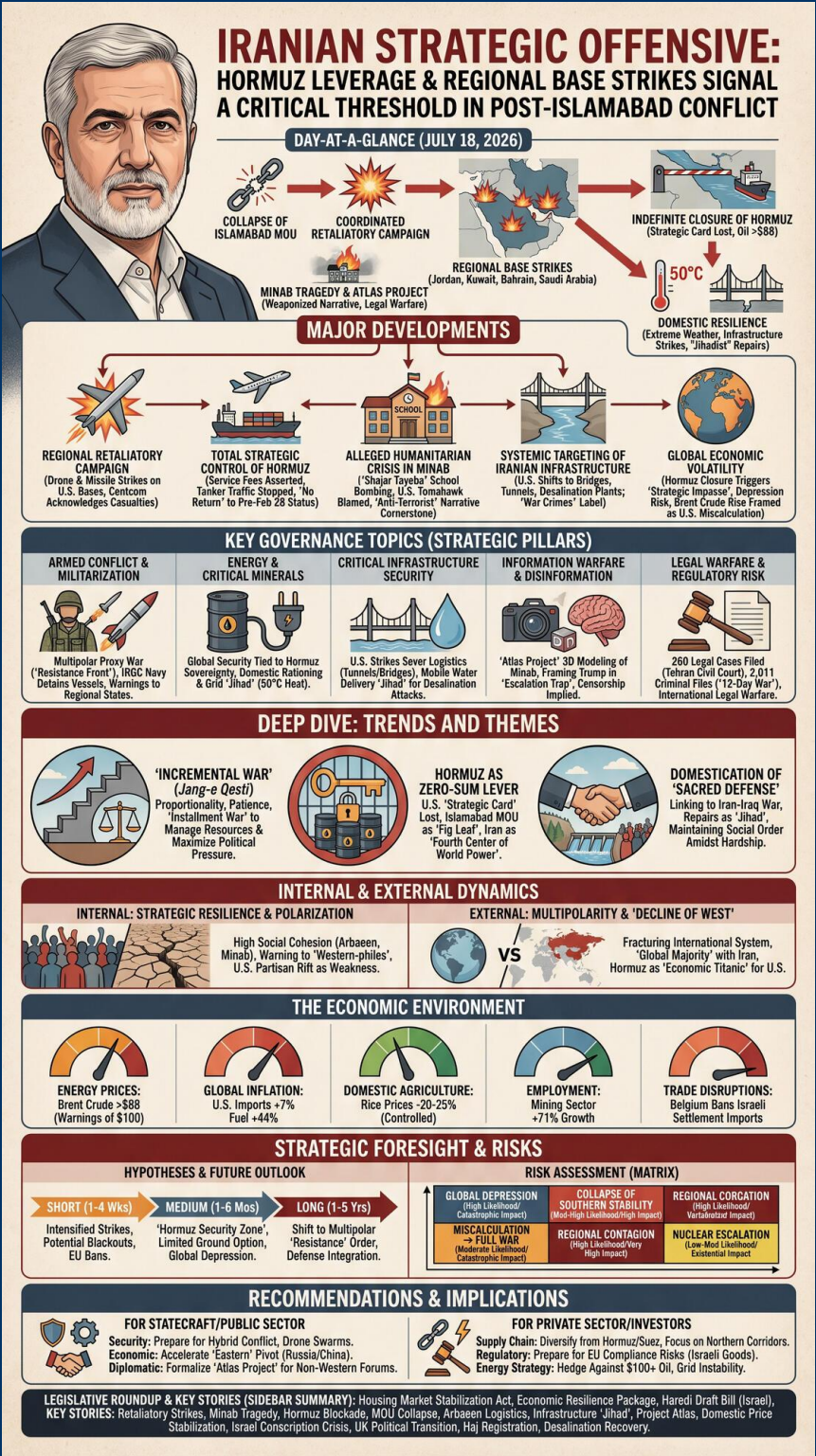


TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

IRINN

JULY 18, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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IRANIAN STRATEGIC OFFENSIVE: HORMUZ LEVERAGE AND REGIONAL BASE STRIKES SIGNAL A CRITICAL THRESHOLD IN POST- ISLAMABAD CONFLICT

