

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

PRESSTV

JULY 18, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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REGIONAL SECURITY COLLAPSE AND DIRECT IRAN-US MILITARY CONFRONTATION FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF AYATOLLAH ALI KHAMENEI

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

West Asia has entered a period of unprecedented instability following the assassination or death of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the subsequent total collapse of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). On July 8th and 9th, 2026, the United States and Iran exchanged [direct military strikes](#), with the US hitting approximately 80 targets inside Iran and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) retaliating against the [US 5th Fleet headquarters in Bahrain](#) and the Ali al-Salem Airbase in Kuwait. This escalation marks the end of a brief 60-day diplomatic window intended to de-escalate regional tensions, as both sides now trade accusations of violating maritime navigation rights in the Strait of Hormuz.

The domestic landscape in Iran is defined by a massive, multi-day [funeral procession](#) for the late leader, which Iranian state media

characterizes as a global manifestation of "defiance and loyalty." Amidst this transition, Sayid Mujtaba Khamenei has emerged as a central voice, issuing warnings that the ["American president's signature is worthless"](#) and that the "Resistance Front" will teach the US "unforgettable lessons." Concurrently, the conflict has expanded geographically, with IRGC-affiliated forces in Yemen threatening to close the [Bab el-Mandeb Strait](#), a move that analysts predict could push global oil prices toward \$200 per barrel, further destabilizing a global economy already reeling from a 30-40% poor Asian monsoon and a European automotive crisis.

The editorial posture of the reporting network emphasizes the "criminal nature" of US strikes on [civilian infrastructure](#), including bridges, desalination plants, and hospitals, while framing Iranian retaliatory strikes as "precision-guided" operations against military assets. There is a clear effort to delegitimize the US presence in the region, portraying US bases in Jordan, Kuwait, and Bahrain as "magnets for missiles" and urging local populations to [expel American forces](#) to ensure their own national security.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Total Collapse of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU):** The 14-point peace plan, mediated by Pakistan and signed on June 17, is now declared "null and void" by Tehran. The primary friction point is **Article 5**, which governs the Strait of Hormuz; Iran claims the US violated its sovereignty by attempting to establish an [independent shipping corridor](#) with Oman, bypassing Iranian oversight.

- **Escalated Direct Military Confrontation:** Following US strikes on 80 targets, Iran launched its "Operation Thunder" and "Operation NASR 2" phases. Retaliatory strikes have targeted the [Al-Udairi camp in Kuwait](#), the Sheikh Isa airbase in Bahrain, and various logistical hubs in Jordan. The US Central Command (CENTCOM) has confirmed [two American service members killed](#) in Jordan.
- **Iranian Leadership Succession and Funereal Mobilization:** Massive crowds, estimated between [12 and 15 million in Tehran](#) alone and millions more in Iraq, gathered for the funeral of the martyred leader. Sayid Mujtaba Khamenei is now being quoted as a primary authority, framing the current war as a "battle for independent civilizations" and a final push to [expel US imperialism](#) from the region.
- **Global Economic and Energy Crisis:** The threat to the twin choke points of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb has caused immediate market volatility. Analysts warn that a full closure of Bab el-Mandeb could disrupt [25% of the world's oil and gas supply](#), sending oil prices to record highs and triggering a "global depression."
- **Regional Destabilization and Complicity Warnings:** The IRGC has issued **Statement Number 28**, explicitly warning regional countries that hosting US bases makes them [complicit in war crimes](#) and subjects them to "proportionate responses." This has created a severe dilemma for Jordan, Kuwait, and the UAE, as their territories are used as "launch pads" for US operations.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization: The region is witnessing a transition from

"coercive diplomacy" to a sustained "war of attrition." Iran is utilizing a ["step-by-step" operation model](#), first targeting radars and weapons depots, then moving to command centers and AI hubs. The US is being portrayed as targeting [civilian infrastructure](#) (bridges in Hormozgan, hospitals in the south) out of "frustration."

Leadership Dynamics & Governance: In Iran, the transition of power appears to be focusing on the **consolidation of the "Resistance" ideology** under Mujtaba Khamenei. In Ukraine, President Zelensky is facing [nationwide protests](#) after dismissing Defense Minister Mikaelo Fedorov, signaling deep internal rifts in the midst of the ongoing Russian offensive.

