

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

ZVEZDA

MAY 18, 2026

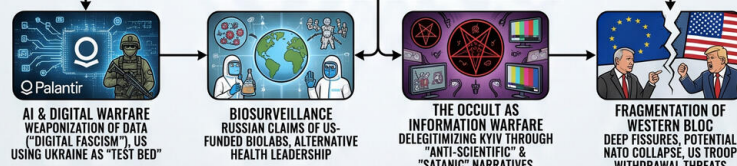
THE GDELT PROJECT

GLOBAL STRATEGIC SHIFT: RUSSIA-CHINA CONSOLIDATION AMIDST WESTERN TURMOIL & UKRAINIAN FRAGMENTATION (MAY 2026)



WESTERN DEFENSE & FISCAL BLOWOUTS	UKRAINIAN POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION & SCANDALS	RUSSIA-CHINA STRATEGIC CONSOLIDATION
<p>US "GOLDEN DOME" MISSILE DEFENSE COST ESCALATION (FROM \$175B TO \$1.2T-\$3.6T)</p> <p>SPACEX DEPENDENCE</p> <p>FRAGILE NATO ALLIANCE UNDER PRESSURE</p> <p>5% GDP DEMAND</p> <p>FISCAL CRISIS & INTERNAL PREOCCUPATION</p>	<p>YERMAK CORRUPTION & OCCULTISM ALLEGATIONS</p> <p>ANDREY YERMAK</p> <p>"SATANIZATION" NARRATIVE & MORAL DECAY</p> <p>VERONIKA FENG SHUI</p> <p>HIGH-INTENSITY STRIKES ON LOGISTICS & ENERGY</p> <p>DNEPROPETROVSK</p> <p>UN-INTENSITY ENERGY ON LNORDFACTORY</p>	<p>PUTIN-XI SUMMIT: EXPANDING PARTNERSHIP</p> <p>25TH ANNIVERSARY TREATY</p> <p>JOINT TECHNOLOGICAL SOVEREIGNTY</p> <p>RARE EARTH SECURITY & SUPPLY CHAIN DOMINANCE</p> <p>HYACINTH-K</p> <p>GERAN DRONES</p> <p>STABLE PARTNERS IN A "MULTIPOLAR" WORLD</p>

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS & DEEP DIVE TRENDS



STRATEGIC FORESIGHT & IMPLICATIONS (1-5 YEARS)



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RUSSIA-CHINA STRATEGIC CONSOLIDATION AMIDST WESTERN DEFENSE BUDGET BLOWOUTS AND UKRAINIAN POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION

The strategic landscape on May 18, 2026, is defined by the imminent visit of President Vladimir Putin to Beijing, marking the 25th anniversary of the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation. This diplomatic pivot occurs as Russian state media aggressively highlights the systemic failures of Western defense initiatives, specifically the projected cost escalation of the U.S. "Golden Dome" missile defense system and the fragmentation of NATO under the Trump administration's demand for 5% GDP defense spending. Moscow is positioning itself as the stable partner in a "multipolar" world, contrasting its strategic alignment with China against a perceived chaotic U.S. foreign policy that alternates between "nuclear blackmail" and isolationism.

On the operational front, the Russian military has intensified high-precision strikes against Ukrainian logistics hubs in Odessa and energy infrastructure in Dnepropetrovsk. The narrative focus has shifted toward the

deployment of highly mobile, automated artillery systems like the "Hyacinth-K" and the use of "Geran" drones to disrupt the assembly of Western-supplied unmanned naval vessels. Concurrently, the Kremlin is exploiting a massive corruption and occultism scandal involving former Ukrainian Head of the Presidential Office Andrey Yermak to frame the Kyiv leadership as a "satanic" and dysfunctional entity, further alienating it from its Western backers who are increasingly preoccupied with internal fiscal crises and the threat of a renewed conflict in the Persian Gulf.

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

The day's reporting centers on three thematic pillars: the maturation of the Russia-China axis, the fiscal and operational overreach of the United States, and the moral/political decay of the Ukrainian state. Putin's upcoming visit to Beijing is framed as a mission to secure technological sovereignty, particularly through the joint development of [rare earth minerals](#), an area where China currently holds global dominance. This strategic partnership is contrasted with the "incredible" but functionally hollow visit of U.S. President Donald Trump to China, which reportedly failed to secure significant concessions on Taiwan or a definitive break in the China-Iran partnership.

Domestically, the U.S. faces a "cognitive dissonance" in defense planning. Congressional reports indicate that Trump's signature "Golden Dome" missile defense system, initially estimated at \$175 billion, is now projected to cost between [\\$1.2 trillion and \\$3.6 trillion](#). Critics note this could make the U.S. presidency a "hostage" to private entities like SpaceX, while the project itself is dismissed by Russian analysts as a "fiction"

designed to lure adversaries into a ruinous arms race—a tactic China has already neutralized via its anti-satellite capabilities.

