or charisma to challenge the status quo [Syrskyi the loyalist](#).

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

Lead Stories: The "Cardboard Maidan" and the Fedorov dismissal dominated airtime, followed by the "Tsushima on Azov" naval victory. The Hormuz Strait conflict was presented as the primary global threat. The DBR corruption scandal was used as a proof-point for institutional rot.

Buried Stories: The **drought and heatwave** hitting Ukraine (forecasted 35-36°C) were buried in infomercials for air conditioners [heatwave mention](#). The **ongoing mass mobilization problems** in Russia were mentioned only in the context of Ukrainian strikes on logistics hubs.

Emotional Tone: Nationalistic and defiant regarding military actions, but **highly skeptical and alarmist** regarding domestic government stability. There is a palpable sense of "hope vs. bureaucracy."

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The international system is framed as a **mercenary and fracturing multipolarity**, where even allies (Poland, USA under Trump) must be "managed" through transactional or emotional appeals rather than shared values.

COUNTRIES and LEADERS

- **Russia (Vladimir Putin):** Portrayed as an **isolated, inept strategist** who is losing control of his internal clans and is now reduced to sacrificing camels (shamanic rituals) to reverse his luck [Putin's camel sacrifice](#). Quotes characterize him as "living in an illusion of control" while his nascent "spider battle" elite infighting begins [spider battles](#).
- **USA (Donald Trump):** Portrayed as a **pragmatic, transactional foe-turned-friend**. His Ankara summit is seen as "successful" because he recognizes Ukraine is "currently winning" [Trump's Ankara success](#).
- **Iran (Khamenei/Vahidi):** Characterized as **overconfident and chaotic**. Their "euphoria" over perceived US weakness is seen as a miscalculation that will lead to the "fragmentation of Iran" [Iranian euphoria](#).
- **Poland (Nawrocki):** Framed as a **petty, obstacle-heavy ally** whose obsession with historical grievances is being exploited by Russian propaganda [Nawrocki obstacle](#).

NON-STATE & CORPORATE ACTORS

- **Wildberries (Tatyana Bakalchuk):** Framed as a **de facto arm of the Russian MoD**. Its logistics network is no longer a private business but a "military target" for dual-use components [Wildberries militarization](#).
- **DBR (Sukhachov Faction):** Portrayed as a **corrupt institutional actor** using its power to shield family members from legal scrutiny, even attempting to use the courts to silence the free press [Sukhachov scandal](#).

- **Raiffeisen Bank:** Characterized as a **corporate traitor** to EU values, staying in Russia only to be sued by the Russian government and then demanding an EU bailout [Raiffeisen betrayal](#).

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

- **Propaganda Seeding:** Russian media is actively seeding a narrative of "**Internal Smut**" among its own populace to prepare them for catastrophic resource failure, while Ukrainian broadcasters identify this as a "spider battle" aimed at preserving Putin's throne [Spider Battle Narrative](#).
- **Censorship & Defiance:** The **143 apartment case** was a test of Ukrainian media's "guild solidarity." The court's attempt to use "commercial secrecy" as a gag was bypassed by eight outlets publishing simultaneously [solidarity action](#).
- **Narrative Manipulation:** The Russian narrative regarding the Wildberries strike is to frame it as a strike on "small business," which Ukrainian analysts counter with catalogs of **optical drone coils** found on the platform [drone coil catalog](#).

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Russian Collapse Scenario:** If the "Tsushima on Azov" operation continues, Crimea will be fully demilitarized through **resource exhaustion** by Winter 2026. This could trigger a 1917-style revolution among the "Lumpen" classes currently suffering from fuel and food inflation [1917 scenario](#).

- **Ukrainian Political Rupture:** The protests over Fedorov's removal could evolve into a **broader anti-government movement** if the winter energy crisis is poorly managed by the new PM Koratskyi, potentially forcing a return to the "reformist" faction [future of protests](#).
- **Middle East Hegemony:** The Hormuz Strait protection fee model proposed by Trump could lead to a **permanent US-Iran maritime war**, fracturing global shipping routes into "protected" and "unprotected" lanes [Trump's protective fee](#).

