

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

ALJAZ

FEBRUARY 23, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

GLOBAL GOVERNANCE IN FLUX: Transatlantic Trade Volatility, Cartel Power Vacuums, and the Unraveling of the British Establishment

A World in Turmoil: Unilateralism, Power Vacuums, and Institutional Decay define Feb 23, 2026 & Beyond

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VOLATILITY, CARTEL POWER
VACUUMS, AND THE UNRAVELING
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DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

February 23, 2026, was defined by a rapid acceleration of geopolitical and economic instability, largely driven by unilateral American policy shifts and the sudden removal of major non-state actors. The global economy is reeling from "economic whiplash" as U.S. President Donald Trump [slapped a 15% trade levy](#) on all imports, a move that followed a 10% announcement just 24 hours prior. This escalation, a direct response to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling striking down previous trade regimes, has forced allies like the European Union to [pause ratification](#) of existing trade deals, signaling a profound breakdown in Transatlantic trust and regulatory predictability.

Simultaneously, the security landscape in the Western Hemisphere has been upended by the killing of Nemesio Oseguera, better known as "El Mencho," the leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG). While the Mexican

government and U.S. intelligence claim a [major victory](#), the immediate fallout has been a wave of retaliatory violence, road blocks, and arson across several Mexican states. Analysts warn that this "kingpin strategy" [may backfire](#), creating a violent power vacuum and fragmenting the cartel into even more dangerous, disorganized factions ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

In Europe, the British political establishment is facing a terminal crisis as the Jeffrey Epstein scandal consumes its elite. The [arrest of Peter Mandelson](#), former ambassador to the U.S. and a cornerstone of the New Labour era, on suspicion of misconduct in public office follows the recent detention of Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor (formerly Prince Andrew). These developments have left the government of Keir Starmer [fighting for political survival](#) amidst accusations of massive vetting failures and the improper handling of sensitive government data.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **U.S. Global Trade Escalation:** Following a Supreme Court ruling that much of his previous tariff regime was unlawful, President Trump [doubled down](#) by announcing a 15% across-the-board tariff on all imports. The move is being enacted under Section 122 of the Trade Act, [limited to 150 days](#) unless extended by Congress. The uncertainty has caused the UK and Australia to question the validity of their [10% special deals](#), while Brazil paradoxically benefits as its 40% rate drops to the new 15% global floor.

- **The Fall of El Mencho:** Mexican special forces, [backed by U.S. intelligence](#), successfully targeted the leader of the CJNG in the holiday town of Tapalpa. El Mencho [died in transit](#) to a Mexico City hospital. The killing has triggered nationwide alerts, school closures in half of Mexico's states, and [intense leadership battle](#) fears within the cartel as no clear successor exists.
- **Epstein Files and the Mandelson Arrest:** The release of U.S. Department of Justice documents has led to the [arrest of Peter Mandelson](#). He is accused of passing confidential information regarding the 2008 financial crisis and EU bailouts to Jeffrey Epstein. This follows the [arrest of Andrew Mountbatton-Windsor](#), marking a systemic collapse of institutional credibility in the UK.
- **U.S. Withdrawal from Syria:** The U.S. has begun [evacuating its largest military base](#) in Syria (Qasrak) and redeploying forces to Iraq's Kurdistan region. This is the [third base closed](#) in a week, signaling a strategic shift that leaves the Damascus government and SDF to manage the [resurgence of ISIL](#) on their own.
- **Iran Nuclear Standoff:** Ahead of Geneva talks on Thursday, Iran is projecting a dual posture of [diplomatic readiness and military defiance](#). While the U.S. masses its [largest military force](#) since the 2003 Iraq invasion, including two aircraft carriers, Iranian officials suggest a [win-win deal](#) involves token enrichment in exchange for the total termination of sanctions.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Trade and Economic Security

- The 15% blanket tariff has disrupted [global value chains](#), with U.S. manufacturing ending 2025 down despite protectionist promises. Analysts warn that the U.S. is now viewed as an [unreliable trading partner](#), leading nations to design a trade order with "less America in it."
- The BRICS+ bloc is [considering alternatives](#) to the U.S. dollar, prompted by Trump's [threat of 100% tariffs](#) on any country that moves away from the greenback.

Corruption and Rule of Law

- In the UK, the Starmer government is reeling from the [Mandelson arrest](#), which exposes deep flaws in the nation's vetting processes for high-level appointments.
- The International Criminal Court (ICC) has begun [hearings for former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte](#) for crimes against humanity, specifically linked to his drug war [extrajudicial killings](#).
- The Israeli Defense Ministry has [classified five Palestinian online media platforms](#) as terrorist organizations, a move human rights groups call an [unfounded attack](#) on press freedom in Jerusalem.

Energy Security and Bloc Politics

- Hungary and Slovakia are [retaliating against Ukraine](#) for blocking Russian oil via the Druzhba pipeline. Budapest has [vetoed a \\$106 billion loan](#) to Kyiv and new EU sanctions on Moscow, using energy as leverage [ahead of April elections](#).

- Ukraine has responded by [attacking Russian oil blending stations](#) in Tatarstan to strike at the heart of Russia's war economy.

AI and Technology Policy

- The New Delhi AI Impact Summit highlighted fears of ["agentic AI"](#)—systems that act without human oversight. Industry leaders warn that [white-collar jobs](#) (lawyers, accountants) could be fully automated within 18 months.
- UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese was targeted by a [manipulated video campaign](#), which led several European states to call for her resignation based on [comments she never made](#).

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Governance today was dominated by the use of "national emergency" statutes to bypass traditional legislative hurdles, particularly in the U.S. and Israel, while the UK faced domestic pressure to overhaul education and family law in the Philippines and Venezuela.

