

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

ZVEZDA

FEBRUARY 23, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

RUSSIA'S MULTI-FRONT PROJECTION: CONTINUITY AMID GLOBAL FRACTURES (FEBRUARY 23, 2026)

A Day-at-a-Glance Analysis: Strategic Messaging, Frontline Advances, and International Crises Convergence

PROJECTION OF POWER & CONTINUITY

Unmanned systems are the future... and national unity our strength.

STRATEGIC PARITY & NUCLEAR TRIAD MODERNIZATION

SHIFT TO ELECTRONIC C2 & UNMANNED SYSTEMS

Defender of the Fatherland Day

Kazbek
Ratnik

Detailed description: This panel features a central illustration of Russian leadership, including a man in a dark suit and a military officer, standing before a monument. To the right, there are icons for a submarine, a missile, and an aircraft. Below the leadership, there are icons for a tank and a soldier in a Ratnik suit. A speech bubble from the leadership says, 'Unmanned systems are the future... and national unity our strength.' The panel is titled 'PROJECTION OF POWER & CONTINUITY' and includes sub-sections for 'STRATEGIC PARITY & NUCLEAR TRIAD MODERNIZATION' and 'SHIFT TO ELECTRONIC C2 & UNMANNED SYSTEMS'. A callout box on the left mentions 'Defender of the Fatherland Day'.

MAJOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS & CONVERGENCE

MEXICO: "CARTEL WAR" & ALLEGED UKRAINE LINKAGES

Guadalajara airport
Manzanillo port

El Mencho LIQUIDATED (US INTEL ASSIST)

CJNG FIGHTERS: Combat Experience in Ukraine (UAF)

Escalating Conflict & Infrastructure Disruption

CENTRAL EUROPE: ENERGY BRINKMANSHIP & NATO/EU RIFT

ULTIMATUM: HALT ELECTRICITY TO UKRAINE

DRUZHBA OIL PIPELINE: BLOCKED BY KYIV

Slovakia & Hungary Threaten Power Cuts Over Oil Transit

EMERGING DISSENTING BLOC

Detailed description: This panel is divided into two main sections. The left section, titled 'MEXICO: "CARTEL WAR" & ALLEGED UKRAINE LINKAGES', shows a map of Mexico with red areas indicating conflict. It mentions 'Guadalajara airport' and 'Manzanillo port'. A speech bubble says 'El Mencho LIQUIDATED (US INTEL ASSIST)'. Below, it says 'CJNG FIGHTERS: Combat Experience in Ukraine (UAF)' and 'Escalating Conflict & Infrastructure Disruption'. The right section, titled 'CENTRAL EUROPE: ENERGY BRINKMANSHIP & NATO/EU RIFT', shows two men shaking hands. A speech bubble says 'ULTIMATUM: HALT ELECTRICITY TO UKRAINE'. Below, it says 'DRUZHBA OIL PIPELINE: BLOCKED BY KYIV' and 'Slovakia & Hungary Threaten Power Cuts Over Oil Transit'. At the bottom right, it says 'EMERGING DISSENTING BLOC' with icons for the EU and NATO.

FRONTLINE ADVANCES: THE DONBAS OFFENSIVE

CENTRAL DONBAS

RUSSIAN "CENTER" FORCES DRIVE FOR DOBROPOLYE

SLAVYANSK-KRAMATORSK AGGLOMERATION (UAF Stronghold)

Tactical Focus: Grishino Secured, Logistics Targeted

STEALTH ARTILLERY TACTICS: "Glatsint" Guns with Brick Facades to Evade Drones

Detailed description: This panel features a map of the Donbas region in Ukraine. A red arrow points from the west towards the east, labeled 'RUSSIAN "CENTER" FORCES DRIVE FOR DOBROPOLYE'. A specific area is marked as 'SLAVYANSK-KRAMATORSK AGGLOMERATION (UAF Stronghold)'. Below the map, it says 'Tactical Focus: Grishino Secured, Logistics Targeted'. On the right, there is an illustration of a 'Glatsint' artillery gun firing from behind a brick wall. A speech bubble says 'STEALTH ARTILLERY TACTICS: "Glatsint" Guns with Brick Facades to Evade Drones'.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT & IMPLICATIONS

SHORT TERM (1-4 Weeks): Push for Grishino, Mexico deterioration, Slovakian power cut test.

