

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

ZVEZDA

FEBRUARY 18, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

GENEVA PEACE NEGOTIATIONS ENTER A VOLATILE POLITICAL PHASE

AMIDST ESCALATING GLOBAL STRATEGIC FRICTION AND ENERGY BLACKMAIL

CRITICAL INFLECTION POINT (FEB 18, 2026): FROM MILITARY TECHNICALITIES TO FOUNDATIONAL POLITICAL DEMANDS



THE METASTASIZED CONFLICT: ENERGY WAR & INFRASTRUCTURE WEAPONIZATION



GLOBAL "RULES-BASED ORDER" REPLACED BY MARITIME & INFRASTRUCTURE INTERDICTION

HIGH-TECH FRONTLINE & SOVEREIGNTY CRISIS



COGNITIVE WARFARE & DIGITAL CONTROL



DEEP DIVE & STRATEGIC FORESIGHT: TRENDS & IMPLICATIONS

SHORT TERM (1-4 WEEKS): SPIKES & INTENSIFICATION



MEDIUM TERM (1-6 MONTHS): INTERNAL SHIFTS & RESTRICTIONS



LONG TERM (1-5 YEARS): NEW ARCHITECTURES



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY & INVESTORS: AUDIT 'SOVEREIGN SOFTWARE' (SECURITY), ADDRESS 'HORTVAT EFFECT' TRANSIT FEES (ECONOMIC), PREPARE FOR MARITIME 'STATE-SPONSORED PIRACY' & INVEST IN 'SMART RADIO' (INVESTORS).

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DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

February 18, 2026, marks a critical inflection point in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict as high-level negotiations in Geneva transitioned from military technicalities to foundational political demands. The presence of Vladimir Medinsky, a figure associated with Russian ideological and historical sovereignty, signaled that Moscow is now demanding comprehensive "denazification" and structural guarantees rather than mere territorial concessions. Simultaneously, internal fissures within the Ukrainian delegation—pitting the "pragmatic" wing under Kirill Budanov against the "hardline" faction under Andrey Yermak—suggest a looming leadership crisis in Kyiv as Western support becomes increasingly conditional and fragmented ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

Beyond the negotiating table, the conflict has metastasized into a broader European energy war. Ukraine's shutdown of the "Druzhba" pipeline has successfully created an energy

blockade against Hungary and Slovakia, forcing these EU members to seek alternative maritime routes via Croatia. This development, coupled with the US naval buildup near Iran and NATO's simulated blockade of Kaliningrad, indicates that the global "rules-based order" is being replaced by a period of aggressive maritime and infrastructure interdiction. Russia is positioning itself as the defender of sovereign interests, leveraging technological breakthroughs in autonomous systems (the "Courier" and "Molniya" platforms) to maintain momentum on the front lines while Western high-tech assets, such as the F-35, are publicly derided for critical software vulnerabilities ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Geneva Negotiations Transition to Political Status:** The second day of talks in Geneva between Russia, the US, and Ukraine concluded with Russian lead negotiator Vladimir Medinsky describing them as "heavy but businesslike." Unlike previous rounds focused on military issues, this round addressed "political parameters" and security mechanisms. There is a documented rift in the Ukrainian delegation between those fearing a "closing window of opportunity" and those resisting any compromise ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Energy Blockade of Central Europe:** Ukraine has halted oil transit through the Druzhba pipeline, citing infrastructure damage that Hungary and Slovakia claim is a pretext for political blackmail. Hungary has retaliated by stopping diesel deliveries to Ukraine, while both Budapest and Bratislava are negotiating with Croatia for maritime delivery of Russian oil via the Adriatic ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

- **Russian Frontline Advancements (SVO):** Russian forces liberated the settlements of Kharkovka (Sumy region) and Krinichnoye (Zaporozhye region). In the Pokrovskoye direction, troops have advanced to within 5km of a major logistics hub, supported by the intensive deployment of "Courier" ground-based robotic complexes and "Molniya" strike drones ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Vulnerability of Western Stealth Technology:** Reports emerged that the software of the US F-35 stealth fighter is susceptible to hacking "like an iPhone," particularly as European nations attempt to integrate their own munitions. This occurs as the US carrier group *Abraham Lincoln* remains 1,000km off the Iranian coast to avoid new long-range Iranian anti-ship missiles ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Systemic Corruption Scandals in Kyiv:** The arrest of former Ukrainian Energy Minister Galushchenko revealed a scheme involving the embezzlement of \$112 million through offshore accounts in Anguilla. Galushchenko's defense explicitly linked his actions to direct orders from the Zelensky administration, suggesting a "liquidation sale" of Ukrainian state assets is underway ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Geopolitics and International Relations