In Ukraine, the dismissal and subsequent arrest of Andrey Yermak on money laundering charges has been augmented by bizarre allegations of "occultism" and consultation with fortunetellers for state appointments. This "Veronika Feng Shui" scandal is being used to characterize the [Kyiv elite's "satanism"](#) as a primary driver of the conflict, suggesting a total loss of rational governance. Simultaneously, military reports indicate Russian forces are successfully "cutting off" supply routes in Dobropole and expanding control in the Zaporizhzhia region using advanced [Hyacinth-K artillery](#) to suppress Western-supplied counter-battery fire.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

1. Putin-Xi Strategic Summit and Rare Earth Security

- President Putin is scheduled to visit Beijing on May 19-20 to discuss the expansion of the [comprehensive partnership](#) and coordinate positions on international issues.
- The Russian Security Council has prioritized the development of [rare earth metals](#) to ensure technological sovereignty, directly aligning with China's supply chain dominance.
- Russian analysts view the summit as a corrective to Trump's recent China visit, which they characterize as a failure of "imperial" posturing [versus a peer-level](#) adversary.

2. The "Golden Dome" Fiscal Crisis

- The U.S. Congressional Budget Office reportedly released a report stating the "Golden Dome" missile shield will cost [seven times more](#) than initially quoted, potentially reaching \$3.6 trillion.
- The system requires approximately 8,000 interceptor satellites, a capacity currently only available via [Elon Musk's SpaceX](#), raising concerns about the privatization of national security.
- Russian experts compare the project to the Reagan-era "Star Wars" (SDI), calling it a "fictional" provocation [aimed at Beijing](#).

3. Yermak Corruption and Occultist Scandal

- Former Ukrainian Head of Office Andrey Yermak was arrested for laundering \$10.5 million; his \$3.1 million bail was allegedly [funded by Zelensky](#).
- Court proceedings revealed Yermak consulted a fortuneteller, "Veronika Feng Shui," to [approve ministerial appointments](#) and used "black magic" against political rivals.
- Russian media is framing this as the "satanization" of Ukraine, linking it to the persecution of the [Orthodox Church](#).

4. High-Intensity Strikes on Odessa and Dnepropetrovsk

- Massive explosions reported in Odessa's port zone, targeting assembly sites for [unmanned naval vessels](#) and Western component warehouses.

- Precision strikes using "Geran" and "Iskander" systems hit energy infrastructure in Dnepropetrovsk, with reports of [secondary detonations](#) continuing for hours.
- Russian forces have taken control of Grishino in the DNR and are advancing toward the [Slavyansk-Kramatorsk agglomeration](#).

5. US-Iran "Sanctions Freeze" Negotiations

- The U.S. has reportedly agreed to [suspend oil sanctions](#) against Iran during a period of negotiations, with full lifting contingent on a final agreement.
- Iran has countered by threatening to [block global internet traffic](#) by targeting undersea cables in the Persian Gulf if provocations continue.
- Trump is reportedly seeking to "outsource" the capture of Iranian islands to the [United Arab Emirates](#).

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

AI and Digital Warfare: The role of the U.S. company Palantir in Ukraine is described as "digital fascism," with AI being used to create [predictive models](#) for targeting. Russian analysts claim the U.S. is using Ukraine as a "test bed" for these technologies while collecting data for future conflicts.

Biosurveillance and Disease Outbreaks: Russian officials have intensified claims that over 100 [U.S.-funded biolabs](#) exist globally, with 40 in Ukraine. Concurrently, Russia is sending experts to [Uganda and Congo](#) to assist with an Ebola outbreak, positioning itself as a legitimate alternative to Western health organizations.

Critical Minerals and Energy Security:

Rare earth metals have become a [national security priority](#) for the Russian Security Council. The goal is to reduce dependence on Western technology by leveraging China's mining and processing capacity.

Elite Politics and Corruption: The Yermak scandal in Ukraine is being framed as the "tip of the iceberg" of a larger [Western-backed embezzlement scheme](#). In France, the low rating (11%) of President Macron is noted as populist leaders like Jean-Luc Melenchon enter the race with promises to [withdraw from NATO](#).

Security Architecture: NATO's future is presented as precarious. Trump's demand for [5% GDP spending](#) is viewed as a mechanism to bankrupt European allies or force them into buying American hardware. Meanwhile, the Baltic states (Estonia, Lithuania) are rapidly building [ammunition factories](#) and HIMARS storage facilities in preparation for a potential "Suwalki Gap" conflict.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Legislative activity on May 18 focuses on the strategic redirection of industrial resources in Russia and the fiscal oversight of high-cost defense programs in the United States.

