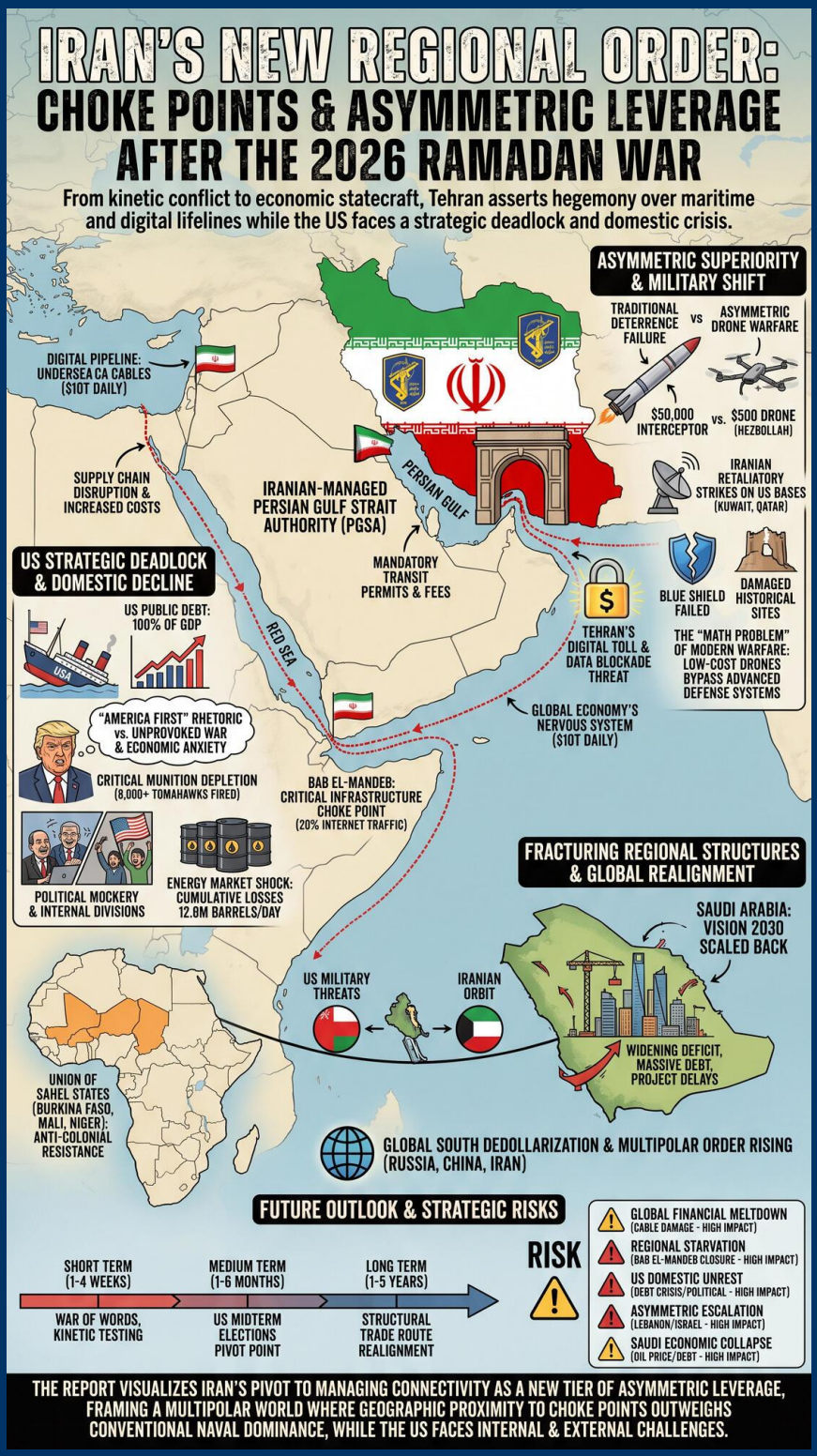
TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

PRESSTV

MAY 28, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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IRAN LEVERAGES MARITIME CHOKE POINTS AND ASYMMETRIC SUPERIORITY TO ENFORCE A NEW REGIONAL ORDER FOLLOWING THE 2026 RAMADAN WAR.