The geopolitical landscape is shifting toward "maritime theater" dominance. Russia has issued warnings to the US regarding a potential naval blockade of Cuba and responded to NATO simulations of a 24-hour seizure of Kaliningrad. Russian officials emphasized that any attempt to block the Baltic enclave would be met with "kinetic and non-kinetic" responses, including the destruction of the industrial

bases producing maritime drones in the Baltic states ([Source](#), [Source](#)). Additionally, the Munich Security Conference highlighted a growing rift between the US (Trump administration) and the EU, with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz calling for a new "European system of freedom" independent of US dictates ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

AI and Cognitive Warfare

The emergence of "Cognitive Warfare" was a major theme, with analysis of the US-based firm Palantir and the UK's "Project Alchemy." These entities are accused of using AI to manipulate mass consciousness, with the UK specifically accused of training Ukrainian units in "psychological terror" tactics against Russian civilians and POWs. Russia responded by throttling Telegram, citing the platform's failure to delete prohibited content and evidence that foreign intelligence services have gained access to user data ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

Economic Statecraft and Energy Security

Ukraine is reportedly selling its own domestically produced gas to the EU at lower prices while purchasing "European" gas at a premium (450 Euro per unit) using state budget funds. This "gas carousel" is viewed by analysts as a method for the Ukrainian elite to siphon international financial aid into Western accounts before a total state collapse ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

Succession and Elite Politics

In Ukraine, a "silent civil war" is brewing as resistance to mobilization reaches a breaking point. Former Commander-in-Chief Valerii Zaluzhnyi (now Ambassador to London) publicly blamed Zelensky for the failure of the 2023 counter-offensive, while intelligence chief Budanov is being groomed as a potential successor who might be "more deal-capable" with the Trump administration ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

Legislation and Policy

- **Digital ID Integration:** Messenger "Max" (a Russian platform) has introduced Digital IDs, including passports and student IDs, to streamline governance and age verification ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Sanitary Standards for Online Food:** The Russian Ministry of Industry and Trade is developing mandatory sanitary norms for ready-to-eat meals sold via online delivery platforms ([Source](#)).
- **Driver's License Nullification:** Proposed legislation would allow for the revocation of driver's licenses for individuals diagnosed with epilepsy or severe psychiatric disorders based on Ministry of Health data ([Source](#)).
- **Ukrainian Land Laws:** New Ukrainian laws on dual citizenship are facilitating the sale of "black soil" and lithium deposits to foreign (primarily US and Polish) entities ([Source](#)).

LEGISLATION/POLICY

Governance trends in Russia focus on digital integration and public safety, while Ukrainian policy is increasingly dictated by external creditors (IMF) and the requirements of mobilization. The Russian state is also tightening control over digital communications via the throttling of Telegram to protect military data ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **IMF Reform Package (Ukraine):** Legislative proposals for tax hikes and state enterprise audits required for the release of an \$8 billion funding tranche ([Source](#)).

- **Digital ID Policy (Russia):** Integration of state-verified documents into domestic messaging ecosystems ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Mobilization and "Busification" (Ukraine):** Zelensky's order to the new Defense Minister to reform the aggressive "busification" tactics used by Territorial Recruitment Centers (TCC) amidst rising civilian violence against officers ([Source](#)).