Macroeconomics & Trade: Global supply chains are being severely altered by [Trump-era tariffs](#) (contributing to a 6.5% producer price inflation) and the threat of a naval blockade. The IMF has reduced [2026 growth projections to 3%](#). Major corporate actors like Porsche have reported a [93% drop in operating profits](#) due to rising energy costs and shifts in the EV market.

Information Warfare & Disinformation: State media is aggressively "de-cloaking" western narratives. They analyze New York Times and CNN coverage to highlight ["narrative inversion,"](#) where the aggressor is portrayed as the victim. There is a heavy emphasis on "media literacy" to combat what they call ["selective interpretation"](#) of the Iranian funeral and regional conflict.

Tech Sovereignty & AI: The US is easing tech export restrictions to the UAE (AI chips, dual-use infrastructure) as a ["geopolitical reward"](#) for its alignment against Iran. Tehran interprets this as the integration of the UAE into an [American-Zionist security](#)

[architecture](#), making Emirati AI centers legitimate military targets.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Choke-Point Strategy: Iran and its allies (specifically the Houthis in Yemen) are leveraging a dual-threat posture against the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el-Mandeb. This is no longer just a regional dispute; it is being used to [punish the global economy](#) for the actions of the US administration. The narrative is that the "law of the jungle" led by the US must be met with the reality of [geographic control](#) over global energy arteries.

Delegitimization of the Dollar and the Rise of CPEC 2.0: There is a concerted push toward [financial integration between China and Pakistan](#), with a shift to local currencies (RMB and PKR) to bypass the US dollar. This trend, termed "CPAC 2.0," focuses on high-tech special economic zones and pharmaceutical joint ventures to build a [robust financial architecture](#) that shields these nations from US sanctions.

The End of "One-Sided Deals": The Iranian leadership is projecting a "post-trust" era. The recurring theme across multiple segments is that [trust was never the basis](#) of the Islamabad MoU—it was "reciprocity." Having seen the US revoke oil general licenses on July 7, Tehran has concluded that [diplomacy has no military option](#) left for the US, and thus, Iran must achieve a "divine victory" through endurance.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

- **Iran:** While the state media portrays a unified front through the funeral processions, they acknowledge the existence of "two Tahrans"—a conservative religious majority and a [secular, more liberal crowd](#). However, the narrative is that both groups are united in "morning and resistance" against external aggression. The succession of **Mujtaba Khamenei** appears to be ongoing with no overt internal dissent reported, though the emphasis on [trust in officials](#) across all three branches suggests a need to reinforce institutional cohesion.
- **Ukraine:** Domestic stability is precarious. The dismissal of the defense minister has triggered [nationwide protests in Kiev](#), with citizens chanting for his reinstatement and the removal of the top military commander. This suggests a **civil-military crisis** that could undermine the front lines against Russia.
- **Germany:** Growing polarization is evident in Frankfurt, where pro-Palestinian/Iranian protesters clashed with a [counter-protest supporting the IDF](#). The state is accused of "unprecedented repression," raids on organizers' houses, and [curtailing press freedom](#) through new legislation that restricts journalists from monitoring politicians.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

West Asia is being reframed as a ["military map"](#) where the US no longer belongs. The broadcast nation (Iran) is positioning itself as the leader of a "new regional order" that excludes "thousands of kilometers away"

powers. There is a strategic move to peel away Gulf allies from the US; analysts argue that the [reliability of the US as a security ally has "melted away."](#) and these states must now work out a "modus vivendi" with Iran to avoid being target zones for Iranian ballistic missiles.

The "outside world" is depicted as a fracturing system. The US is portrayed as [politically weakened and ideologically bankrupt](#), whereas the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) is showcased as a [consensus-building platform](#) where countries like Russia, China, India, and Belarus discuss "coordinated responses" to regional threats. This multipolar arena is being actively weaponized by Iran to isolate the US and Israel.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The global economic climate is characterized by "extreme unpredictability" and structural risks. Geopolitical uncertainty has forced investors into safe assets like gold and US Treasury bonds, although Japan's potential ["dumping" of Treasuries](#) to defend the yen could spark a US financial crisis. Supply chain disruptions are particularly acute in the pharmaceutical and semiconductor sectors.