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

Following the conclusion of the 40-day kinetic phase of the "Ramadan War," the geopolitical landscape in West Asia has shifted toward a high-stakes war of attrition and economic statecraft. Iran has effectively transitioned from defensive military operations to a posture of active regional management, asserting sovereign control over the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el-Mandeb. By implementing mandatory transit permits and fees for commercial vessels, and threatening the same for the undersea fiber optic cables that carry the "nervous system of the global economy," Tehran is attempting to force a formal recognition of its regional hegemony. The United States, under a second Trump administration, appears trapped in a "strategic deadlock," unable to achieve a decisive military victory while facing a domestic economic crisis characterized by record public debt and an aging population.

Concurrently, traditional regional power structures are fracturing. Saudi Arabia is grappling with a widening budget deficit and the necessary scaling back of its ambitious "Vision 2030" megaprojects as oil revenues prove insufficient to cover its massive debt-driven expansion. Smaller regional states, such as Oman and Kuwait, are being forced to navigate a precarious neutrality as Washington issues threats of military action against non-compliant allies. The emergence of the "Union of Sahel States" in Africa and the accelerating trend of dedollarization in the Global South further suggest a systemic decline in Western influence, which Iranian media frames as the definitive rise of a multipolar world order centered on "modern Iran" as a new superpower.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

Assertion of Iranian Sovereignty over Maritime and Digital Infrastructure

- The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has established the Persian Gulf Strait Authority (PGSA) to oversee all transit through the Strait of Hormuz, mandating permits and service fees for all vessels.
- Tehran is preparing to assert jurisdiction over submarine fiber optic cables passing through its territorial waters, which carry an estimated $10 trillion in daily global financial transactions.
- Iranian officials have warned that any unauthorized transit or interference will be met with a decisive military response.

Retaliatory Strikes and the Failure of Traditional Deterrence

- The IRGC confirmed a retaliatory strike on an American airbase (reportedly in Kuwait) in response to a US strike on Bandar Abbas.
- Satellite imagery reportedly shows significant damage to multiple US regional facilities, including Al-Udaid (Qatar) and Ali Al Salem (Kuwait).
- Hezbollah is utilizing low-cost FPV drones to bypass Israeli defense systems, creating a "math problem" where a $500 drone forces the use of a $50,000 interceptor missile.

Saudi Arabian Economic Realignment

- The Saudi Ministry of Finance reported a significant quarterly deficit, the largest since 2020, attributed to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and increased military spending.
- Core Vision 2030 projects, including "The Line," have undergone radical design modifications and scope reductions due to financing feasibility issues.
- Public debt service now consumes approximately 10% of Saudi public spending, equivalent to two-thirds of the education budget.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization

- The "Ramadan War" has evolved into a war of attrition where US bases are no longer safe zones or shielded from direct targeting.
- Reports indicate the US has fired over 8,000 Tomahawk missiles during the conflict, leading to a critical depletion of munition stockpiles that may take years to replenish.

Critical Infrastructure Security

- Undersea cables in the Bab el-Mandeb are identified as a digital choke point carrying 20% of the world's internet traffic, with minimal physical security or international legal protection.
- The "Blue Shield" designation for historical sites has failed to deter strikes, with over 150 Iranian historical sites reportedly damaged by US-Israeli strikes.

