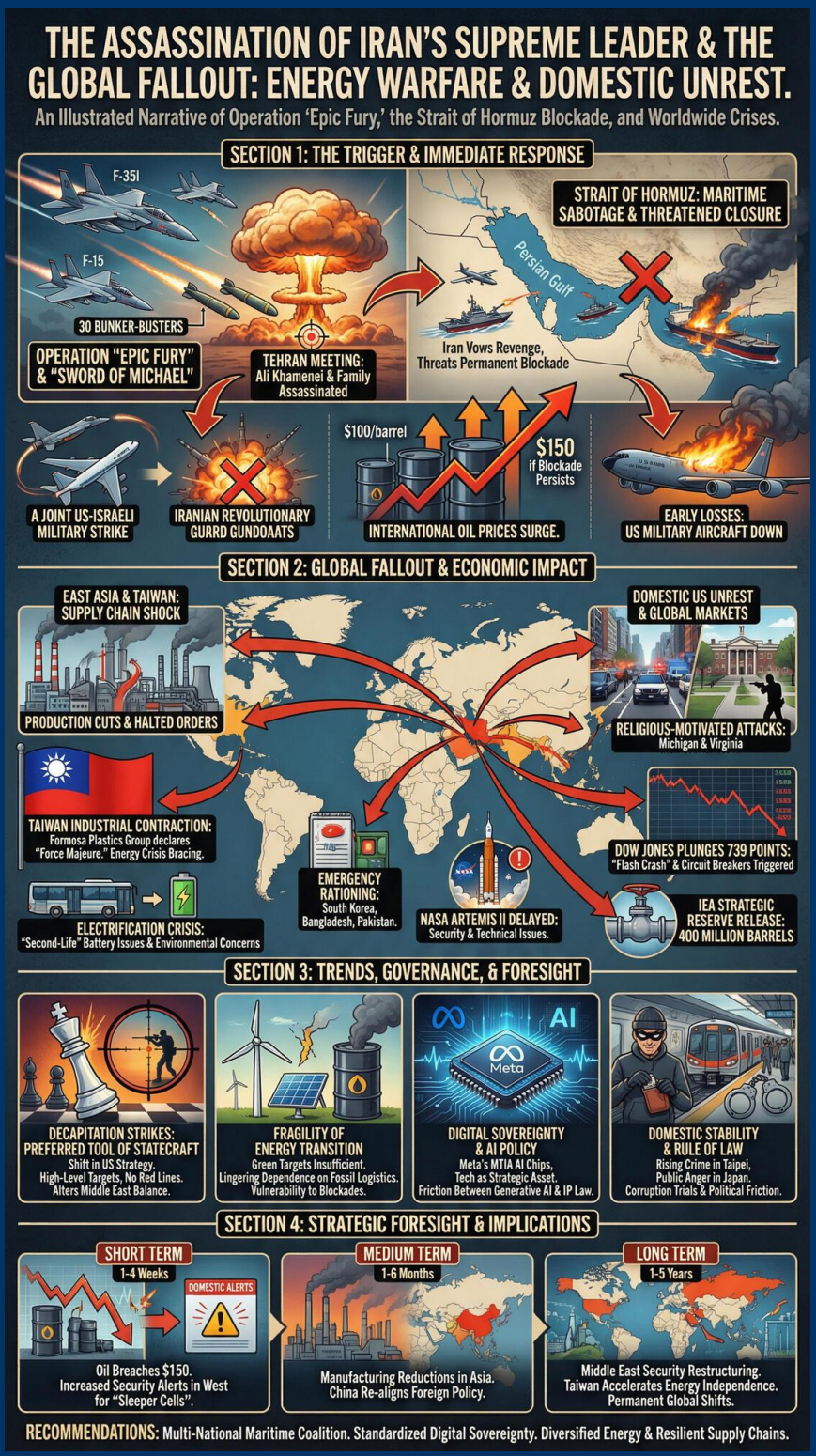
TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

TTV

MARCH 13, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

TTV

MARCH 13, 2026

THE ASSASSINATION OF IRAN'S SUPREME LEADER TRIGGERS GLOBAL ENERGY WARFARE AND DOMESTIC US UNREST

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

The global geopolitical order has entered a state of extreme volatility following the confirmed assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. The operation, dubbed "Epic Fury" and "Sword of Michael," involved a joint US-Israeli strike that deployed 30 bunker-buster bombs on a high-level meeting in Tehran, reportedly killing Khamenei along with his daughter and granddaughter. In immediate retaliation, Iran's Revolutionary Guard has begun a campaign of maritime sabotage, striking oil tankers in the Iraqi and Omani maritime territories and threatening the permanent closure of the Strait of Hormuz. This has sent international oil prices surging past $100 per barrel, with analysts warning of a spike to $150 if the blockade persists.