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

July 18, 2026, marks a pivotal escalation in the ongoing conflict between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States-led coalition. Following the collapse of the "Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding," Iranian media narratives are now dominated by a **coordinated retaliatory campaign** against U.S. military assets across the Middle East. Strategic discourse has shifted from measured diplomacy to an "incremental war" (**Jang-e Qesti**) where Iran is systematically targeting U.S. bases in Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia in direct response to U.S. strikes on Iranian infrastructure [coordinated retaliatory strikes](#). The state media portrays these actions not as isolated skirmishes, but as a holistic defense of national sovereignty and a move to reshape the regional security architecture.

Central to Iran's leverage is the **indefinite closure of the Strait of Hormuz**. Iranian

officials and analysts assert that the U.S. has lost its "strategic card" in the waterway, leading to a surge in global oil prices, with Brent crude exceeding \$88 and projected to reach \$100 [Brent oil price forecasts](#). Domestically, the broadcast emphasizes a surge in nationalistic fervor, catalyzed by the alleged U.S. bombing of a school in Minab, which resulted in significant child casualties. This tragedy is being weaponized via the "Atlas Project" to document U.S. and Israeli "war crimes" for international legal warfare [Atlas project documentation](#).

The convergence of extreme weather conditions—southern Iran is enduring temperatures of 50°C and 100% humidity—and widespread U.S. strikes on energy and water infrastructure is testing **domestic resilience**. However, the network frame portrays a population united in "sacred defense," viewing infrastructure repairs as "jihadist" acts [infrastructure repair jihad](#). This convergence suggests a state strategy of leveraging humanitarian crisis to solidify internal support while simultaneously squeezing global energy markets to force a U.S. strategic retreat.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Regional Retaliatory Campaign Against U.S. Bases:** Iran has claimed responsibility for a series of drone and missile strikes targeting U.S. military installations in Jordan (Al-Azraq), Kuwait (Al-Ahmadi and Arifjan), Bahrain (Sheikh Isa base), and Saudi Arabia [strikes on regional bases](#). Centcom reportedly acknowledged casualties, though Iranian media suggests the numbers are being censored by Western outlets [Centcom casualty reports](#).

- **Total Strategic Control of the Strait of Hormuz:** Iranian state officials have declared that the Strait of Hormuz will not return to its pre-February 28 status. Iran is now asserting its right to collect "service fees" for maritime safety and has stopped all tanker traffic for the third consecutive day [Strait of Hormuz blockade](#).
- **Alleged Humanitarian Crisis in Minab:** Extensive coverage was given to the "Shajar Tayeba" school bombing in Minab, which Iranian authorities attribute to a deliberate U.S. Tomahawk missile strike [Minab school tragedy](#). This incident is the cornerstone of a new "anti-terrorist" national narrative intended to justify continued high-intensity conflict.
- **Systemic Targeting of Iranian Infrastructure:** Reports indicate the U.S. has shifted to targeting bridges, tunnels, and water desalination plants, particularly in Hormozgan province [infrastructure under fire](#). Iranian media classifies these as "war crimes" aimed at "socializing the war" by pressuring the civilian population.
- **Global Economic Volatility:** The Hormuz closure has triggered a "strategic impasse" for the U.S. administration, with global markets pricing in the risk of a new depression [global economic depression risk](#). Brent crude's rise is framed as an direct consequence of U.S. "miscalculations."

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization

- Transition to a "multipolar" conflict where Iran projects power through proxy groups and direct missile strikes across the "Resistance Front" [Resistance Front escalation](#).

