

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

RT

MAY 23, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

GLOBAL CONFLICTS & DOMESTIC DECAY: THE FRACTURING OF WESTERN HEGEMONY

Economic Warfare Escalates in Vital Maritime Corridors (Report: May 23, 2026)

MULTITHEATER CONFLICT ESCALATION



ECONOMIC WARFARE & MARITIME CHOKPOINTS



DOMESTIC DECAY & SOCIAL UPHEAVAL



TRENDS, RISKS & FUTURE OUTLOOK



Visualized from Report Data: Global Conflicts and Domestic Decay Signal the Fracturing of Western Hegemony as Economic Warfare Escalates in Vital Maritime Corridors. May 23, 2026.

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DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

The global security environment on May 23, 2026, is defined by a widening multi-theater conflict that is increasingly perceived as a "disaster of our own making," primarily driven by U.S. and Israeli strategic miscalculations. The three-week-old war with Iran, initiated on February 28 against the advice of U.S. military leadership, has failed to achieve a rapid regime collapse and has instead settled into a [graduated escalation](#) that threatens the global energy supply. Iran's systematic decentralization of command and its shift to an [underground insurgency profile](#) suggest a long-term conflict for which the West is economically ill-prepared, particularly as Tehran begins enforcing a [new control zone](#) in the Strait of Hormuz.

Concurrently, the conflict in Ukraine has reached a new level of vitriol following a devastating drone strike on a school

dormitory in Lugansk. The Russian-backed narrative emphasizes that the strike, which killed at least 21 people, was a deliberate act of [NATO-aided aggression](#) targeting civilians. The refusal of Western media outlets to visit the site is being weaponized to frame the West as complicit in war crimes and indifferent to humanitarian suffering when it contradicts their strategic interests. This development is being used to solidify the argument that Russia has effectively won the war, while the West continues to [bankroll a failing regime](#) at the expense of its own economic stability.

Domestically, both the United States and several allied or non-aligned nations are facing severe social upheavals. In the U.S., a mounting homelessness crisis and the "too damn high" cost of living are fueling populist resentment against an elite perceived as [beholden to billionaires](#) and foreign interests. Internationally, mass protests in Bolivia and Serbia signal a broader trend of institutional decay and public rejection of leadership. The convergence of these events suggests a global system in transition, where traditional power structures are losing their mandate amidst economic despair and the perceived [collapse of American superpowerdom](#) in real-time.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

The Failed U.S.-Israeli Blitz on Iran

- The conflict initiated on February 28, intended to last 72-96 hours, has entered its third week with no end in sight, as the Iranian military utilizes [decentralized command capabilities](#) to resist decapitation strikes.

- Tehran has successfully tethered the war to global markets by initiating [economic counterpunches](#), targeting oil refineries only after being hit first.
- Internal dissent within the U.S. national security apparatus is surfacing, evidenced by the high-profile resignation of Joe Kent, who claimed Iran posed [no imminent threat](#) to the nation.

Socio-Economic Collapse and Civil Unrest

- In Bolivia, violent clashes between trade unions and police have erupted in La Paz, with protesters using [sticks of dynamite](#) to demand the resignation of President Rodrigo Paz amid rising fuel costs.
- Serbia is experiencing mass anti-government demonstrations in Belgrade, triggered by a [canopy collapse in Novi Sad](#) that killed 16, but reflecting deeper dissatisfaction with leadership.
- The U.S. faces a burgeoning [homelessness emergency](#), particularly in California, where rents have soared to \$3,500 for one-bedroom apartments, driving millions to the brink of unhousing.

Ukraine War Escalation and "Information Blockade"

- A drone strike on a Lugansk vocational school has become a flashpoint, with Russia accusing Ukraine of using [suicide drones](#) to maximize civilian casualties.
- Russian officials are condemning CNN and the BBC for [refusing invitations](#) to investigate the site, framing this as a deliberate "information blockade" to maintain a specific narrative.
- Claims are circulating that the U.S. and NATO are [directly involved](#) in intelligence and targeting for these strikes.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization

- Fears of nuclear escalation are rising, with reports that Netanyahu is [pressuring Trump](#) to consider the first use of nuclear weapons since 1945.
- The concept of "combined arms strikes" using glide bombs and long-range drones is now the standard for [Ukrainian operations](#) against targets in Russian-controlled territory.