Key Economic Vectors:

- **Energy Prices:** Oil prices surged \$14 in one week, rising to [\\$81-\\$82 per barrel](#), with a forecast of \$200 if the Bab el-Mandeb is closed.
- **Inflation:** US producer price inflation is at [6.5%](#); Iran predicts exponential inflationary pressure globally due to the "dead" MoU [arrangement](#).

- **GDP Growth:** 2026 forecasts: Eurozone 0.2%, US 2%, India 5.7%, Global average [2.2%](#).
- **Bankruptcies:** US insolvencies reached [150,000 in Q1 2026](#) due to tight credit markets and high interest rates.
- **Trade Deficit:** US deficit soared to [\\$77.6 billion](#) in May 2026.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Strategic shifts in leadership and key personnel have been central to the day's narrative, signaling a move toward more hardline military and political stances in both Iran and Europe.

- **Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (Late):** The Iranian Supreme Leader has been "martyred" (died), sparking massive nationwide mobilization and a transition period. State media highlights his [strategic vision](#) for scientific independence and nuclear science.
- **Sayid Mujtaba Khamenei:** Emerging as the [third leader](#) (or primary successor candidate) and a dominant ideological voice; his statements are now the [benchmark](#) for Iranian foreign policy.
- **Mikaelo Fedorov (Ukraine):** Dismissed from his post as [Defense Minister](#) by Zelensky, sparking civil unrest and protests in Kiev.
- **Andy Burnham (UK):** Expected to take office as the new [Prime Minister](#) on Monday; protesters are demanding a radical shift away from his predecessor Keir Starmer's policies on Gaza and Iran.
- **General Alexander Siersky (Ukraine):** Facing calls for [dismissal](#) from protesters following the reshuffle of the defense ministry.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

The network's hierarchy is dominated by the **sanctification of the late Iranian leader** and the **justification of regional retaliation**. The "Lead Stories" are the massive turnout at funeral processions, which are used to disprove western claims of regime weakness, and the success of "Operation Thunder" and "Operation NASR 2" in striking US bases. These are framed with a tone of **nationalist pride and righteous indignation**.

"Buried Stories" include the [devastating earthquakes in Venezuela](#) (killing over 5,000) and the [cyber-attack history \(Stuxnet\)](#) and nuclear sabotage against Iran. While covered, these are often linked back to the broader theme of US/Zionist aggression. A **conspicuous omission** is any detailed report on Iranian military casualties or internal dissent regarding the succession of Muftaba Khamenei, which would likely be seen as undermining the state's projected image of "unprecedented cohesion."

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The subtext of the day's stories reveals a stark division between "Independent Civilizations" (Iran, China, Russia) and "Aggressor Empires" (US, Israel). The framing relies heavily on emotional weight—using terms like "genocide," "martyrdom," and "Great Satan" to create a moral binary.

COUNTRIES

- **United States:** Portrayed as an "occupier," "terrorist regime," and "Great Satan" that is ["changing its mind more often than its ties."](#) Characterized as weak, unreliable, and desperate.
- **Iran:** Framed as a [stable, principled, and technologically advanced](#) "pillar of resistance" that does not want war but is ready to "teach unforgettable lessons."
- **Israel:** Depicted as a ["zionist regime"](#) that acts as a US puppet but also an "occupier" in total alert, with its society [at the brink of collapse](#) and businesses fleeing.
- **Jordan/Kuwait:** Characterized as **complicit victims** whose governments are puppets, providing ["launch pads"](#) for US aggression and thus endangering their own people.

LEADERS

- **Donald Trump:** Framed as a ["vicious violent" leader who "cannot be trusted" and whose "signature is worthless."](#) He is [portrayed as weak in front of Netanyahu](#) and being "pushed into war" against his interest.
- **Benjamin Netanyahu:** Described as ["launching wars to stay in power" and being the primary source of instability in West Asia.](#)
- **Vladimir Zelensky:** Portrayed as a [chaotic](#) leader facing a ["nationwide protest" and internal military revolts.](#)

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

State media is engaged in a high-intensity **narrative counter-offensive**. They specifically target New York Times and CNN

headlines to deconstruct what they term ["double standards"](#) and "misleading language." A key instance of "narrative seeding" is the claim that the US is [deliberately targeting elementary schools](#) (Minab) and hospitals to provoke Iran into an escalation that the US can then call "aggression."