MEDIUM TERM (1-6 Months): Pincer on Slavyansk, EU energy rift deepens, World Cup risk.

LONG TERM (1-5 Years): AI-integrated warfare shift, Permanent Central European neutrality buffer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Diplomatic Mediation for EU Energy Crisis

Investigate Foreign Fighter Blowback Risks

Supply Chain & Energy Market Volatility Awareness

Detailed description: This panel contains three clock icons representing different time horizons. The 'SHORT TERM (1-4 Weeks)' section mentions 'Push for Grishino, Mexico deterioration, Slovakian power cut test.' The 'MEDIUM TERM (1-6 Months)' section mentions 'Pincer on Slavyansk, EU energy rift deepens, World Cup risk.' The 'LONG TERM (1-5 Years)' section mentions 'AI-integrated warfare shift, Permanent Central European neutrality buffer.' Below this, there is a section titled 'RECOMMENDATIONS' with three icons: a handshake for 'Diplomatic Mediation for EU Energy Crisis', a warning sign for 'Investigate Foreign Fighter Blowback Risks', and a bar chart for 'Supply Chain & Energy Market Volatility Awareness'.

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FEBRUARY 23, 2026

RUSSIA PROJECTS MILITARY
CONTINUITY AMID FRONTLINE
ADVANCES, CENTRAL AMERICAN
UNREST, AND EUROPEAN ENERGY
ULTIMATUMS

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

February 23, 2026, marked a high-intensity propaganda and strategic communication effort by the Russian state, utilizing the "Defender of the Fatherland Day" holiday to weave a narrative of historical continuity between the Soviet victory in World War II and the ongoing "Special Military Operation" (SVO). President Vladimir Putin and Defense Minister Andrey Belousov leveraged the holiday to signal a commitment to the [development of the nuclear triad](#) and to honor soldiers currently engaged in a critical offensive toward the Slavyansk-Kramatorsk agglomeration. The state media apparatus prioritized images of the military leadership laying wreaths and awarding "Gold Star" medals to highlight domestic stability and military resolve during a period of sustained high-intensity conflict.

Simultaneously, two significant international crises emerged as primary focus points. In

Mexico, the liquidation of cartel leader "El Mencho"—allegedly with U.S. intelligence assistance—triggered a [massive armed uprising](#) that Russian state media linked to the conflict in Ukraine, claiming cartel members gained combat experience fighting for the UAF. In Europe, a burgeoning rift within NATO/EU ranks solidified as Slovakia and Hungary threatened to [halt electricity exports to Ukraine](#) in response to Kyiv's blockade of the Druzhba oil pipeline. This convergence of events suggests a Russian strategy of highlighting Western instability and internal fragmentation while maintaining a methodical, high-tech offensive on the Donbas front.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

1. Central Donbas Offensive: The Drive for Dobropolye

- Russian "Center" forces have intensified their advance toward Dobropolye, a strategic logistics hub situated between the captured Krasnoarmeysk and the Slavyansk-Kramatorsk pocket [last major UAF stronghold](#) in Donbas.
- The tactical focus has shifted to the village of Grishino, where Russian stormtroopers have reportedly [secured most of the territory](#) while heavy artillery targets UAF rear positions in Novoaleksandrovka.
- Military reports emphasize the use of "Giatsint" (Hyacinth) long-range artillery, which utilizes "stealth" tactics such as [building brick facades around guns](#) to blend into destroyed urban landscapes and evade drone detection.