Geopolitical Competition & Bloc Politics

- The global power structure is shifting as Russia and China are seen as being [in the ascendancy](#) while U.S. influence wanes.
- Iran and Oman are reportedly discussing a [joint mechanism](#) to manage traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, effectively challenging international maritime laws.

Macroeconomics & Trade

- Energy markets are highly volatile as the Strait of Hormuz becomes a [zone of control](#) for the IRGC, with tankers forced to await authorization to pass.
- U.S. domestic economic indicators show a widening gap, with [400 people](#) reportedly holding more income than the rest of the population combined.

Diplomacy & Statecraft

- Diplomatic efforts in Ukraine are characterized as [intentionally sabotaged](#) by events like the Lugansk strike to prevent a peaceful resolution.

- Uganda has publicly rejected U.S. aid for Ebola, with President Museveni stating the country [does not need](#) foreign expenses on the ground.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Resiliency of Sanctioned States

A significant theme emerging is the counter-intuitive resilience of states that have been long-sanctioned. Iran, having lived under a "cage" for 47 years, is described as being [less exposed](#) to global economic disruptions than the Arab states and Western nations. This suggests that the weaponization of finance may have reached its limit, effectively inoculating adversaries against further economic pressure while leaving the U.S. domestic economy vulnerable to the resulting commodity shocks. Tehran's ability to "counterpunch" via the Strait of Hormuz shows a sophisticated understanding of Western [economic fragility](#).

The Decay of the "Rules-Based Order"

There is a pervasive narrative of institutional decay within the West. From the "illegal" war in Iran to the [isolation of Tulsi Gabbard](#) within the administration, the broadcast portrays a government acting in violation of its own laws. This is mirrored in the domestic sphere by a [broken healthcare system](#) that "dumps" patients on Skid Row and a foster care system that serves as a pipeline to homelessness. The "rules-based order" is presented as a facade for elite interests, leading to a [loss of faith](#) in government across the globe.

Information Warfare and the "Meta-Narrative"

The conflict in Ukraine is being fought as much in the media as on the battlefield. The broadcast highlights a "double standard" where Western media [ignores Ukrainian war crimes](#) while amplifying Russian ones. This "partisan approach to reporting" is framed as a symptom of a deeper alliance between the [media and the deep state](#), designed to manufacture consent for a war that is not in the public's interest. The use of "bot armies" and disinformation attacks against dissidents like Tucker Carlson is cited as evidence of an increasingly [desperate censorship regime](#).

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

United States: Elite Infighting and Populist Despair

- The Trump administration is characterized as being surrounded by "grifters" and [CPAC D-listers](#), while key dissenting voices like Joe Kent are purged or ignored.
- A massive disconnect exists between the political class and a public struggling with a [12% rise in homelessness](#) in California and record corporate profits during a period of extreme poverty.
- Rumors of [blackmail against Trump](#) by foreign leaders are being used to explain aggressive foreign policy decisions that harm domestic stability.

Bolivia and Serbia: Institutional Fragility

- Bolivian protesters are driven by literal starvation, stating "our children are starving" while the [president is fine eating](#) with his ministers.

- In Serbia, the Novi Sad tragedy has become a proxy for [corruption allegations](#) against President Vucic, showing how singular failures can ignite broader latent unrest.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

The international system is portrayed as a fracturing multipolar arena where the U.S. is a [declining power](#) reacting defensively to external shocks. The outside world is increasingly hostile, not just through military force but through the reclamation of strategic trade routes like the [Strait of Hormuz](#). Russia is framed as a "real winner geopolitically," having survived sanctions to now [dictate terms](#) in Europe. The state's strategic maneuverability is severely constrained; the U.S. is depicted as being "in hawk" to Israeli interests, unable to de-escalate without risking a ["use it or lose it" nuclear response](#) from its partner.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The global economic state is one of managed chaos, where inflationary pressures and maritime disruptions are being used as strategic weapons. Commodity prices, particularly oil, are surging as the Strait of Hormuz becomes an [Iranian-administered zone](#). Domestically, the U.S. economy is hollowed out, with a "fantasy" middle class and a real estate market that has become a [way to invest](#) rather than house people.