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **U.S. Section 122 Tariff Authority:** Invoked by President Trump to [bypass the Supreme Court's striking down](#) of the IEEPA-based reciprocal tariffs. It allows a temporary 150-day trade barrier [based on a purported "balance of payments" crisis](#).
- **Venezuela Amnesty Law:** Passed by the new Venezuelan parliament following [U.S.-backed reforms](#) and the January [capture of Nicholas Maduro](#).
- **Philippines Divorce Bill:** Currently [pending in the Senate](#) after passing the House. It seeks to end the country's status as the [only nation outside the Vatican](#) where divorce is illegal.

- **Israeli Education Law:** A [contentious law](#) that bars Palestinian Israeli citizens who graduated from West Bank universities from [teaching in Israeli schools](#).

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Mexican Government Press Conference:** President Sheinbaum and her Defense Minister [detailed the operation](#) against El Mencho, stressing that while U.S. intelligence was used, [no U.S. troops](#) would be allowed on Mexican soil.
- **Iranian Foreign Ministry Briefing:** Spokesperson reiterated that [there is no such thing](#) as a "limited strike" and any U.S. aggression would [result in horizontal war](#) across the region.
- **EU Foreign Ministers Meeting:** Held in Brussels to [finalize the 20th sanctions package](#) against Russia, currently [stalled by Hungary](#).

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Failure of the Kingpin Strategy

The death of El Mencho is being analyzed not as a solution, but as a [potential catastrophe](#) for Mexican stability. Historical evidence from the Sinaloa cartel suggests that removing a central "dictator" [triggers fragmentation](#). Disorganized crime is often [more dangerous](#) than organized crime, as underlings compete for control through public displays of violence and extortion. With Mexico hosting the [World Cup in 109 days](#), the government's inability to control the [retaliatory outbursts](#) suggests a state capacity crisis that could threaten international tourism and safety.

Economic Weaponization and Allied Hedging

President Trump's trade policy is characterized by "economic whiplash," using social media to [announce major levies](#) without prior consultation. This has forced allies to [rethink their dependence](#) on the U.S. market. The EU's decision to [pause the Scotch-agreed trade deal](#) and Germany's Chancellor [heading to Beijing](#) indicate a global shift toward a multipolar trade order. Nations are increasingly viewing the U.S. as a "predatory" power [weaponizing the dollar](#), accelerating the [de-risking from America](#) rather than just from China.

The "White Collar" AI Revolution

The narrative around AI has shifted from "future threat" to "immediate replacement." The New Delhi summit revealed that [40% of global jobs](#) are now exposed to AI risk, with a specific focus on high-skill analytical work. The emergence of "[agentic AI](#)"—systems that can program themselves and take independent actions—has stripped away [plausible deniability](#) from tech CEOs, who are now [sounding alarms](#) while simultaneously [aggressively monetizing](#) the technology.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks):

Retaliatory violence in Mexico is expected to [escalate](#) as regional commanders within the CJNG begin a [bloody succession battle](#). In the UK, the [arrest of Peter Mandelson](#) will likely lead to further [establishment figures being detained](#) as the Epstein files are fully unraveled, potentially [forcing a vote of no confidence](#) in the Starmer government. On the trade front, expect [immediate lawsuits](#) against the Section 122 tariffs by international trade bodies and [affected corporate entities](#).

Medium Term (1-6 Months):

The 150-day clock on Trump's tariffs will [lapse in July 2026](#), likely replaced by [Section 232 \(National Security\)](#) and [Section 301 \(Unfair Trade\)](#) measures to maintain protectionist levels without Section 122's legal restrictions. In the Middle East, the [U.S. military buildup](#) could trigger an [accidental escalation](#) if Geneva talks fail to produce more than a [framework agreement](#). Hungary's [April elections](#) will determine if the EU's internal [obstructionism on Ukraine aid](#) becomes permanent.

Long Term (1-5 Years):

The [BRICS+ bloc](#) will likely formalize its [alternative financial architecture](#), reducing global reliance on the SWIFT system and the U.S. dollar. The U.S. [withdrawal from Syria](#) may lead to a [permanent Iranian-Russian-Syrian security axis](#) in the Levant. Domestically, the [wealth inequality and housing crisis](#) facing Gen Z in the U.S. will likely result in [significant political radicalization](#) and a possible [third-party movement](#) by the 2028 election cycle.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For International Policy:

- Allies must [accelerate domestic savings programs](#) and [diversify export markets](#) to mitigate the impact of permanent U.S. trade [unpredictability](#).
- The international community should [re-evaluate the security of the 2026 World Cup](#) in Mexico, given the [unstable paramilitary nature](#) of the fragmenting cartels.

- EU leadership must find [legal mechanisms to bypass single-member vetoes](#) (like Hungary's) to ensure [long-term financial stability](#) for Ukraine.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chain Risk:** Manufacturers should [expect persistent 15% minimum tariffs](#) and plan for [higher costs](#) by shifting production to nations with [standing trade exemptions](#) (e.g., Brazil).
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Companies with UK ties must [audit historical data transfers](#) and [political lobbying efforts](#) to ensure they are not swept up in the widening Epstein/Mandelson [misconduct investigations](#).
- **Tech Transition:** Businesses should [invest in "human-in-the-loop" AI training](#) now to prepare for the [automation of analytical roles](#), focusing on [ethics and copyright compliance](#) to avoid [future policy crackdowns](#).

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 GDEL Project at <https://blog.gdelproject.org/> and the Internet Archive's TV News Archive at <https://archive.org/details/tv>.