The fallout has transcended the Middle East, manifesting as a domestic security crisis in the United States and a supply chain shock in East Asia. Two major religious-motivated attacks occurred in Michigan and Virginia, with a gunman at a university reportedly shouting religious slogans during a mass shooting. Meanwhile, the International Energy Agency (IEA) has authorized the largest strategic oil reserve release in history—400 million barrels—to stabilize a market that saw US indices trigger circuit breakers before a partial recovery on President Trump's rhetoric regarding a "short war."

In Taiwan, the industrial sector is bracing for a prolonged energy crisis. Formosa Plastics Group has announced production cuts and a halt on new orders due to the inability to manage raw material costs. Simultaneously, the Taiwanese government is navigating internal political friction over Central Election Commission (CEC) nominations and high-profile corruption trials involving former police officials and legislators. The convergence of these events suggests a global shift toward direct state-on-state conflict, testing the resilience of energy infrastructure and the stability of the Western security architecture.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **The Assassination of Khamenei and Operation "Epic Fury"**
  - US and Israeli forces executed a decapitation strike using F-35I and F-15 aircraft to eliminate dozens of Iranian officials, including the Defense Minister and Revolutionary Guard commanders.
  - Iran's new leadership, under Mojtaba Khamenei, has vowed revenge and declared the Strait of Hormuz a tool of "pressure," threatening to keep it closed indefinitely.
  - The US military has suffered early losses in the escalating theater, with four KC-135 tankers lost or damaged during operations in the Middle East.
- **Global Energy Crisis and Market Instability**
  - Crude oil prices surpassed the $100 mark on March 8 and are approaching $120-$147 per barrel as maritime transit becomes a war zone.
  - Major Asian economies have begun emergency rationing; South Korea introduced its first oil price ceiling in 30 years, while Bangladesh and Pakistan closed schools to conserve energy.
  - The US stock market experienced a "flash crash" scenario, with the Dow Jones plunging 739 points in a single session amid panic over private credit liquidity.
- **Taiwan Industrial Contraction**
  - Formosa Petrochemical and Formosa Plastics have declared "force majeure" factors in their operations, seeking alternative oil sources to mitigate the loss of Middle Eastern supply.
  - Domestic fuel prices in Taiwan will follow CPC's pricing mechanism, though companies admit they cannot fully absorb the rising costs without further output reductions.
- **Domestic Terrorism in the United States**
  - A Lebanese-American suspect rammed a truck into a building in Michigan, while a shooting at a university in Virginia left two dead, highlighting the domestic blowback from the Middle East conflict.
  - The FBI and local law enforcement have stepped up surveillance of religious sites as "Sword of Michael" operations draw direct fire from extremist elements within the US.
- **NASA Artemis II Schedule and Delays**
  - NASA has rescheduled the Artemis II lunar mission for April 1, following gas leak issues in the SLS rocket system during pre-launch checks.
  - This mission marks the first time humans will orbit the far side of the moon in over 50 years, though security concerns at launch sites have increased due to the Iranian conflict.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Energy Security and Critical Infrastructure

- The blockade of the Strait of Hormuz represents a threat to 20% of the world's oil supply. Nations are pivoting to strategic reserve releases totaling 400 million barrels to prevent a total economic collapse.
- In Taiwan, the electrification of public buses faces a "second-life" crisis, with experts calling for mandatory recycling and tracking systems for large-scale lithium batteries to prevent environmental hazards as the fleet expands toward 2030 targets.

National Security and Military Readiness

- The US military is shifting to a convoy-escort model for merchant ships in the Middle East, despite the loss of four tankers (KC-135s) which were reportedly lost or damaged in recent sorties.
- Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense is accelerating the procurement of Paladin self-propelled howitzers and HIMARS rocket systems as regional tensions highlight the need for rapid-response deterrence.

AI and Technology Policy

- Meta has unveiled details of its custom MTIA AI chips, seeking to reduce reliance on Nvidia and leverage TSMC's 3nm and 4nm processes for future compute sovereignty.
- AI music generator Suno is facing heavy litigation from record labels over copyright infringement, even as its subscription base exceeds 2 million users, highlighting the friction between generative AI and intellectual property law.

Domestic Stability and Social Order

- Taipei is dealing with a surge in international pickpocketing syndicates operating in the Metro system, with some victims having their credit cards used in Saudi Arabia within 30 minutes of the theft.
- Public anger in Japan is rising as JR East railway fares increased for the first time in 40 years (outside of tax hikes), driven by escalating energy and maintenance costs.

Corruption and Rule of Law

- Former Criminal Investigation Bureau official Huang Jianrong is standing trial for extortion, accused of using his high-ranking position to threaten a restaurant owner over a 10 million TWD debt.
- Legislator Zheng Tiancai is facing bribery charges related to a 7.11 million TWD kickback scheme involving industrial contractors, with his assistants reportedly pleading guilty to all charges.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Legislative activity in Taiwan focused heavily on staffing independent oversight bodies and responding to the military-industrial requirements of the escalating global conflict. The Legislative Yuan held sessions to bypass partisan gridlock regarding the Central

Election Commission and confirmed funding for advanced missile systems.