2. Mexico's "Cartel War" and Alleged Ukraine Linkages

- The death of Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes ("El Mencho"), leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), has plunged 15 Mexican states into [active armed conflict](#).
- Russian reports claim that CJNG members [obtained combat experience in Ukraine](#) fighting for the UAF before returning to Mexico to resist government forces.
- Civilian infrastructure, including the Guadalajara International Airport and the port of Manzanillo, faced significant disruptions or seizures by [heavily armed cartel units](#) using drones and armored vehicles.

3. Central European Energy Brinkmanship

- Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico announced that Slovakia is prepared to [terminate electricity supplies to Ukraine](#) following Kyiv's decision to halt Russian oil transit via the Druzhba pipeline.
- Hungary joined the ultimatum, with officials stating they would [veto the 20th package of sanctions](#) against Russia until oil transit is fully restored, highlighting a major fracture in EU energy policy.

4. Domestic Security and Strategic Modernization

- President Putin reaffirmed that the [attainment of strategic parity](#) remains a top priority, with specific emphasis on the modernization of the nuclear triad and "unmanned systems."

- The military signaled a transition to [fully electronic command and control](#) (C2) architectures, referencing the development of the "Kazbek" automated system and modern "Ratnik" infantry gear.
- A new assassination attempt on Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago, involving a [man with a shotgun and gasoline](#), was reported as evidence of deepening domestic instability within the United States.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

National Security and Military Architecture

The Russian state is aggressively promoting its "unmanned systems" as the future of warfare. The Ministry of Defense highlighted the [establishment of drone units](#) as a primary career path for new recruits, contrasting this with the historical development of Soviet signal troops. There is a clear push for [technical sovereignty in communications](#), specifically mentioning the BSM6 supercomputer and its role in coordinating hundreds of secure communication channels in the field. This indicates a governance shift toward AI-integrated C2 systems to mitigate the vulnerability of traditional radio and satellite links.

Energy Security and Geopolitical Power Dynamics

The energy row between the "Bratislava-Budapest bloc" and Kyiv represents a significant failure of European coalition cohesion. By framing the [Slovakian response as an act of sovereignty](#) against "Brussels and Washington," Russian media is amplifying the narrative that Ukraine's neighbors are no longer willing to bear the economic costs of the conflict. The potential loss of 50% of Ukraine's electricity imports from these two nations represents a [critical](#)

[infrastructure risk](#) for Kyiv heading into the spring.

International Relations and "Global Risk" Narratives

Russian state media is framing the unrest in Mexico not merely as a domestic criminal issue but as a symptom of [failed U.S. foreign policy](#). By alleging that "Ukraine-trained" militants are now destabilizing the Western Hemisphere, Moscow is attempting to link the SVO to North American security. The recommendation for Russian citizens to [avoid 15 Mexican states](#) underscores the severity of the security collapse in a region traditionally under U.S. influence.

Domestic Stability and Crisis Management

Despite the focus on military glory, reports of [infrastructure collapse in Khabarovsk](#) due to a cyclone and [heating failures in Moscow](#) suggest ongoing struggles with state capacity and utility maintenance. The government's response—using record snowfall as a justification for service delays—highlights the [ongoing vulnerability of Russian urban infrastructure](#) to extreme weather events despite wartime mobilization.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Legislative activity was largely ceremonial or focused on military-social support, with a significant emphasis on the role of the Duma in honoring fallen soldiers and regulating support for their families.

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **Social Support for SVO Families:** President Putin met with widows of Special Operations personnel to [review additional assistance measures](#) intended to bypass bureaucratic hurdles in regional governance.

- **Military-Industrial Prioritization:** Directives were reinforced regarding the [prioritization of weapons and missile systems](#) over general state infrastructure, a policy dating back to the Kosygin era but reaffirmed in current budget logic.

