

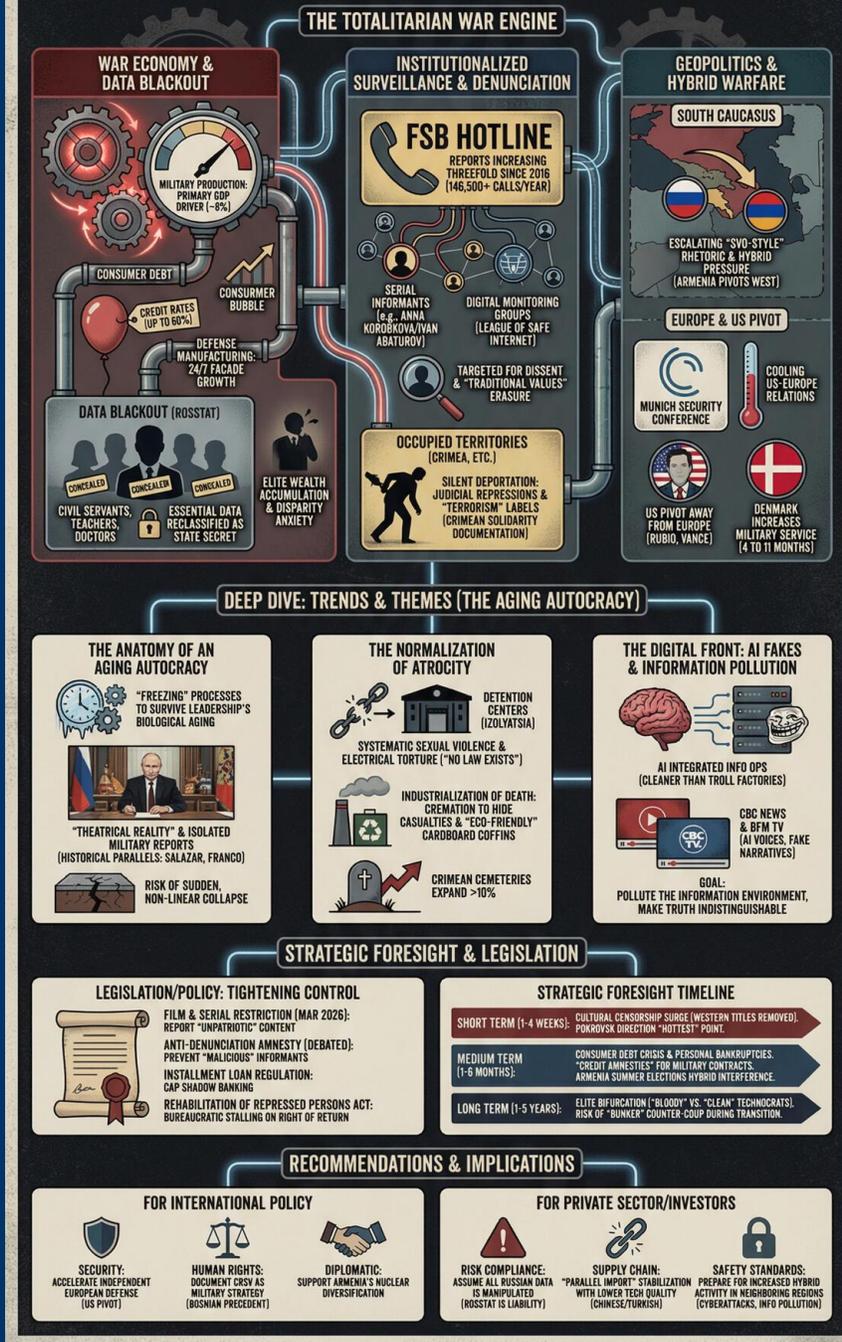
TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

CURRENTTIME

FEBRUARY 22, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

<HI>RUSSIA ENTERS ITS FIFTH YEAR OF WAR: TOTALITARIAN ECONOMY, CONCEALED DATA, SYSTEMIC SURVEILLANCE.</HI>



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RUSSIA ENTERS ITS FIFTH YEAR OF WAR BY ENTRENCHING A TOTALITARIAN WAR ECONOMY, CONCEALING STATE DATA, AND INSTITUTIONALIZING SYSTEMIC SOCIAL SURVEILLANCE.