The network also uses **psychological operations** by speaking directly to the citizens of Jordan and Kuwait in Arabic, urging them to ["cleanse the Holy Land"](#) of US soldiers. This is a clear attempt to bypass governments and incite "street power" against US military presence. The likely "ground truth" delta is that while Iran claims precision in its strikes, the reality of a multi-front missile war likely involves significant collateral damage that is sanitized in these reports.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Straitjacket Diplomacy:** If current trends continue, Iran will likely enforce a permanent "maritime toll" or total closure of the Strait of Hormuz to non-aligned nations, effectively ["strangling" the US-led economic order](#).
- **Regional Axis Consolidation:** The death of the Iranian leader will likely result in a **short-term surge in "Resistance Front" activities** as a show of force to deter any perception of transitional weakness.
- **US Regional Withdrawal:** The narrative hypothesis is that the US will eventually be forced to [distance itself from Israel](#) because it cannot "indefinitely bear the political cost" and the military risks to its regional bases.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

- **Short Term (1-4 Weeks):** Increased frequency of ["Operation NASR" drone and missile waves](#); [potential for Yemen to declare the Babel Mandab "closed"](#); further civil unrest in Kiev and Frankfurt.
- **Medium Term (1-6 Months):** A permanent spike in global oil prices to [\\$150-\\$200](#); possible realignment of Kuwait and Qatar toward the Iranian/SCO sphere to avoid "magnet base" risks; formalization of the succession of **Mujtaba Khamenei**.
- **Long Term (1-5 Years):** The emergence of a [non-dollar financial bloc](#) centered on China and Pakistan; the collapse of the US "Petrodollar" system as Hormuz becomes an ["Iranian-rules" waterway](#).

RISK ASSESSMENT

The current geopolitical environment is a "tinderbox" where minor miscalculations can trigger global catastrophes.

- **Global Energy Choke Point Closure:** The simultaneous closure of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb. **Triggers:** Further US strikes on Iranian bridges or desalination plants. **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** 25% of global oil/gas cut; \$200/barrel; global depression. **Mitigations:** Immediate return to the Islamabad MoU terms and lifting of [US oil sanctions](#).
- **US Military Sanctuary Collapse:** Domestic uprisings in Jordan or Kuwait against US bases. **Triggers:** Mass casualty events in local villages caused by US "launch pad" operations. **Likelihood:** Moderate. **Impact:** Forced US withdrawal and loss of 5th Fleet infrastructure. **Mitigations:** US adherence to "neutrality" rules in the [Gulf](#).

- **Nuclear Escalation (The "Samson Option"):** Use of tactical nuclear weapons if the "Zionist regime" faces imminent collapse. **Triggers:** Successful IRGC/ Hizbullah ground invasion or massive missile swarm. **Likelihood:** Low but increasing. **Impact:** Continental contamination; total war. **Mitigations:** Enforcing the [NPT](#) on all regional actors.
- **European Economic Collapse:** Total failure of the European automotive and industrial sectors. **Triggers:** Sustained energy costs above \$150/barrel and disruption of [LNG from Qatar](#). **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** De-industrialization of Germany; mass layoffs. **Mitigations:** Pivot to [energy producers](#) like Russia/Norway.
- **Iranian Succession Crisis:** Potential power struggle following the death of the Supreme Leader. **Triggers:** Assassination attempts on [Mujtaba Khamenei](#) or elite infighting. **Likelihood:** Moderate. **Impact:** Fragmentation of the "Axis of Resistance." **Mitigations:** Consolidating legitimacy through [national mourning](#).

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- **Verification of US Base Damage:** While state media reports "destruction" of AI centers and depots, no independent verification of [US aircraft losses](#) is provided beyond Iranian military claims.
- **Internal Dissent in Iran:** The reports mention "two Tahrans" but fail to detail the [extent of the liberal opposition's](#) stance on the new leadership transition.
- **Omani Position on Article 5:** The US claims of an [independent corridor with Oman](#) are reported as a "trick," but the official stance of Muscat (Oman) is not detailed in the transcripts.

- **Zelensky's Opposition:** The "Michelo Fedorov" dismissal is mentioned, but the [specific nature](#) of his rift with Zelensky and the "General Sersky" military strategy is missing.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

The "Stalling Tactic" Hypothesis: What if the Islamabad MoU was never a peace plan but a **stalling tactic** by the US and Iran to consolidate military assets for this exact July confrontation? The rapid [revocation of oil licenses](#) and the "Operation Thunder" waves suggest both sides had prepared contingencies for an immediate "post-MoU" war.