- The IRGC Navy is actively detaining "violating" vessels in the Persian Gulf and warned regional states against supporting "U.S. terrorism" [IRGC Navy warnings](#).

Energy & Critical Minerals

- Global energy security is now explicitly tied to Iranian sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz [energy security lever](#).
- Domestic electricity rationing and "jihadist" efforts to maintain the grid under wartime conditions and 50°C heat [domestic energy jihad](#).

Critical Infrastructure Security

- Systemic U.S. strikes on transport corridors (tunnels and bridges) in southern Iran to sever logistics [targeting transport corridors](#).
- Attacks on water desalination plants in Jask, affecting 10,000 residents, are being responded to with mobile water delivery "jihad" [desalination plant attack](#).

Information Warfare & Disinformation

- The "Atlas Project" uses 3D photorealistic modeling to "prove" U.S. responsibility for the Minab school bombing, countering U.S. claims of accidental fire [Atlas Project modeling](#).
- Framing U.S. leaders (Trump) as "idiotic" and "weak," claiming he is trapped in a "self-made trap" (**Escalation Trap**) [escalation trap analysis](#).

Legal Warfare & Regulatory Risk

- Iran has registered 260 legal cases in Branch 55 of the Tehran Civil Court against the U.S. and Israel, including 2,011 criminal files related to the "12-Day War" [legal cases filed](#).

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The "Incremental War" Strategy (Jang-e Qesti)

- Iran is articulating a military doctrine of "proportionality" and "patience," choosing to retaliate against U.S. bases incrementally rather than entering a full-scale direct war immediately. This "installment war" allows Iran to manage its domestic resources while maximizing international political pressure on the U.S. [Jang-e Qesti doctrine](#).

The Strait of Hormuz as a Zero-Sum Lever

- Analysts suggest that U.S. efforts to reopen the Strait are failing strategically. The "Islamabad MOU" was reportedly a "fig leaf" for the U.S. to refill oil inventories, which Iran blocked after alleged U.S. violations [Hormuz zero-sum lever](#). Iran is now positioning itself as the "fourth center of world power" through its ability to dictate terms in the Strait [Hormuz and world power](#).

Domestication of the "Sacred Defense" Narrative

- The broadcast consistently links the current conflict to the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War ("Holy Defense"). By framing infrastructure repairs and civil endurance as "Jihad," the government is attempting to maintain social order despite severe service disruptions and extreme heat [domestic jihadist narrative](#).

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

Iran: Strategic Resilience Amidst Hardship

- The Iranian domestic front is under extreme pressure from U.S. strikes on civilian infrastructure and record-breaking heat [domestic heat and war](#). However, the media portrays a high degree of social cohesion, using the Arbaeen pilgrimage and the Minab tragedy as unifying national symbols [Arbaeen unification](#). There is an underlying warning to "Western-philies" and those seeking de-escalation that the time for negotiation has passed [warnings to Western-philies](#).

United States: Partisan Polarization as a Strategic Weakness

- Iranian analysts are closely monitoring U.S. domestic politics, highlighting the rift between the Trump administration and figures like J.D. Vance and Marco Rubio [US partisan rifts](#). They frame Trump's "America First" policy as having shifted to "Israel First," causing friction within the Republican camp [US partisan friction](#). This polarization is seen by Iran as a constraint on U.S. military decision-making.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

Multipolarity and the "Decline of the West"

The Iranian broadcast frames the international system as a fracturing arena where Western "power brokers" in cities like Paris, Berlin, and London represent only a small fraction of the global population (800

million out of 8.3 billion) [global population framing](#). Iran is positioning itself alongside Russia and China as a leader of the "global majority" that is "rooting for Iran" against U.S. hegemony [multipolar alliances](#). The state projects an image of strategic maneuverability, using the Hormuz blockade to force the U.S. into a "Titanic-like" collision with economic reality [economic Titanic metaphor](#).

