

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

CURRENTTIME

MAY 25, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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THE RUSSIAN STATE IS PIVOTING
TOWARD A TOTAL WAR POSTURE
CHARACTERIZED BY ELITE
FRAGMENTATION, DOMESTIC
REPRESSION, AND AN
INCREASINGLY LOPSIDED
DEPENDENCY ON CHINA.

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

The reporting from May 25, 2026, depicts a Russian Federation under significant internal and external strain, as the Kremlin's "Special Military Operation" enters a phase of prolonged attrition. Elite dissatisfaction is reportedly reaching a boiling point, with high-level officials and business leaders expressing "horror" to Western media regarding the [self-destructive decisions](#) being made by Vladimir Putin. The sense of a "predictable future" has vanished among the ruling class, replaced by a realization that the state no longer protects private property, instead viewing all assets as [temporary state functions](#). This domestic anxiety is exacerbated by the intensification of Ukrainian drone strikes on Moscow's suburbs and regional centers, revealing a systemic failure in state [compensation and protection](#) for its citizens.

On the front lines, the Russian military is struggling with a qualitative recruitment crisis. To meet quotas and avoid a politically risky second wave of mobilization, the military is increasingly relying on [vulnerable populations](#), including the disabled and those with severe substance abuse issues, often recruited through "shadow" intermediaries. Simultaneously, the Kremlin is escalating its psychological warfare through the deployment of "Oreshnik" ballistic missiles against Ukrainian urban centers, a move analysts describe as [reckless nuclear brinkmanship](#). This external aggression is mirrored by a domestic pivot toward "ideological healing," with the Presidential Administration preparing the public for a [total information war](#) with the West, where civilian populations and children are explicitly labeled as "legitimate targets."

Geopolitically, Russia's "pivot to the East" is revealing its limits. While Moscow portrays its relationship with Beijing as a strategic triumph, the reality is a [deepening asymmetry](#) where Russia serves as a raw material appendage to a China that is increasingly cautious and transactional. China's refusal to commit to significantly higher gas imports through "Power of Siberia 2" underscores Russia's [weakened bargaining position](#). Meanwhile, in the near-abroad, Russia is weaponizing energy prices against Armenia to influence its internal politics and [thwart its European integration](#), even as Central Asian states like Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan seek to diversify their technological and legal dependencies away from Moscow.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

Elite Fragmentation and Institutional Decay

- Reports of a "complaint club" among Kremlin elites sharing their [concerns with foreign journalists](#) regarding Putin's lack of a long-term strategy.
- The erosion of private property rights, with business leaders fearing that all assets are now [subject to state seizure](#) to fund the war effort.
- Internal rumors of a [potential coup or conspiracy](#) involving former Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and the military leadership.

Escalation of Asymmetric Warfare

- Introduction of the "Oreshnik" ballistic missile as a [psychological weapon](#) to intimidate Ukraine and its Western allies.
- Systemic Ukrainian drone strikes targeting Russian energy infrastructure and residential areas in [Moscow and surrounding regions](#).
- The Kremlin's refusal to acknowledge the failure of its "3-day war" narrative as it settles into a [multi-year conflict](#).

Lopsided Sino-Russian Strategic Alliance

- Analysis of the "unequal marriage" between Moscow and Beijing, where Russia provides raw materials in exchange for [essential manufactured goods](#).
- China's strategic delay on the "Power of Siberia 2" pipeline, indicating that Russia is no longer a [priority energy partner](#).

- The cultural shift in Russia toward [mandatory Chinese language study](#) and adoption of Chinese symbols as a replacement for Western influence.

Domestic Mobilization and Repression

- Increased pressure on state employees (teachers, doctors) to [register and vote](#) for United Russia in upcoming primaries.
- The use of "shadow" recruitment tactics, including the [sale of recruits](#) with severe health issues to the military by private intermediaries.
- The Presidential Administration's plan for "ideological healing" of the population through [aggressive anti-Western propaganda](#).

Regional Instability and Coercive Diplomacy

- Russia's threat to Armenian energy security as [retribution for its pivot](#) toward the European Union.
- The use of Russian Electronic Warfare (EW) systems to [divert Ukrainian drones](#) toward Baltic states like Lithuania and Latvia, potentially creating a pretext for escalation.
- The deteriorating health of human rights defenders in the Russian prison system, specifically [Bakhrom Khamroev](#), highlighting systemic torture.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization: The Russian front line is reportedly sustained by a [declining quality of personnel](#), with reports of recruits being "bought and sold" like commodities despite severe physical and mental infirmities. Meanwhile, the state is preparing for a "long war," with strategic

planning now [focused on capturing the Donbas](#) by year-end.

Information Warfare & Disinformation:

Alexander Kharichev, a high-ranking Kremlin official, has called for a [totalizing information war](#), suggesting that the state must build "immunity" to Western influence while treating its own youth as a primary battlefield.