Key Economic Vectors

- **Energy Prices:** Gas prices are [approaching \\$5](#) per gallon in the U.S., driven by the Hormuz blockade.
- **Maritime Disruption:** Tankers are being [forced to wait](#) for IRGC authorization, rippling through global supply chains.
- **Housing Crisis:** One-bedroom rents in California hit [\\$3,500](#), contributing to a 10 million-person "at-risk" population.
- **Labor Unrest:** Mass strikes in Bolivia and Serbia are directly linked to [rising fuel and food costs](#).

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Personnel shifts reflect a consolidation of power around hardliners and the isolation of moderate or dissenting voices.

- **Joe Kent:** Resigned from the National Counter Terrorism Center in [protest of the war](#) in Iran, signaling a rift in the intelligence community.
- **Tulsi Gabbard:** Reported to be "hermetically sealed" and [isolated](#) as Director of National Intelligence, having no real power over the war agenda.
- **JD Vance:** Framed as "carrying water" for the president, [failing to chart](#) an independent course despite the failing war effort.
- **Susie Wiles:** Accused of [paying off pollsters](#) to feed the president biased data, ensuring he remains insulated from public dissent.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

The network's lead stories for May 23 focus heavily on the ["disastrous" war in Iran](#) and the "war crime" at the [Lugansk school](#). These are framed with high emotional urgency, emphasizing civilian suffering and elite corruption. Stories about the [homelessness](#)

[crisis](#) in the U.S. and the drug epidemic on Skid Row are positioned to highlight domestic failure. Conspicuously omitted are any reports of Ukrainian military advances or U.S. strategic gains in the Middle East, instead focusing on the [collapse of American power](#). The tone is highly skeptical of Western official narratives and overtly nationalistic toward the Russo-Iranian axis.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The subtext characterizes Western leaders as incompetent or controlled, while their adversaries are portrayed as methodical, resilient, and acting in defense of their sovereignty. The "Deep State" is the overarching antagonist, manipulating leaders to maintain a state of perpetual war.

COUNTRIES and LEADERS

- **Donald Trump:** Portrayed as weak and [pressured into war](#) by Netanyahu, failing to control his own administration.
- **Benjamin Netanyahu:** Characterized as a corrupt manipulator who has "won no more than 27%" of the vote but [runs the United States](#).
- **Vladimir Putin:** Framed as [very restrained](#) despite "NATO-aided" attacks on Russian schools.
- **Iran:** Portrayed as a [judicious counterpuncher](#) that has out-thought U.S. military strategy.
- **Ukraine (Zelensky):** Described as an [illegitimate](#) leader who has "expired" and is "willing to sacrifice" his people for Western elites.

NON-STATE & CORPORATE ACTORS

- **The Deep State:** Implicitly framed as an [omnipresent force](#) that "has its hands in everything" and imprisons whistleblowers.
- **NATO:** Portrayed as an [active accomplice](#) in civilian massacres through intelligence sharing.

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

- **Narrative Seeding:** The broadcast repeatedly seeds the idea that [blackmail](#) is the primary driver of U.S. foreign policy.
- **Censorship:** Claims that the "Nexus of Five Eyes" targets dissidents who share [counter-narratives](#).
- **Delta between Spin and Truth:** The official U.S. casualty figures (7-10 killed) are [disputed as a "disgusting lie,"](#) with claims that the actual numbers are being "slow-walked" to manage public perception.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Economic Depression:** If the Strait of Hormuz remains contested, the global economy faces a ["Great Depression"](#) scale event.
- **Impeachment:** A GOP midterm "wipeout" is expected to lead to the [impeachment of Trump](#) as soon as Democrats are sworn in.
- **Regional Hegemony Shift:** Israel may be forced to revert to a ["contained entity"](#) as Arab states distance themselves from the failing U.S. alliance.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Expect a "double tap" escalation in Ukraine as Russia retaliates for the Lugansk school strike. In the U.S., social unrest over [rent and housing](#) may escalate into broader strikes similar to those in Bolivia.

Medium Term (1-6 Months): The [failure of decapitation strikes](#) in Iran will likely lead to calls for a "full-scale" U.S. ground incursion, potentially triggering a regional nuclear "use it or lose it" scenario.

Long Term (1-5 Years): A structural retreat of U.S. power from the Middle East, with [Putin acting as the primary mediator](#) for a new regional security architecture.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The convergence of maritime disruption, domestic socio-economic decay, and nuclear posturing creates a high-risk environment for global stability.