Macroeconomics & Trade

- US public debt has reached 100% of GDP, leading to concerns that interest payments are outpacing national security spending.
- Global energy markets face a massive supply shock, with cumulative losses estimated at 12.8 million barrels per day since February 2026.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Weaponization of Geography and Connectivity

A central theme is the strategic shift from controlling territory to controlling connectivity. Iran’s pivot toward managing the "digital pipeline" of undersea cables represents a new tier of asymmetric leverage. By framing the Strait of Hormuz as a sovereign toll-way, Tehran is effectively taxing the global supply chain, forcing a choice between recognizing Iranian authority or facing a "one, two, three punch" of energy,

trade, and data blockades. This trend suggests that in the 21st century, geographic proximity to choke points is more valuable than conventional naval dominance.

The "Deadlocked" Hegemon

The transcripts consistently portray the United States as a declining power that is "fighting against itself." The contrast between President Trump's "America First" rhetoric and his engagement in an unprovoked war creates a domestic credibility gap. Analysts highlight that US military contractors cannot keep pace with the war's demands, while the federal budget is being "devoured from the inside" by compound interest on spiraling debt. This creates a "deadlock" where Washington can neither win decisively nor withdraw without admitting a historic defeat.

Fragmentation of the Western Alliance

The reported "internal conflict and dispute" between the US and its European allies indicates a fracturing of the post-WWII security architecture. European nations, reliant on Persian Gulf LNG and jet fuel, are increasingly vulnerable to the maritime blockade. Simultaneously, allies like Oman are being threatened by Washington, which Iranian media interprets as a sign of "moral bankruptcy" and "lawlessness" in US foreign policy, further driving neutral states toward the Iranian-Russian-Chinese orbit.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

Iran: National Endurance and Ideological Unity

The broadcast nation emphasizes a state of total societal mobilization. Nightly rallies in Tehran and other provinces are framed as a "visible testament to resilience" and a "message of national endurance." The concept of **John-Fadol** (readiness to sacrifice one's life) is promoted as a unifying national trait, specifically highlighting the participation of women in military training to counter Western narratives of female oppression. This internal cohesion is presented as the primary reason for the US's failure to achieve regime change through bombardment.

United States: Economic Anxiety and Political Mockery

The US is depicted as suffering from deep internal divisions. Domestic criticism of President Trump is reportedly moving beyond journalism into "viral mockery" by ordinary citizens. Public frustration is fueled by the contrast between a "chaotic" presidency and the harsh reality of inflation, debt, and economic anxiety. The narrative suggests that if the Republican Party loses the upcoming midterm elections on November 3rd, the "America First" movement itself will be at risk.

Israel: Coalition Instability and Strategic Failure

The Israeli government is portrayed as facing a "growing instability" within its governing coalition. Reports suggest that the "ultra-orthodox" and opposition parties may bring down the government as public trust collapses due to the endless escalation and international isolation. The failure of ground operations in Lebanon has reportedly forced the IDF into a "collective punishment campaign" against civilians to simulate a semblance of victory.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

The Rise of the Global South and Sahel States

The transcripts celebrate the emergence of the "Union of Sahel States" (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger) as a "most inspiring" development. The expulsion of French colonial forces and their alignment with Russia is framed as a pivotal moment in the anti-colonial resistance. This aligns with a broader narrative of the world "hastening a new world" where the "old US empire was done and dusted."

China's Soft Power Diplomacy

China is framed as a "smart" actor utilizing **soft power** and the "carrot" of infrastructure investment (railroads, high-speed rail, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank) rather than the "stick" of military force. Iranian media notes with approval that China played a key role in re-establishing Iran-Saudi relations and continues to provide an economic lifeline by purchasing Iranian oil despite US sanctions.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The current environment is defined by severe energy market distortions and high levels of sovereign risk. While the US and Israel are accused of deliberately targeting Iranian oil to benefit US fracking interests, the global result is a "transportation, manufacturing, and cost of living crisis."