Diplomacy & Statecraft: Russia is using coercive energy diplomacy to [destabilize Armenia](#) ahead of its parliamentary elections, signaling a "market price" penalty for any state attempting to leave Moscow's orbit.

Critical Infrastructure Security: Ukrainian drone strikes have successfully penetrated [Moscow's elite suburbs](#), exposing the inadequacy of Russian air defenses and the state's failure to properly compensate affected homeowners.

Leadership Dynamics & Governance:

There is a growing divide between the "siloviki" (security services), who demand harsher internal measures, and the "political technologists," who [favor more subtle control](#). Putin appears to be siding increasingly with the former.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The End of the "Social Contract" in Russia

For over two decades, the Putin regime offered stability and increasing prosperity in exchange for political passivity. This contract is now being replaced by a [totalitarian demand for sacrifice](#) without guaranteed protection. The state's failure to reimburse victims of drone strikes—often paying only [10% of assessed damage](#)—while

simultaneously increasing taxes and seizing business assets for the war effort, indicates a state that is no longer accountable to its populace. This is compounded by the "Oreshnik" escalation, which suggests the Kremlin is willing to risk [catastrophic nuclear consequences](#) to maintain a narrative of strength.

The Sinicization of the Russian Economy

The transcripts reveal a Russia that is rapidly losing its economic sovereignty to China. From the [study of Chinese in kindergartens](#) to the adoption of Chinese technology for everything from [manufacturing to retail](#), Moscow is reshaping its society to fit into a Beijing-led order. However, this is not a partnership of equals; China remains [skeptical of Russian reliability](#), particularly regarding Gazprom's ability to maintain long-term contracts after the political weaponization of energy against Europe.

Systemic Societal Trauma and the Domestic "Meat Grinder"

The internal health of Russian society is deteriorating as veterans return with [untreated PTSD](#), leading to a documented spike in domestic violence. The state's response is not therapy, but a narrative that [dismisses mental health issues](#) as "Western fashion," further isolating traumatized individuals. This trauma is being recycled back into the war effort as the military [recruits convicts and addicts](#), creating a self-perpetuating cycle of violence that is likely to destabilize Russian social order long after the conflict ends.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

The Russian state is facing a crisis of legitimacy among its elite. The "point of convergence" that Putin once represented—balancing the interests of liberals, communists, and nationalists—has collapsed as he [pursues independent, erratic policies](#) that alienate all factions. While the "siloviki" gain influence, there is a palpable sense of [fear and helplessness](#) among the business elite, who see no path forward and are beginning to share their grievances with Western outlets. Institutional decay is also evident in the [forced electoral participation](#) of state employees, suggesting that the government can no longer rely on genuine public support, but must instead manufacture it through coercion.

- **Elite Conflict:** Rumors of a [Shoigu-led conspiracy](#) indicate deep fissures in the military-political leadership.
- **Economic Repression:** Business leaders describe a climate where [taxes are rising](#) while the state offers no protection from the consequences of the war.
- **Social Fragmentation:** The surge in [domestic violence and PTSD](#) points to a society unable to process the scale of its current trauma.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

Russia's global posture is one of aggressive isolationism and transactional alliances. The Kremlin frames the world as a [hostile matrix](#) where it must fight an "information war" to preserve its "soviet-style" values. This posture is manifest in the [Oreshnik missile strikes](#), which serve as a warning to the West to stop

supporting Ukraine. However, this bravado masks a desperate need for external support, which is increasingly focused solely on China. Russia is actively [surrendering islands and economic sectors](#) to Beijing to maintain its war footing, while simultaneously attempting to reassert control over its former Soviet neighbors through [energy blackmail](#).

- **Baltic Escalation:** Russian EW systems are suspected of [diverting drones](#) to test NATO's air defenses in Lithuania and Latvia.
- **Armenian Coercion:** Threats of [increased gas prices](#) are being used to punish Yerevan for its pro-EU stance.
- **China Dependency:** Moscow has effectively [lost its status](#) as a preferred partner for Beijing, becoming a secondary supplier of raw materials.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The Russian economy is undergoing a "structural transformation" toward a command-style war economy, characterized by high inflation, rising taxes, and the erosion of private property. While the ruble shows artificial strength, the underlying [economic fundamentals are weakening](#) due to massive defense spending and international isolation.

- **Inflation and Taxes:** Elite and business circles report [significant tension](#) over rising fiscal burdens and uncompensated war losses.
- **Energy Sector Weakness:** Gazprom's reputation is [severely damaged](#), with China refusing to sign on to new major gas infrastructure projects like "Power of Siberia 2."

- **Property Rights:** Business leaders increasingly feel they are [temporary custodians](#) of assets that the state can seize at any time.
- **Foreign Exchange:** The ruble is described as having "strengthened," but this is increasingly [decoupled from market reality](#).

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

A significant shift is occurring in the Kremlin's power structure as Putin consolidates control among the hardline security services while sidelining more pragmatic technocrats.