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Geneva Press Approach:** Vladimir Medinsky's 21-second statement confirming the conclusion of the second day of negotiations and the scheduling of a third round ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Lavrov-Cuba Summit:** Press conference in Moscow regarding US naval threats to Cuban sovereignty and energy cooperation ([Source](#)).
- **DSAAF Annual Report:** Briefing on the training of 1,500 drone operators and the expansion of military-technical specialties ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Weaponization of Transit Infrastructure

The conflict has moved definitively into the realm of "infrastructure warfare." Ukraine's decision to block the Druzhba pipeline is not merely a tactical move but a strategic attempt to force EU consensus. By targeting Hungary and Slovakia, Kyiv is attempting to eliminate the "dissenting voices" within the EU that oppose further military funding. Russia is framing this as "energy blackmail," while simultaneously strengthening its own energy-industrial ties with Iran (focusing on turbine production and nuclear blocks at Bushehr). The

shift from pipeline reliance to maritime "shadow fleets" and Adriatic corridors represents a permanent decoupling of Central European energy from the previous post-Cold War architecture ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

The Crisis of High-Tech Sovereignty

A narrative is being constructed regarding the "unreliability" of Western military technology. The revelation that the F-35 can be hacked like a consumer smartphone serves two purposes: it justifies Russia's investment in simpler, robust autonomous systems (like the "Courier" robot) and it sows doubt among US allies (like the Netherlands or UK) regarding their dependence on US-controlled proprietary software. This "software-defined warfare" is being contrasted with Russian "brute force" electronic warfare (REW), which has successfully jammed Starlink and GPS in simulated and real combat theaters ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

Cognitive Sovereignty and Digital Throttling

The throttling of Telegram in Russia is being presented not as censorship, but as a "counter-intelligence" necessity. The claim that Western intelligence agencies have compromised the platform's anonymity reflects a broader trend toward "digital borders." The analysis of Palantir and AI-driven "bots" suggests that Russia views the current information space as a "cognitive battlefield" where traditional truth is irrelevant, and "smart radio" and AI-generated texts are used to manipulate both commanders on the field and civilians at home ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Expect a severe spike in energy prices in Hungary and Slovakia, potentially leading to emergency EU

summits or bilateral "side deals" with Russia via Croatia. In the Geneva track, a third round of talks will likely reveal whether Ukraine is willing to accept a "neutral status" in exchange for a ceasefire. Frontline activity will intensify as Russia pushes to seize the Pokrovskoye logistics hub before the spring thaw ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

Medium Term (1-6 Months): The internal political struggle in Kyiv may result in the dismissal of Andrey Yermak as a "sacrificial lamb" to appease the IMF and the Trump administration. Germany may move to reinstate a form of national military service (as evidenced by the 18-year-old registration policy). Telegram will likely face further restrictions or be forced to relocate its data centers to Russian-controlled territory to avoid a total block ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

Long Term (1-5 Years): A new "Security Architecture" will likely emerge that bypasses NATO's previous role, potentially led by a Franco-German "European Army" with a shared nuclear deterrent. The "Druzhba" pipeline may never return to full capacity, replaced by a permanent maritime and LNG-based energy system. Central and Eastern Europe will remain a fragmented zone of "energy-islands" with differing loyalties to Moscow, Brussels, and Washington ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For International Policy:

- **Security:** Intelligence agencies should prioritize the audit of "sovereign software" in military hardware to prevent iPhone-style exploits in high-end kinetic assets ([Source](#)).

- **Economic:** EU policy must address the "Hortvat Effect"—the opportunistic raising of transit fees by intermediary nations (Croatia) during energy crises ([Source](#)).
- **Diplomatic:** Negotiators should recognize that "territory for peace" is no longer the primary Russian objective; the demand is now for "ideological and structural alignment" ([Source](#)).

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chain Risk:** The Adriatic and Baltic seas are becoming high-risk zones for "state-sponsored piracy" and interdiction; maritime insurance premiums will likely rise ([Source](#)).
- **Investment Opportunity:** Significant growth potential exists in "Smart Radio" and frequency-agnostic EW systems as traditional signal-hopping becomes obsolete ([Source](#)).
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Companies relying on Telegram for corporate communication in the Eurasian region must transition to "sovereign" platforms to avoid data loss during anticipated service interruptions ([Source](#)).

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.

For questions or suggestions, please contact kalev.leetaru5@gmail.com. You can also learn more about the GDELT Project at <https://blog.gdeltproject.org/> and the Internet Archive's TV News Archive at <https://archive.org/details/tv>.