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

- **Short Term (1-4 Weeks):** Potential for **escalated protests** in Kyiv as the PM reshuffle is formalized; Russian **retaliatory KAB strikes** on Sumy and Odesa will likely intensify to distract from Azov Sea losses.
- **Medium Term (1-6 Months):** Ukraine will attempt to **launch locally produced Patriot-style missiles (Freyja)**, seeking to bridge the "missile gap" before winter strikes on the energy grid [Freyja missile timeline](#).
- **Long Term (1-5 Years):** A permanent shift toward **military-logistical targets** in Russia will likely turn commercial infrastructure (rail, delivery hubs) into hardened combat zones, leading to the "logistical isolation" of Russia from global dual-use supply chains [logistical isolation](#).

RISK ASSESSMENT

- **Institutional Governance Failure:** The rapid turnover of ministers and the sidelining of popular reformers creates a **vacuum of expertise**. Triggers: A botched winter energy rollout by PM Koratskyi. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Catastrophic domestic morale loss. Mitigations: Restoring parliamentary oversight and reinstating independent reformers [governance risk](#).
- **Russian Logistic Famine:** Severe fuel rationing and maritime decimation in the south could lead to **uncontrollable civilian unrest** in occupied territories. Triggers: Final destruction of the Kerch Bridge rail link. Likelihood: High. Impact: Operational collapse of the southern front. Mitigations: None identified for the Russian side [fuel famine risk](#).
- **Global Energy Shock:** A US-Iran total war in the Hormuz Strait would spike oil prices globally. Triggers: Iranian blockade of the Strait. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Global recession. Mitigations: Success of the "Soyuzniki" (Allies) coalition in securing alternate routes [Hormuz risk](#).
- **Judicial/Media Conflict in Ukraine:** The use of court injunctions to stop corruption reporting threatens **EU candidate status**. Triggers: Arrest of "Solidarity 143" journalists. Likelihood: Low. Impact: Freeze in EU accession talks. Mitigations: Immediate judicial reform and repeal of the Pechersky Court injunctions [censorship risk](#).

- **Russian Ballistic Attrition:** Russia's transition to **S-400/S-300 "ERZATS-ballistics"** overwhelms current PPO due to short flight times. Triggers: Massive swarm attacks on Kyiv infrastructure. Likelihood: High. Impact: Widespread blackouts and civilian casualties. Mitigations: Deployment of localized "Freyja" anti-ballistic systems [ballistic risk](#).

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- **Operational Status of the Freyja Missile:** While touted as a cheap alternative to Patriot, its **actual test performance** and production timeline remain opaque [Freyja opacity](#).
- **The Trump-Putin Secret Communication:** Reference is made to a "businessman" leak by Putin regarding secret money offers to Zelenskyi; the identity and veracity of this claim remain **unverified** [Trump/Putin leak](#).
- **The Fate of PM Shmyhal:** Shmyhal's move from PM to "1st Vice PM" is treated as a demotion, but his **actual portfolio** and power in the new cabinet are not explained [Shmyhal's role gap](#).
- **China's Tactical Stance:** While WSJ reports indicate China is "preparing for Russian collapse," there is no detail on **military or economic triggers** for such a Chinese intervention [China's move](#).

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

- **The Fedorov Dismissal as a Controlled Burn:** Far from a purge, Fedorov's removal may be a **strategic relocation** to allow him to build a political base for a 2029 presidency without being tied to the inevitable failures of the 2026 winter grid [future presidency hypothesis](#).
- **The "Azov Tsushima" as an Iranian Diversion:** The timing of the Azov Sea fleet destruction perfectly aligns with US-Iran hostilities; Russia may be **intentionally sacrificing tankers** to justify an escalated Iranian response in the Persian Gulf, thereby spiking oil prices to its own benefit [oil spike strategy](#).
- **Black Swan: A military mutiny in Odesa or Dnipro** by units loyal to Fedorov/Zaluziyi-style reform, leading to a dual-power situation in Ukraine while the Russian front is collapsing.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- **Security:** Ukraine must prioritize **anti-ballistic autarky** through the Freyja project, as US Patriot supplies are finite and geopolitically fragile [missile autarky](#).
- **Economic:** Leverage the **\$3 billion World Bank package** specifically for winterizing decentralized energy hubs rather than "monumental" restoration projects [World Bank usage](#).

- **Diplomatic:** Establish a **historical commission with Poland** immediately to de-escalate UPA-related grievances before they become structural EU vetoes [Poland de-escalation](#).