- **Central Election Commission (CEC) Nominations:** The Legislative Yuan confirmed four of seven nominees for the CEC, including You Ying-long, after a tense standoff where some DPP members initially opposed the appointments due to past criticisms of the party.
- **National Defense Procurement:** Legislators reached a consensus to authorize four major procurement contracts for Javelin missiles, Paladin self-propelled guns, and HIMARS systems to ensure the US begins production immediately.
- **Criminal Code Amendments:** The Legislative Yuan passed amendments to the Criminal Code and its Implementation Act, adjusting the systems for parole revocation and sentencing for life-imprisonment inmates.

Hearings and Press Events:

- **Formosa Plastics Press Conference:** New President Wu Jia-zhao held his first formal meeting with the media to outline the transformation plan for the group's "Four Treasures" in response to the energy crisis.
- **Taichung Local Election Polls:** A new poll released by ETToday shows the DPP's Su Chiao-hui leading at 35.7% against the KMT's potential candidate Li Sichuan, as the 2026 mayoral race begins to take shape.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

Decapitation Strikes as a Preferred Tool of Statecraft

The precision and scale of the "Epic Fury" operation suggest a shift in US strategy toward direct decapitation of adversarial regimes rather than prolonged proxy warfare. By targeting 1,200 objectives in a single day—eight times the intensity of the Gulf War—the US-Israeli coalition has signaled that "red lines" regarding senior leadership are no longer in effect. This has fundamentally altered the strategic balance in the Middle East, as Iran’s "Axis of Resistance" finds its ability to manage conflict through proxies severely weakened by the loss of the primary command structure in Tehran.

The Fragility of the Energy Transition

While nations like Taiwan and those in the EU have pushed for green energy and electrification, the current oil shock reveals a lingering and dangerous dependence on fossil fuel logistics. The emergency rationing in Asia and the sudden production halts in the petrochemical sector demonstrate that green targets (like Taiwan's 2030 bus electrification) are currently insufficient to buffer against a total maritime blockade of the Hormuz. Furthermore, the unresolved issues of battery recycling and supply chain security for lithium pose a long-term risk to the very "sustainability" these policies aim to achieve.

Weaponization of Commercial Platforms and Digital Sovereignty

The reported unveiling of MTIA AI chips by Meta and the legal battles over Suno AI point to a new era where digital infrastructure is treated as a strategic asset. Meta’s move to

bring chip design in-house is a direct response to the vulnerability of the global supply chain, which is currently dominated by a few players like Nvidia and TSMC. The litigation against Suno AI further illustrates the "wild west" nature of AI governance, where the pursuit of training data has outpaced the legal frameworks designed to protect intellectual property.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks)

- Expected volatility in global fuel prices; oil is highly likely to breach $150 per barrel if US-escorted convoys in the Strait of Hormuz face sustained drone or suicide boat attacks.
- Increased domestic security alerts in Western capitals as Iranian "sleeper cells" or radicalized individuals may retaliate for Khamenei's death, following the pattern seen in Michigan and Virginia.

Medium Term (1-6 Months)

- Industrial contraction in Taiwan and South Korea as energy-intensive manufacturing (plastics, semiconductors) reduces production shifts to manage costs.
- A possible re-alignment of Chinese foreign policy; as Iran's stability falters, China may distance itself from Tehran to secure energy deals with the Gulf Monarchies, which it now relies on even more heavily.

Long Term (1-5 Years)

- A permanent restructuring of the Middle East security architecture. If the Iranian regime fails to stabilize after the succession of Mojtaba Khamenei, a power vacuum could lead to a fragmented Iran, necessitating a massive regional intervention or a total shift in global energy routes.
- Taiwan will likely accelerate its energy independence programs, including a potential revival of nuclear debates or massive investment in domestic strategic reserves as the vulnerability of its petrochemical industry becomes a central political issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For International Policy:

- Establish a multi-national maritime security coalition that extends beyond the US and Israel to include major energy importers like China and India, as the blockade of Hormuz is a global, not regional, threat.
- Develop a standardized "Digital Sovereignty" framework to manage the rapid advancement of AI chips and generative models, preventing systemic legal warfare from stifling technological innovation.
- Strengthen intelligence sharing on domestic "proxy threats" to prevent the importation of Middle Eastern conflict into local communities.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Energy Diversification:** Investors should pivot toward energy companies with diversified geographic holdings outside the Middle East, as the volatility in WTI and Brent is expected to remain high for the next two quarters.
- **Supply Chain Resilience:** Manufacturing firms in East Asia must review force majeure clauses and secure alternative logistics for raw materials, as the traditional reliance on the Persian Gulf is currently a liability.
- **AI Infrastructure:** There is a significant investment opportunity in "AI sovereignty" tech—companies that design hardware independent of the Nvidia-dominated stack or provide secure, licensed data for AI training.

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.