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

On the fourth anniversary of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian state has moved beyond mere authoritarianism into a fully realized totalitarian framework. The internal landscape is characterized by a "war economy" where military production is the primary driver of GDP, while the civilian population faces skyrocketing interest rates (up to 60% on credit cards) and deepening debt cycles. To maintain control, the Kremlin has effectively institutionalized a culture of denunciations, with reports to the FSB increasing threefold since 2016. High-profile figures and ordinary citizens alike are targeted by a professional class of "serial informants" and digital monitoring groups, such as the League of Safe Internet, which leverage traditional values to justify the erasure of dissent. ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#))

Simultaneously, the Russian government is systematically blinding domestic and international observers by reclassifying essential economic and social data as state secrets. Recent moves by Rosstat to hide official salaries for civil servants and social workers (teachers, doctors) indicate a growing anxiety regarding elite wealth disparities and the potential for civil unrest. In occupied territories, particularly Crimea, the strategy has shifted to "silent deportation," using judicial repressions and the label of "terrorism" to force indigenous populations and activists into exile or long-term imprisonment. The convergence of these trends suggests a regime that is "freezing" itself in time to survive the biological aging of its leadership, drawing historical parallels to the final years of the Franco and Salazar dictatorships. ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#))

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Systemic Institutionalization of Denunciations:** The Russian state has successfully normalized "donos" (denunciations) as a form of social ladder and civic activism. The FSB's "hotline" received over 146,500 calls in the past year, focusing increasingly on "terrorism" and "extremism" rather than common crimes. ([Source](#), [Source](#))
- **Transition to a Mobile War Economy:** Military spending now accounts for approximately 8% of Russia's GDP, with defense manufacturing operating 24/7. This has created a facade of growth (1% GDP increase) that masks a precipitous decline in technological standards and an explosion in consumer debt. ([Source](#), [Source](#))

- **Totalitarian Data Blackout:** Rosstat has ceased publishing data on the salaries and headcount of civil servants, doctors, and teachers. This move prevents public scrutiny of government spending and the massive wealth accumulation by children of the elite during the war. ([Source](#))
- **The "Bucha Investigation" Breakthrough:** Journalists have reconstructed minute-by-minute records of the March 2022 massacres on Yablonska Street using drone footage and intercepted Russian communications, identifying specific units and commanders responsible. ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#))
- **Hybrid Warfare in the South Caucasus:** Moscow has intensified its political and hybrid pressure on Armenia as the latter pivots toward Western nuclear and security partnerships, with Russian media escalating "SVO-style" rhetoric against Yerevan. ([Source](#))

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Geopolitics and International Relations

- The Munich Security Conference highlights a "cooling" of US-Europe relations, with European leaders increasingly debating the creation of an independent European army due to the "Trump factor" and perceived American unreliability. ([Source](#), [Source](#))
- Denmark has increased its military service term from 4 to 11 months as a direct response to Russian aggression and shifting US priorities. ([Source](#))
- Armenia is actively reducing its energy dependence on Russia through a new nuclear cooperation agreement with the United States. ([Source](#))

Domestic Stability and Social Order

- The "Association of Informants" and individuals like Anna Korobkova (revealed as Ivan Abaturov) have conducted systematic harassment of academics and lawyers, resulting in forced emigration and arrests. ([Source](#))
- In Crimea, the "Crimean Solidarity" movement continues to document the arrests of activists under "fake terrorism" charges, which rights groups describe as a tool for ethnic and political cleansing. ([Source](#), [Source](#))

Economic Statecraft and Investment Climate

- The disconnection from SWIFT has forced Russian business into "bypass schemes," increasing the cost of international transactions and isolating the private sector. ([Source](#))
- Real estate and asset flight: Russians are finding it increasingly difficult to move capital to Europe, with banks closing accounts for those with residency permits due to "financial hygiene" regulations. ([Source](#))

Corruption and Governance

- Children of high-ranking Russian officials have earned over 10 billion rubles in interest alone from bank deposits over the last three years, benefiting from record-high central bank rates. ([Source](#))
- The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index shows Russia's score dropping to 22, driven by centralized, non-transparent governance and the suppression of independent media. ([Source](#), [Source](#))

LEGISLATION/POLICY

Recent legislative activity in Russia focuses on tightening cultural control, shielding the elite from financial scrutiny, and expanding the definition of "unpatriotic" behavior to include specific lifestyle choices.

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **Film and Serial Restriction Amendment:** Effective March 1, 2026, this law allows any citizen to report content that "discredits traditional values." Online platforms must remove reported content within 24 hours of a Ministry of Culture finding. ([Source](#))
- **Anti-Denunciation Amnesty (Proposed):** Debate surrounding the necessity of legal mechanisms to prevent "malicious" informants from clogging the judicial system. ([Source](#))
- **Installment Loan Regulation:** A new law capping interest-free "installments" at 50,000 rubles to prevent the shadow banking sector from further inflating the consumer debt bubble. ([Source](#))
- **Rehabilitation of Repressed Persons Act (Russia):** Ongoing legal battles regarding the right of return for families of Soviet-era deportees to Moscow and St. Petersburg, with authorities effectively stalling through bureaucratic quotas. ([Source](#), [Source](#))