- **Energy Volatility:** Oil prices fluctuate between $80 and $120 per barrel based on Trump's rhetoric, providing an estimated $63 billion in additional profit to the US fracking sector.
- **National Debt Milestones:** US public debt has officially hit 100% of GDP; Saudi Arabia's debt-to-GDP ratio has risen to 36% from just 6% in 2015.
- **Supply Chain Disruption:** Shipping costs have surged 200% to 600%; rerouting around Africa adds 10-14 days to journeys and up to $9 billion in annual costs.
- **Currency Trends:** Growing momentum for dedollarization in the "Global South," with Russia officially conducting oil transactions in Yuan.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Strategic leadership shifts are centered on the transition from kinetic warfare to long-term ideological and economic governance.

- **President Donald Trump:** Portrayed as a "greedy fool" trapped by Zionist lobbyists and his own ego, unable to admit military defeat while prioritizing family wealth through partners in military drone companies.
- **Ayatollah Sayid Mojtaba Khamenei:** Positioned as the steady "leader of the Islamic Revolution," urging lawmakers to focus on economic recovery and post-war reconstruction.
- **Benjamin Netanyahu:** Framed as desperate to prevent a peace deal to preserve his political survival, despite the strategic failure of ground operations in Lebanon.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

The network maintains a highly nationalistic and confrontational posture. The **Lead Stories** revolve around Iranian military

"victories," the assertion of sovereign rights over maritime choke points, and the perceived collapse of US regional authority. Significant airtime is dedicated to "Fake News Expose" segments that characterize Western mainstream media (CBS, BBC) as finally being forced to admit Washington's strategic failures. The tone is triumphalist regarding Iran's capabilities and moralistic regarding the suffering of civilians in Lebanon and Gaza.

Buried Stories: Detailed Iranian casualty figures from the "Ramadan War" are notably absent, focusing instead on the damage to US bases. The specific location of the US airbase hit by Iran remains vaguely "unknown" or "under investigation," potentially to avoid immediate diplomatic fallout with the host nation.

Conspicuous Omissions: There is no discussion of the internal economic hardships facing ordinary Iranians as a result of the war and sanctions, nor any mention of domestic opposition to the government's high-risk maritime strategies.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

Iranian media frames the current conflict not as a war between nations, but as a "fundamental conflict between two different ideologies": rapacious imperialism versus the "ideology of humanity" represented by Iran.

COUNTRIES

- **Iran:** Portrayed as a "superpower" and a "political genius" that has "brought the world's most powerful military to its knees." Quote: "modern Iran is a new superpower."
- **United States:** Characterized as an "irresponsible" and "emotionally volatile" bully. Quote: "language of someone um emotionally irresponsible and he's handling the largest mility in the world."
- **Oman:** Framed as a principled mediator and "constructive" actor currently being "blackmailed" by Washington. Quote: "blackmail an independent country which is a member of the United Nations."

LEADERS

- **Donald Trump:** Portrayed as an "egotistical maniac" and a "liar" whose primary motivation is insider trading and family enrichment. Quote: "He's just liar, he's a narcissist, he's an egotistical maniac."
- **Benjamin Netanyahu:** Framed as a "child-killing" regime leader whose survival depends on the continuation of war. Quote: "Netanyahu is also facing a great situation internally, he cannot sell his people victory."

NON-STATE & CORPORATE ACTORS

- **IRGC:** Depicted as the legitimate and effective guardian of regional security, providing "safe passage" where the US provides "threat and terror." Quote: "when you bank on the IRGC you get safe passage."
- **Hezbollah:** Framed as a highly competent resistance force that has "perfected" asymmetric drone warfare. Quote: "the battlefield the future... Hezbollah's latest headache delivery system."