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Putin's Defender of the Fatherland Address:** A televised speech emphasizing [nuclear triad modernization](#) and the "multi-national" nature of the Russian army as its core strength.
- **Slovakian PM Statement on Energy:** Robert Fico's press conference where he declared Slovakia is [not a "banana republic"](#) and would act against Kyiv's interests to protect its own energy supply.
- **Defense Ministry Briefing:** General Belousov's address to the troops, focusing on [professionalism and "unbending will"](#) as the drivers for the current offensive operations.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Evolution of "Stealth" Artillery A recurring theme in current frontline reporting is the adaptation of heavy systems to the drone-saturated environment. The practice of [using urban camouflage \(brickwork\)](#) for "Giatsint" guns reveals a tactical shift where firepower is secondary to concealment. This trend suggests that the "artillery war" has become a game of visual deception, where the [accuracy of long-range fire](#) is only relevant if the unit can remain "invisible" to FPV and reconnaissance drones.

Weaponizing Global Instability Russia is increasingly using events in the Western

Hemisphere to validate its own regional interventions. The chaos in Mexico is being framed as the [inevitable blowback of US intelligence activities](#). By highlighting the [participation of cartel members in the Ukraine war](#), Moscow is constructing a narrative where the conflict in Donbas is a training ground for global actors who will eventually bring violence back to the United States' doorstep.

The Fragmentation of NATO's Eastern Flank The coordination between Hungary and Slovakia on oil and electricity transit signals the emergence of a **dissenting bloc** within the EU that views [Ukraine's transit policies](#) as a direct threat to their national survival. This "rebellion" is no longer purely rhetorical; the threat to cut [electricity exports to Ukraine](#) represents the most significant tangible policy shift against Kyiv by its neighbors since the start of the conflict.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Expect a definitive Russian push to [fully capture Grishino](#) and isolate the logistical routes into Dobropolye. In Mexico, the security situation is likely to deteriorate further as the CJNG attempts to [seize additional transportation hubs](#) to extract concessions from the government. Slovakia may move beyond threats to initiate a "test" [reduction in power flow](#) to Ukraine to force a resumption of oil transit through the Druzhba pipeline.

Medium Term (1-6 Months): The "Center" grouping will likely attempt to create a [pincer movement around the Slavyansk-Kramatorsk agglomeration](#) using Dobropolye as a staging base. The internal EU rift over energy may deepen, potentially leading to a formal [Hungarian veto on Ukraine's accession talks](#)

or new financial aid packages. The 2026 FIFA World Cup preparations in Mexico could be [jeopardized by the cartel uprising](#), leading to international pressure for a more direct security intervention.

Long Term (1-5 Years): Russia's focus on [unmanned systems and 5G-integrated warfare](#) suggests a long-term goal of replacing traditional infantry-heavy tactics with AI-managed technical units. The current energy friction in Central Europe may lead to a [permanent shift in regional alliances](#), where Slovakia and Hungary act as a "neutrality buffer" within the EU, potentially disrupting NATO's logistics for the eastern front permanently.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For International Policy:

- The threat to [cut electricity to Ukraine](#) requires immediate diplomatic mediation within the EU to prevent a cascading energy crisis that could collapse the Ukrainian rear.
- The alleged movement of [foreign fighters from Ukraine to Latin American cartels](#) warrants a high-level investigation into the "blowback" risks of mercenary involvement in the SVO.
- Western security agencies must account for the [recurrence of assassination attempts](#) on high-profile U.S. political figures as a driver of global market and political volatility.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chain Risk:** Operations in Mexico, particularly near the [port of Manzanillo and Jalisco state](#), face high risk of interruption due to cartel-military clashes.

- **Energy Sector Volatility:** The [blockade of the Druzhba pipeline](#) and retaliatory power cuts will lead to significant price spikes in the Central European energy market and potential industrial shutdowns in Slovakia/Hungary.
- **Investment Opportunity:** The Russian state's heavy investment in [unmanned systems and 5G infrastructure](#) indicates that defense-tech remains the most resilient and subsidized sector in the Russian economy for the foreseeable future.

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>.