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Geneva Peace Framework Talks:** Russia and Ukraine held two days of talks in Geneva regarding "parameters for cessation." No breakthrough occurred, with Zelensky dismissing Russian historical demands as "nonsense." ([Source](#))

- **Munich Security Conference:** US Secretary of State Rubio and Vice President Vance signaled a pivot of US priorities away from Europe toward other global regions, shocking European security establishments. ([Source](#), [Source](#))

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Anatomy of an Aging Autocracy

Analyses of the current Russian regime increasingly draw on historical precedents from the mid-20th century. Like the Salazar regime in Portugal, the current Russian leadership has created a "Luzitanian-style" national myth where the state's borders are conceptually infinite. The transcript highlights a "theatrical reality" created for the aging leader, including staged meetings with "ordinary citizens" and military reports delivered in isolation. This suggests a regime that is no longer capable of genuine policy innovation and has instead turned to "freezing" social and political processes. The risk is a sudden, non-linear collapse when the "biological foundation" of the regime eventually fails, similar to the "Revolution of Carnations." ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#))

The Normalization of Atrocity

A recurring theme is the systematic use of sexual violence and electrical torture against both men and women in detention centers like "Izolyatsia" and through the filtration process in occupied Kherson and Donetsk. Survivors describe an environment where "no law exists." The transcripts also reveal that the Russian state is prioritizing the cremation of soldiers to hide the true scale of casualties and save space in Crimean cemeteries, which have expanded by over 10% in area since 2022. This

"industrialization of death" is paired with the production of "eco-friendly" cardboard coffins, reflecting a pragmatic, albeit macabre, adaptation to high mortality. ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#))

The Digital Front: From Troll Factories to AI Fakes

The evolution of Russian information operations is now fully integrated with AI. Ahead of the Winter Olympics, Z-bloggers utilized AI-generated voices and doctored logos of CBC News and BFM TV to spread disinformation about the SBU and the Ukrainian Olympic team. This represents a "cleaner" version of the old "Troll Factory" tactics, where AI reduces the cost of creating convincing foreign-language narratives. The goal has shifted from convincing the audience to merely "polluting the information environment" so that the truth becomes indistinguishable from fiction. ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#))

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Expect a surge in cultural censorship in Russia as the March 1st film reporting law takes effect. This will likely lead to the removal of several high-profile Western and liberal Russian titles from online streaming platforms. In Ukraine, the Pokrovsk direction will remain the "hottest" point, with Russian forces attempting to capitalize on the hard-frozen ground for armored advances. ([Source](#), [Source](#))

Medium Term (1-6 Months): The Russian consumer debt bubble is nearing a critical threshold. With interest rates at 30-60%, a wave of personal bankruptcies is inevitable. The state may respond by expanding "credit amnesties" for those who sign military contracts, further linking economic survival to participation in the war. Armenia's summer

elections will become a major theater for Russian "hybrid" interference to prevent a final exit from the CSTO. ([Source](#), [Source](#))

Long Term (1-5 Years): The "Spanish/Portuguese" model suggests that the Russian elite is currently bifurcating: an older, "bloody" generation and a younger, "clean" technocratic generation (e.g., figures like Kiriienko). The younger generation will likely seek a "post-regime" opening to the West to protect their assets once the primary leader is gone, but this transition will be fraught with the risk of a "bunker" counter-coup by the security siloviki. ([Source](#), [Source](#))

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For International Policy:

- **Security:** European states should accelerate independent defense manufacturing, as the US pivot away from the European theater is now a consensus policy across American political factions. ([Source](#))
- **Human Rights:** International courts must prioritize the documentation of "conflict-related sexual violence" (CRSV) as a military strategy rather than isolated incidents, utilizing the Bosnian precedent for reparations. ([Source](#), [Source](#))
- **Diplomatic:** Support for Armenia's nuclear energy diversification is a strategic priority to permanently reduce Moscow's leverage in the Caucasus. ([Source](#))

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Risk Compliance:** Investors must assume that **all** remaining economic data from Russia is manipulated or intentionally incomplete. Reliance on Rosstat figures for headcount or wage inflation is now a professional liability. ([Source](#))
- **Supply Chain:** The Russian "parallel import" market is stabilizing into a permanent "adaption" phase with lower technological quality (Chinese/Turkish components); this lowers the long-term resale value of machinery and infrastructure in the region. ([Source](#))
- **Safety Standards:** Firms operating in neighboring regions (Central Asia, South Caucasus) should prepare for increased Russian hybrid activity, including cyberattacks and "information pollution," as the Kremlin seeks to maintain its sphere of influence. ([Source](#))

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>.