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The economic climate is characterized by extreme volatility in energy markets and domestic price stabilization efforts in Iran. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz is the primary driver of global inflation, while Iran attempts to manage domestic food security through administrative price controls.

- **Energy Prices:** Brent crude oil has surpassed \$88/barrel with warnings of a jump to \$100 [Brent crude prices](#).
- **Global Inflation:** U.S. imported goods saw a 7% price increase, with fuel imports rising by 44% in the last year [US fuel inflation](#).
- **Domestic Agriculture (Iran):** Iranian rice prices are reportedly decreasing by 20-25% (290,000 to 450,000 Tomans per kg) due to administrative measures and the approaching harvest season [Iranian rice prices](#).
- **Employment (Iran):** The mining sector reports a 71% growth in employment since 2011, with an average of 22 workers per mine [Iranian mining employment](#).
- **Trade Disruptions:** Belgium has reportedly banned imports from Israeli settlements in the West Bank in response to Gaza strikes [Belgium import ban](#).

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Strategic personnel shifts and political rivalries are featured as indicators of regime stability or decay.

- **United Kingdom:** Keir Starmer has officially replaced the outgoing Prime Minister, with Andy Burnham taking over as Labor Party leader [UK leadership change](#).
- **Israel:** Elite infighting is highlighted regarding the conscription of Haredi Jews into the IDF, which is framed as a deepening social chasm [Israel conscription crisis](#).
- **U.S. Republican Party:** J.D. Vance and Marco Rubio are identified as the "frontrunners" for 2028, with their competition influencing current U.S. policy toward Iran [US GOP rivalry](#).

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

The editorial hierarchy of IRINN focuses on maintaining a **high-intensity nationalist narrative**. The "Lead Stories" are consistently the Iranian strikes on U.S. bases and the Minab school tragedy, which are given maximum airtime and emotional weight [Lead story: strikes](#). "Buried Stories" include the nuances of the Islamabad MOU (Western version of events is entirely ignored) and the potential for internal dissent within Iran over fuel and water shortages. The tone is highly nationalistic, defiant, and reassuring of state competence. A conspicuous omission is any detailed report on Iranian military casualties from U.S. retaliatory strikes, which are minimized in favor of civilian "martyrdom" stories.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The subtext of the day's news is the terminal decline of U.S. regional authority and the emergence of a resilient, technologically capable Iran supported by a global multipolar majority.

- **United States:** Portrayed as a "chaotic foe" and a "piratical hijacker" (**rahzan**) [US framing as hijacker](#). Trump is specifically depicted as "impulsive" and "trapped" by his own rhetoric [Trump's trap](#).
- **Israel:** Characterized as a "criminal regime" and "U.S. mercenary," with its military described as overstretched and socially divided [Israel draft crisis](#).
- **Russia and China:** Framed as "competent partners" who recognize Iran's strategic weight and are benefiting from the decline of U.S. power [Russia/China framing](#).
- **Arab Regional States (Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan):** Portrayed as "weak and complicit" hosts of U.S. "terrorism," warned that their silence and support for the U.S. will lead to their own economic and physical ruin [warnings to Kuwait](#).

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

Active narrative seeding is evident in the "Atlas Project" and the "Escalation Trap" theory. The state is weaponizing civilian casualties in Minab to justify the "incrementalist" military strategy and Hormuz blockade [Atlas Project seeding](#). Censorship is implied in the systematic omission of Iranian military losses and the reframing of severe infrastructure failure as a "voluntary jihad of endurance." The network also highlights Western media (e.g., The Independent, Washington Post) only when they validate

Iranian narratives of U.S. weakness or Iranian success [citing Western media validation](#).

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- The conflict will likely enter a **protracted attrition phase** rather than a direct invasion. Iran will continue to use the Strait of Hormuz to squeeze the global economy while targeting U.S. logistical nodes regionally [attrition strategy](#).
- U.S. strikes on Iranian infrastructure will escalate, potentially targeting power plants in central Iran (Tehran, Isfahan) as the "incremental war" continues [infrastructure escalation](#).
- Global oil prices are highly likely to **hit \$100/barrel** within 4 weeks if the Hormuz blockade persists, triggering a widespread recession in the West [oil price hypothesis](#).