- **Nuclear Escalation:** Israeli "existential fight" mentality leads to tactical nuclear use. Triggers: Impending military defeat or U.S. withdrawal. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Catastrophic. Mitigations: Immediate [diplomatic resolution](#).
- **Global Economic Collapse:** Permanent closure of Hormuz trade routes. Triggers: Escalation of [naval skirmishes](#). Likelihood: High. Impact: Extreme. Mitigations: Negotiated maritime management with Iran.

- **U.S. Civil Insurrection:** Housing and food insecurity ignite mass domestic unrest. Triggers: [Rent hikes](#) above \$4,000 or midterm election disputes. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: High. Mitigations: Urgent rent control legislation and debt relief.
- **NATO-Russia Direct Conflict:** Escalation from "proxy war" to direct strikes on NATO infrastructure. Triggers: Discovery of [NATO personnel](#) in Lugansk. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Catastrophic. Mitigations: Strategic communication and de-confliction.
- **Regime Collapse in Ally Nations:** Resignation of leaders in Bolivia/Serbia leads to regional voids. Triggers: [Continued dynamite-led protests](#). Likelihood: High. Impact: Moderate. Mitigations: Economic stabilization aid.

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

A complete risk assessment is hindered by several unverified or missing pieces of information.

- The actual status of the [anti-war faction](#) within the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff remains unclear.
- Independent verification of the "suicide drones" and [civilian identities](#) at the Lugansk school is unavailable.
- The specific nature of the [blackmail evidence](#) allegedly held by Netanyahu against Trump has not been disclosed.
- The full extent of [NATO coordination](#) in Ukrainian strikes is only presented from one side.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

The Iranian "Hormuz Trap": The current maritime disruption may not be a reactive measure but a [pre-planned trap](#) designed to lure the U.S. into a ground war that will bankrupt the West while Iran remains shielded by its decentralized insurgency model.

The "Deep State" as a Stabilization Force: While portrayed as the villain, the "Deep State's" isolation of Tulsi Gabbard and others might be a desperate attempt by [career professionals](#) to prevent a erratic executive from causing even greater global damage.

Black Swan Event: The [canopy collapse in Novi Sad](#) could be the first of many structural failures in ageing European infrastructure, leading to a continent-wide crisis of public safety and government legitimacy.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- Prioritize [diplomacy](#) over decapitation strikes to prevent total economic fallout.
- Establish transparent [casualty reporting](#) to regain public trust.
- Address the domestic [housing crisis](#) as a matter of national security.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- Hedge against prolonged [maritime disruptions](#) in the Middle East.
- Prepare for significant [regulatory shifts](#) in the U.S. real estate market.

- Divest from sectors exposed to [South American instability](#).

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Legislative activity is centered on populist demands for economic relief and accountability for the ongoing war effort.

- **BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:** A California [rent control initiative](#) to cap prices amid the unhousing crisis.
- **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:** Resignation of Joe Kent and the [NCTC hearing](#) on the Iran war mandate.

KEY STORIES

- **The Iran War Disaster:** Analysis of the failed three-week blitz and Iran's [judicious escalation](#).
- **Lugansk School Strike:** Russian claims of a "NATO-aided" [civilian massacre](#).
- **Hormuz Control Zone:** Iran and Oman's [maritime management](#) plan.
- **Bolivian Uprising:** Protesters using [dynamite](#) against President Rodrigo Paz.
- **Serbian Protests:** Mass demonstrations in Belgrade following the [Novi Sad tragedy](#).
- **US Housing Emergency:** Rents hitting [\\$3,500](#) and driving homelessness.
- **Deep State whistleblowing:** John Kiriakou's segment on [CIA torture](#) and secret government influence.
- **Ugandan Ebola Response:** President Museveni's [rejection of US aid](#).
- **White House Gunshots:** Kash Patel investigating [shots fired](#) near the executive mansion.

- **Tanzanian Ideology:** A look back at Nyerere's [Ujamaa socialism](#).
- **Skid Row Patient Dumping:** Hospitals accused of [dumping patients](#) in Los Angeles.
- **Mobile Showers in LA:** The "Shower of Hope" providing [hygiene services](#) to the unhoused.

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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