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

The broadcast actively engages in "semiotic warfare," utilizing high-quality animations and "liquid political communication" to reach global audiences. The network frames the US position as a series of "bluffs" that Iran has successfully called. A key narrative seed is that the US is lying to its own voters about the cost and purpose of the war to protect Republican interests in the midterms. Psychological operations are evident in the detailed descriptions of the "mosquito whine" of FPV drones, intended to instill "airborne dread" in Israeli soldiers.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Formalization of the "Hormuz Toll":** Iran will likely move to institutionalize its permit system for the Strait, potentially securing tacit approval from China and Russia while ignoring US protests. This will create a permanent new revenue stream and a permanent check on Western naval movements.
- **The Digital Bottleneck:** If kinetic conflict resumes, Iran may demonstrate its ability to sever or tap specific undersea cables, using "data blackmail" to force the US into a broader diplomatic surrender that includes the release of all frozen assets.
- **Saudi Shift toward Eurasia:** As Vision 2030 megaprojects stall and debt mounts, Riyadh may be forced to abandon its "America First" investment commitments and pivot more aggressively toward the BRICS/SCO economic framework for survival.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

- **Short Term (1-4 Weeks):** Expect a "war of words" and sporadic kinetic testing by both sides as the Pakistani mediation continues. Increased use of "false flag" accusations and market manipulation via presidential social media posts.
- **Medium Term (1-6 Months):** The US midterm elections on November 3rd will serve as a critical pivot point. If the Republicans lose control of the House, a significant shift in military budgeting and war posture is likely.
- **Long Term (1-5 Years):** A structural realignment of global trade routes. If the Strait of Hormuz remains "managed" by Iran, the Red Sea will become the primary focus for regional infrastructure, potentially leading to a new economic geography for the Arabian Peninsula.

RISK ASSESSMENT

- **Global Financial Meltdown:** Triggered by the accidental or deliberate damage to undersea cables in the Bab el-Mandeb or Strait of Hormuz. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Catastrophic (loss of $10 trillion in daily transactions). Mitigations: International coordination on cable-specific laws and rapid repair permits.
- **Regional Starvation:** Triggered by a total closure of the Bab el-Mandeb, which handles more than half of the region's fertilizer imports. Likelihood: Low. Impact: High (massive global starvation). Mitigations: Diversification of food supply chains away from maritime choke points.

- **US Domestic Unrest:** Triggered by a "third assassination attempt" on Donald Trump or a 190% debt-to-GDP projection causing a market panic. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: High (regime change in the US). Mitigations: Drastic federal budget cuts or emergency diplomatic resolutions.
- **Asymmetric Escalation in Lebanon:** Triggered by an Israeli attempt to seize control of the Litani River crossing. Likelihood: High. Impact: Moderate (prolonged attritional war). Mitigations: A "true ceasefire" that includes the withdrawal of occupation forces.
- **Saudi Economic Collapse:** Triggered by sustained oil prices below $80/barrel combined with high debt service. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: High (regional instability). Mitigations: Rapid revenue diversification into tourism and services.

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- The transcripts do not address the **actual current state of Iran's nuclear program** beyond general statements about "highly enriched uranium," leaving a critical ambiguity in the threat matrix.
- The **position of Russia** in the conflict is mentioned only in passing regarding "dedollarization," despite its likely role as a major security provider in the Sahel and a mediator in Moscow-hosted security conferences.
- There is a lack of independent verification for the **loss and damage claims** regarding US bases, which currently rely heavily on Iranian satellite imagery interpretations.
- The **humanitarian impact of the Hormuz blockade** on neutral trading nations is ignored, focusing exclusively on the damage to Western economies.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

- **The "Stalling Tactic" Hypothesis:** Iran's diplomatic overtures and the PGSA permit system are not signs of a new order, but a stalling tactic to buy time for the missile arsenal to be fully re-earthed and expanded before a final US-Israeli offensive.
- **The "Economic Mirage" Hypothesis:** The US debt and Saudi deficit figures are being weaponized by Press TV to mask **systemic Iranian economic failure** caused by the war, with the Hormuz "tolls" being a desperate attempt to secure basic hard currency.
- **Black Swan Event:** A single "single dragged anchor" in September 2025 reportedly damaged 15 cables. A similar "accidental" event during the 2026 tensions could trigger a **global internet blackout** that neither side intended, leading to an immediate and chaotic collapse of the current "deadlocked" status quo.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- Formalize contingency plans for "Digital Diplomacy" to secure global data flow in the event of maritime choke point closures.
- Condition regional security guarantees on the closure of the unprecedented debt loop in allied states.