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

- **Short Term (1-4 Weeks):** Intensification of drone strikes on U.S. bases in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia; potential total blackout in southern Iran provinces due to grid failure; further ban of Israeli-linked goods by European nations [short-term outlook](#).
- **Medium Term (1-6 Months):** Formalization of a "Hormuz Security Zone" where Iran charges transit fees; potential for a "limited ground option" by U.S. forces to seize key islands; global economic depression triggers political unrest in the U.S. and EU [medium-term outlook](#).

- **Long Term (1-5 Years):** Shift of the regional security paradigm away from U.S. hegemony toward a multipolar "Resistance-backed" order; structural integration of Iranian, Russian, and Chinese defense networks [long-term outlook](#).

RISK ASSESSMENT

- **Risk of Global Economic Depression:** Triggered by the indefinite closure of the Strait of Hormuz and oil exceeding \$120/barrel; Likelihood: High; Impact: Catastrophic; Mitigations: Negotiated de-escalation of the Hormuz blockade or U.S. strategic reserve release (currently low) [global depression risk](#).
- **Collapse of Southern Iranian Domestic Stability:** Triggered by systemic U.S. strikes on water/desalination infrastructure during 50°C heat; Likelihood: Moderate-High; Impact: High (Civil Unrest); Mitigations: Rapid mobile desalination deployment and "Jihadist" volunteer mobilization [infrastructure risk](#).
- **Miscalculation Leading to Direct Full-Scale War:** Triggered by a "high-casualty" Iranian strike on a U.S. aircraft carrier or central command in Saudi Arabia; Likelihood: Moderate; Impact: Catastrophic; Mitigations: Back-channel communication via Qatar or Switzerland [war miscalculation risk](#).
- **Regional Conflict Contagion:** Triggered by Israel opening a full-scale "Third Lebanon War" to distract from Hormuz; Likelihood: High; Impact: Very High; Mitigations: Diplomatic pressure from Russia/China on Israel [regional contagion risk](#).

- **Nuclear Escalation (Implicit):** Triggered by U.S. strikes hitting sensitive enrichment sites in central Iran (Isfahan/Natanz); Likelihood: Low-Moderate; Impact: Existential; Mitigations: Restoration of the Islamabad MOU terms [nuclear flashpoint risk](#).

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- **Detailed U.S. Counter-Narrative:** The broadcast completely ignores the U.S. justification for the Islamabad MOU collapse, preventing a balanced assessment of diplomatic failure.
- **Iranian Military Casualties:** There is a total lack of information regarding Iranian military losses, making it impossible to assess the IRGC's actual combat sustainability.
- **Arbaeen Security Risks:** The network encourages massive pilgrimage participation while simultaneously reporting high-intensity U.S. air strikes on regional transport routes [Arbaeen story prominence](#).
- **Internal Dissent:** No coverage of any domestic Iranian voices calling for de-escalation despite severe utility shortages and heat.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

- **The "Potemkin Defense":** The focus on "Jihadist" infrastructure repairs and Arbaeen unity may be a desperate cover for a military logistics system that is on the verge of total collapse due to systemic U.S. air strikes on the tunnel and bridge networks [infrastructure damage severity](#).