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chain:** Commercial logistics in the CIS region must assume **zero safety for warehouses** within a 500km radius of the front lines; dual-use designation risk is now systemic [logistics risk](#).
- **Regulatory:** Investors in European banking (Raiffeisen) should prepare for **heavy litigation losses** as sanctioned Russian entities win local lawsuits [Raiffeisen litigation](#).
- **Energy:** Prepare for a **long-term maritime insurance premium hike** in the Hormuz Strait regardless of current ceasefire attempts [shipping premiums](#).

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Legislative activity centered on **anti-corruption transparency** and property valuation reforms required for the EU's **Ukraine Facility** funding. The parliament is facing a crisis of mandate as its sessions end and key posts (MoD, Foreign Affairs) remain filled by "acting" officials (TVO) in a potential **breach of constitutional norms** [constitutional vacuum](#).

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **Property Valuation Reform:** A bill passed its second reading to introduce international standards, intended to **reduce corruption in asset recovery** and fulfill IMF/EU conditions [valuation bill](#).

- **National Pantheon Act:** Passed by the Rada to create a unified site for honoring war heroes, though it faces **geopolitical friction with Poland** over specific UPA commanders [Pantheon Act](#).

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Fedorov Farewell Briefing:** A highly critical public report where Fedorov accused military leadership of **stifling innovation** and causing a "meat-grinder" culture [Fedorov's accusations](#).
- **Trump-Zelenskyi Ankara Briefing:** Confirmed US support for **deep-strikes into Russia** and the transfer of Patriot manufacturing rights [Ankara briefing](#).

KEY STORIES

- **Wildberries Hub Strikes:** Ukrainian drones hit massive commercial warehouses in Moscow and Tambov, destroying millions of dollars in drone parts and dual-use electronics [Moscow logistics strike](#).
- **Tsushima on Azov:** Ukraine disables 13 shadow fleet ships in one night, and over 172 in two weeks, severely hindering Russian fuel supply lines to the southern front [Azov naval victory](#).
- **Fedorov Ouster and Protests:** The removal of Mikhailo Fedorov sparks "Cardboard Maidan" protests; protesters demand his return and the resignation of General Syrskyi [Kyiv protests](#).
- **Koretskyi Reshuffle:** Serhiy Koretskyi is named Prime Minister, leading a government reshuffle that includes PM Denys Shmyhal becoming a First Vice PM [government reshuffle](#).
- **Hormuz Strait Crisis:** US-Iran maritime hostilities resume; Trump proposes a 20% protection fee for tankers passing through the strait [Middle East maritime war](#).
- **The 143 Apartment Scandal:** Media defies a court ban to expose the brother of the DBR head's luxury real estate acquisitions at absurdly low prices [DBR corruption](#).
- **Odesa Civilian Toll:** Russian retaliatory strikes on Odesa kill a 60-year-old man and a mother of two during a park walk [Odesa strikes](#).
- **Sumy KAB Terror:** Nine KAB gliding bombs hit Sumy city center in 24 hours, terrorizing the civilian population with untraceable strikes [Sumy terror](#).
- **Freyja vs. Patriot:** Report on Ukraine's development of the Freyja long-range missile as a cost-effective alternative to the \$1 million-per-shot Patriot [missile tech](#).
- **Russian Shadow Tanker "Volgodon":** Detailed report on a specific Russian tanker intercepted while trying to load fuel in neutral waters via "board-to-board" transfer [Volgodon case](#).
- **Belgorod Journalistic Void:** Analysis of how Russian media and Moscow elites are completely ignoring the constant bombardment of Belgorod, viewing it as a "non-Moscow" problem [Belgorod framing](#).
- **Invictus Games Return:** Ukrainian veterans return from the Invictus Games, highlighting the critical role of adaptive sports in physical and psychological rehabilitation [veteran rehab](#).
- **Wildberries Catalog Evidence:** On-air demonstration of Wildberries catalogs listing military-grade drone components (optical coils, release mechanisms) to justify the strikes [catalog evidence](#).

- **Sukhachov Apartment Pricing:** Precise detail that the DBR head's brother bought luxury units for as little as **\$932 each** [apartment price details](#).
- **Simonyan's Famine Prep:** Russian state TV segments prepare the population for rationing water and food, evoking memories of the 1990s [Russian internal messaging](#).

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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