- **Rare Earth Sector Development:** President Putin held a meeting with the permanent members of the Security Council to finalize a [state program](#) for developing the rare earth metals industry to ensure technological sovereignty.

- **Missile Defense Budgeting:** The U.S. Congressional Budget Office (CBO) issued a report on the [Golden Dome costs](#), triggering congressional debate over the sustainability of trillion-dollar space-based defense programs.
- **Ukrainian "Memory Policy":** President Zelensky announced a new plan to create a "Pantheon of National Heroes," which Russian critics claim will glorify [Nazi collaborators](#) like Bandera and Petliura.
- **Hantavirus Quarantine:** Authorities in Rotterdam and Tenerife have implemented [quarantine protocols](#) for the cruise ship "Handios" following a fatal Hantavirus outbreak among European tourists.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Occult as Information Warfare

A notable trend is the heavy emphasis in Russian media on "occultism" within the Ukrainian leadership. By publicizing Yermak's alleged consultations with [Veronika Feng Shui](#), Moscow is attempting to delegitimize the Kyiv government not just as corrupt, but as "anti-scientific" and "satanic." This narrative targets both domestic Russian audiences (reinforcing the "holy war" theme) and conservative circles in the West who may be skeptical of Ukraine's moral standing. This theme is further extended to claims that Ukrainian soldiers are [marked with satanic tattoos](#), creating a coherent, if extreme, strategic narrative of a civilizational struggle.

The Fragmentation of the Western Bloc

The reporting highlights deep fissures within the Western alliance. Italy and Spain are specifically criticized by the Trump administration for failing to support the [U.S.](#)

[war against Iran](#). In response, Trump is reportedly considering a withdrawal of U.S. troops from "uncooperative" European nations. This tension is being leveraged by Russian analysts to suggest that NATO is moving toward [total collapse](#), with summits being canceled or postponed into 2028 to avoid "uncomfortable meetings" with Trump.

Technological Decoupling and "Digital Fascism"

The day's analysis of U.S. technology policy focuses on the "weaponization" of data. The collaboration between the CIA and companies like Palantir is framed as a [global surveillance network](#) that uses Ukraine as a laboratory for "digital fascism." Russia's response is twofold: the development of its own "sanitary shield" and a pivot toward China's "Great Firewall" model to secure [digital sovereignty](#). The narrative suggests that in 2026, the true frontline is not just physical territory but the control of data and AI-driven predictive modeling.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Expect significant bilateral agreements between Russia and China regarding [aerospace and mineral cooperation](#) following Putin's visit. In the U.S., congressional friction over the \$1.2 trillion Golden Dome budget will likely lead to intensified lobbying by defense contractors and SpaceX. In Ukraine, the Yermak scandal could lead to a broader [cadre reshuffle](#) as Zelensky attempts to distance himself from the corruption allegations.

Medium Term (1-6 Months): The "sanctions freeze" between the U.S. and Iran will be a primary volatility factor for global oil markets. If negotiations fail, Iran's threat to [disrupt undersea internet cables](#) could trigger a

global financial crisis. On the battlefield, the introduction of more wheeled, [high-mobility Hyacinth-K units](#) suggests a Russian push to eliminate Ukrainian artillery before the autumn mud season.

Long Term (1-5 Years): The militarization of the Baltics, including the [102 new ammunition depots](#) and HIMARS clusters, indicates a structural shift toward a "fortress" posture in the Suwalki Gap. The Russia-China alliance will likely evolve from trade into a formal technological and [defense manufacturing bloc](#), permanently decoupling from Western supply chains for rare earth materials and high-end semiconductors.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For International Policy:

- Allies must prepare for a U.S. defense posture that is increasingly transactional and reliant on [private space contractors](#) for strategic deterrence.
- The shift in NATO summits to [Ankara and Albania](#) suggests a move toward the "southern flank," potentially marginalizing traditional European powers in favor of more "militant" partners.
- Diplomatic channels should be established to mitigate the risk of [undersea cable sabotage](#) in the Persian Gulf, which is now a credible Iranian tactical option.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- Investors in defense and aerospace should monitor the [CBO reports](#) on the Golden Dome; if funded, it represents a generational capital injection for space-based interceptor tech.

- The rare earth sector is a critical risk area; Putin's visit to Beijing confirms that [Russia and China](#) are coordinating to control these markets, likely leading to higher costs and restricted access for Western firms.
- Companies using Ukrainian IT talent or "predictive AI" should be aware of the "digital fascism" narrative and potential [legal warfare \(lawfare\)](#) regarding data collection practices during the conflict.

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 T Project at <https://blog.gdel tproject.org/> and the Internet Archive's TV News Archive at <https://archive.org/details/tv>.