- **Negotiation via Escalation:** The "Jang-e Qesti" and Hormuz blockade might not be a bid for regional dominance, but a high-stakes Iranian gambit to force the U.S. back to the Islamabad MOU on more favorable terms, as Iranian reserves likely cannot sustain a long-term blockade [MOU negotiation hypothesis](#).
- **Black Swan - Israeli Regime Collapse:** Domestic polarization over the Haredi draft and economic strain could lead to a sudden collapse of the Netanyahu government, potentially triggering a desperate preemptive Israeli strike on Iran [Israel draft crisis significance](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- **Security:** Prepare for high-intensity hybrid conflict including systematic drone swarms targeting U.S. regional logistics nodes.
- **Economic:** Accelerate "Eastern" supply chain pivots (Russia/China) to mitigate the impact of U.S. infrastructure strikes.
- **Diplomatic:** Formalize "Atlas Project" documentation for usage in non-Western international forums (BRICS+) to isolate the U.S. and Israel legally.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chain:** Diversify away from any logistics paths relying on the Strait of Hormuz or Suez Canal; focus on land-based Northern corridors.
- **Regulatory:** Prepare for increased compliance risks as EU nations may begin banning Israeli-settlement-linked goods [EU regulatory shift](#).

- **Energy Strategy:** Hedge against sustained \$100+/barrel oil prices and potential global electricity grid instability due to cyber/kinetic attacks on infrastructure.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Governance discourse centers on wartime administrative controls, legal warfare against foreign adversaries, and domestic infrastructure "jihad." Major policy focus is on the **Housing Market Stabilization Act** and the **Atlas Legal Documentation Project**.

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **Housing Market Stabilization (Article 8):** A new law mandating the creation of a "Fair Price System" for rent and real estate to prevent wartime price gouging [housing market law](#).
- **Economic Resilience Package:** A 700-Toman stimulus package for farmers and producers to mitigate the removal of preferential currency exchange [agricultural stimulus](#).
- **Haredi Draft Bill (Israel):** Discussed as an indicator of Israeli societal fracturing [Haredi draft debate](#).

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Judiciary Press Briefing:** Documentation of 260 civil cases against U.S. and Israeli leadership for "war crimes" [judiciary presser](#).
- **Ministry of Roads and Urban Development:** Announcement of the opening of the 130km Ardakan-Mehriz highway as part of the strategic Bazargan-Bandar Abbas corridor [highway opening](#).

KEY STORIES

- **Retaliatory Strikes on U.S. Bases:** Iran claims successful missile and drone attacks on U.S. facilities in Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia in response to U.S. aggression [regional strikes](#).
- **Minab School Tragedy:** Detailed reports on the alleged U.S. bombing of the Shajar Tayeba school, with forensic 3D modeling and child casualty lists used for national mobilization [Minab school report](#).
- **Strait of Hormuz Blockade:** Tanker traffic remains at zero for the third day; Iran asserts permanent control and warns of \$100 oil [Hormuz blockade status](#).
- **Islamabad MOU Collapse:** Iran declares the memorandum void due to U.S. "violations" and "strategic treachery" [MOU collapse](#).
- **Arbaeen Pilgrimage Logistics:** Despite the war, over 787,000 Iranians have registered for the pilgrimage to Iraq, with major infrastructure corridors being prepared [Arbaeen registrations](#).
- **Infrastructure "Jihad":** Repairs to U.S.-bombed tunnels and bridges in southern Iran are framed as military-spiritual acts of resistance [bridge/tunnel repair](#).
- **Project Atlas:** The launch of a high-tech legal documentation project to archive "U.S. and Israeli war crimes" for international litigation [Project Atlas launch](#).
- **Domestic Price Stabilization:** State efforts to lower the price of rice by 25% to manage wartime inflation [rice price control](#).
- **Israel Conscription Crisis:** Analysis of internal Israeli discord over drafting ultra-Orthodox Jews [IDF draft crisis](#).

- **UK Political Transition:** Reporting on the shift from Keir Starmer to Andy Burnham within the Labor Party [UK politics](#).
- **Haj Registration:** Opening of registration for the 1446 Haj pilgrimage despite ongoing regional conflict [Haj registration news](#).
- **Desalination Plant Recovery:** Efforts to restore water to 10,000 residents in Jask after U.S. air strikes [Jask water restoration](#).

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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