The "Sovereignty for Technology" Trade: What if the US easing tech restrictions on the UAE is not about defense, but about a **calculated sacrifice** of Emirati sovereignty to lure Iran into a "high-tech" battlefield where US AI and cyber systems can be tested in live combat? The ["geopolitical reward"](#) might be a trap.

Black Swan Event: The [death of Lindsey Graham](#) in Ukraine (reported as "died alone in his room") could be a trigger for a US "domestic rage" response that overrides Trump's "America First" hesitancy, leading to a **total ground invasion of Iran** despite analysis saying it would require 1.5 million troops.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- **Security:** Immediately recalibrate regional base positioning. Bases in [Bahrain and Kuwait](#) have proven vulnerable to IRGC "stealth" drone swarms and should be treated as high-risk nodes.
- **Economic:** Accelerate the creation of a "Non-Chokepoint" energy route (e.g., land-based pipelines via CPEC 2.0) to bypass the [Strait of Hormuz](#).
- **Diplomatic:** Re-engage with [SCO mediators](#) (Pakistan/Belarus) to establish a "New Islamabad Accord" before Bab el-Mandeb is fully closed.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chains:** Reroute all maritime logistics away from the Red Sea and Persian Gulf immediately; expect [surging insurance costs](#).
- **Regulatory:** Prepare for [heightened tariffs](#) and trade barriers as the "Trump economy" continues to favor isolationism and supply chain disruptions.
- **Capital Allocation:** Hedge against a [yen-driven financial crisis](#) by diversifying out of US Treasuries and into gold or regional currencies like the RMB.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Recent legislative and policy shifts reflect a transition to a **war footing** and an erosion of civil liberties in both Europe and West Asia. Policies are being drafted to nationalize

energy distribution and restrict information flow regarding military setbacks.

• BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **The New German Information Act:** A new law that makes it harder for journalists to monitor [politicians and public authorities](#), cited as an attack on press freedom.
- **Belgium's Palestinian Territories Import Ban:** A law approved to [ban goods](#) originating from illegal Israeli settlements.
- **Fundamental Transformation Document (Iran):** A roadmap for reforming the [education system](#) to align with "Islamic civilization" and "Revolutionary State" goals.

• HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **SCO Border Services Meeting (Islamabad):** The 12th meeting focused on ["coordinated responses"](#) to US-Israeli aggression and illegal migration.
- **IRGC Statement Number 28:** A strategic communication [warning host countries](#) of US bases to expect retaliatory strikes.

KEY STORIES

- **Assassination/Death of the Iranian Supreme Leader:** The central story of the day involves the passing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the massive [funerals](#) in Tehran and Iraq.
- **Collapse of the Islamabad MoU:** Reports on the failure of the [June 17th deal](#) and the suspension of all Iranian commitments.
- **Direct Military Exchanges (July 8-9):** US strikes on 80 targets; Iran hits the [US 5th Fleet in Bahrain](#).

- **Yemen's Bab el-Mandeb Threat:** Ansarullah (Houthi) warnings to [close the Red Sea choke point](#) to punish the US and Saudi Arabia.
- **The European Automotive Crisis:** Porsche reports a [93% profit drop](#) as energy costs soar.
- **US Producer Inflation Surge:** Reports of [6.5% inflation](#) and \$77.6B trade deficit.
- **Japan's Yen Crisis:** Tokyo [dumps US Treasuries](#), threatening a US financial meltdown.
- **Ukraine Internal Turmoil:** Zelensky dismisses the [Defense Minister](#), leading to street protests in Kiev.
- **Frankfurt Protest Repression:** German police raid house of [protest organizers](#) and allow Zionist counter-protests.
- **Venezuela Twin Earthquakes:** Over [5,000 dead](#) and 16,000 wounded in the June 24th seismic events.
- **The Mordechai Vanunu/Israel Nuclear Secrets:** A retrospective on [Israel's 100-200 atomic bombs](#) and historical US double standards.
- **US Abduction of Venezuelan Leader:** Transcripts mention the [seizure of Nicolas Maduro](#) in January, cutting off Cuba's oil.
- **Death of Lindsey Graham:** US Senator reported to have [died alone in his room](#) after visiting Ukraine.

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.

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