- Prioritize the "Islamabad negotiations" as the most viable path to prevent a world war.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- Reroute critical supply chains away from the Bab el-Mandeb to mitigate the 600% shipping search risk.
- Hedge against US dollar volatility as dedollarization becomes an official policy for major oil producers like Russia and Iran.
- Audit exposure to "Vision 2030" projects, particularly those dependent on East-West pipeline capacity.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Strategic legislative focus is currently divided between Iranian post-war recovery and US-led sanctions regimes. In Tehran, the Islamic Consultative Assembly marked its anniversary with a focus on "economic recovery and post-war reconstruction." In Washington, the Treasury Department has moved to sanction the PGSA to disrupt its "toll" mechanism.

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **Persian Gulf Strait Authority (PGSA) Charter:** Iranian legislation establishing sovereign jurisdiction over maritime transit and data cables. Strategic intent: Enforce a new regional "law of the sea" to disclude the US from regional waters.
- **US Fiscal Year 2027 Military Budget:** A requested $1.5 trillion budget. Strategic intent: Cover the costs of the Ramadan War and modernize arsenals.
- **Saudi Vision 2030 Scope Amendment:** De-facto legislative downscaling of megaprojects like "The Line." Strategic intent: Align national spending with a reduced oil revenue reality.

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **14th Moscow International Security Conference:** Senior Iranian and Russian officials discussing a "new order" for West Asia.
- **UN Security Council Session (May 28):** Iran's ambassador defending the PGSA's actions as "fully legal" under international law.
- **Trump-Xi Meeting in Beijing:** A "subdued" President Trump meeting with President Xi Jinping. Strategic intent: Potential off-the-record de-escalation regarding Taiwan and Iran.

KEY STORIES

- **PGSA Mandatory Permit System:** The IRGC Navy confirmed that 26 commercial vessels crossed the Strait of Hormuz after obtaining mandatory permits. Unauthorized transit is now considered a "disruption."
- **Retaliation for Bandar Abbas:** The IRGC confirmed a strike on a US airbase (Kuwait military confirmed its air defenses confronted "hostile projectiles") in retaliation for US strikes in southern Iran.
- **Saudi Vision 2030 Delays:** "The Line" and "Niam" projects have been scaled back or delayed due to a $1.1 trillion deficit projection.
- **Digital Choke Points:** Tehran is preparing to charge transit fees to "Google, Microsoft, Meta, and Amazon" for submarine cables carrying 90% of Europe-Asia bandwidth.

- **Hezbollah FPV Drone Superiority:** Footage from April 27 shows Hezbollah drones destroying "multi-million dollar tanks" at a cost of $500 per unit.
- **US Public Debt Crisis:** The US national debt has officially hit 100% of GDP, with debt payments reportedly exceeding national security spending.
- **Israeli Strikes in Tyre and Sidon:** At least 9 people killed and 37 wounded in new Israeli air strikes violating the ceasefire agreement.
- **Mexico Awards Medal to Iran:** The Mexican Society of Geography and Statistics awarded the Benito Juarez medal to the Iranian nation for "courageous resistance."
- **Gaza Reconstruction through Recycling:** Palestinian families are recycling war debris into usable gravel due to Israeli restrictions on construction materials.
- **UN Special Rapporteur Sanctions:** The US has reimposed sanctions on Francesca Albanese, blacklisting her from major credit card use.
- **Iran-Oman Regional Framework:** Tehran and Muscat are negotiating a new maritime transit agreement that would bypass previous international norms.
- **US Munition Depletion:** Reports suggest the US may take until late 2030 to fully replenish munition inventories used in the Ramadan War.
- **Trump Approval Ratings:** New polling from The Economist shows Trump's approval at 34% versus a 59% disapproval rating, a new all-time low.

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.

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