- **Sergei Shoigu:** Rumors circulate regarding a [possible conspiracy](#) or move to check his influence within the military.
- **Sergei Kiriyenko:** Portrayed as the [proponent of "political technology"](#) control, increasingly at odds with the FSB's "iron fist" approach.
- **Alexander Kharichev:** Emerging as a key ideological architect, calling for [preparations for a total information war](#).
- **Dmitry Peskov and Sergei Kiriyenko:** Reportedly [unsuccessfully attempted](#) to dissuade Putin from certain escalatory restrictions.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

The broadcast editorializes heavily on the **fragility of the Russian state**, prioritizing stories of elite discontent and the "absurdity" of current Kremlin policy. The **lead stories** focus on the gap between official state propaganda and the "horror" felt by those close to power. The network adopts an **adversarial and analytical tone**, frequently using terms like "self-destructive" and "meat

grinder" to describe Russian actions. **Buried stories** include more nuanced economic data that might show areas of Russian resilience, while **conspicuous omissions** include any detailed discussion of Ukrainian military casualties or internal Ukrainian political struggles, focusing almost exclusively on Russian vulnerabilities.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The transcripts portray a world in a state of chaotic fracturing, with Russia as the primary agent of instability, acting from a position of perceived (but false) strength and actual strategic decay.

COUNTRIES

- **Russia:** Framed as a [chaotic and self-destructive](#) actor governed by a leader receiving "distorted information" from a sycophantic elite.
- **China:** Portrayed as a [coldly pragmatic master](#) of the relationship, exploiting Russian weakness while maintaining a "diplomatic Zen" to avoid direct entanglement in the war.
- **Ukraine:** Depicted as a [resilient defender](#) whose resistance is forcing the Kremlin into increasingly desperate psychological escalations like the Oreshnik missile.
- **Lithuania/Latvia:** Framed as [potential targets of provocation](#), being drawn into the conflict by Russian EW and drone diversion tactics.

LEADERS

- **Vladimir Putin:** Characterized as [irritable, frail, and obsessed](#) with capturing Donbas at any cost, regardless of the destruction of his own country's economy.

- **Xi Jinping:** Viewed as a [senior partner](#) who refuses to help Russia out of its energy trap, prioritizing Chinese long-term interests over the "friendship without limits."
- **Volodymyr Zelensky:** Portrayed as [attentive to Russian vulnerabilities](#) and actively preparing for further Russian mobilization waves.

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

The Kremlin is moving from passive censorship to **active narrative seeding** and ideological indoctrination. High-level officials are explicitly calling for a "total" information war where the civilian population is the target. This includes the [recategorization of dissent](#) as "mental illness" and the use of state-controlled "sociology" to manufacture public support for Putin. The delta between the media spin—of a Russia "going from victory to victory"—and the [reality of elite terror](#) and systemic infrastructure failure is widening, creating a volatile domestic information environment.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Forced Nationalization:** As the war economy requires more resources, the Kremlin is likely to move from informal pressure to [formal nationalization](#) of key industrial and private assets.
- **Secondary Mobilization:** Despite the "shadow" recruitment, the [declining quality and number of recruits](#) will likely necessitate a second official wave of mobilization by late 2026.

- **Escalating Repression:** The "siloviki" faction is poised to [win the internal power struggle](#), leading to a North Korean-style "tightening of the screws" on all aspects of Russian life.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Expect [intensified energy pressure](#) on Armenia and a surge in Russian "Oreshnik" strikes on Ukrainian logistics hubs to distract from poor front-line progress.

Medium Term (1-6 Months): Implementation of the [digital soldier registry](#) and electronic summonses will lead to a significant crackdown on potential draft-dodgers and a possible closing of the borders for military-aged men.

Long Term (1-5 Years): Russia will likely become a **de facto protectorate of China**, with its economic and educational systems [reoriented entirely toward Beijing](#), while its internal society grapples with the permanent scars of mass PTSD and state-sanctioned violence.

RISK ASSESSMENT

- **Strategic Nuclear Miscalculation:** Triggers: Ukrainian deep strikes hitting sensitive Russian targets. Likelihood: Low-Moderate. Impact: Catastrophic global escalation. Mitigations: Maintaining backchannel military-to-military communication with the West.

- **Elite-Driven Coup or Instability:** Triggers: Further major military defeats in Donbas or a total collapse of the ruble. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Internal civil unrest or [violent power transition](#) in Moscow. Mitigations: Continued purges of the military leadership.
- **Baltic Border Flashpoint:** Triggers: Russian EW systems successfully [diverting a drone](#) into a NATO civilian target. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Activation of Article 5 or significant NATO-Russia direct confrontation. Mitigations: Rapid deployment of advanced NATO air defense to the borders.
- **Russian Economic Collapse:** Triggers: China withdrawing its support for "shadow" oil exports or a collapse in global oil prices. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Massive domestic [unrest and failure](#) to fund the war. Mitigations: Increased economic concessions to Beijing.
- **Systemic Social Collapse:** Triggers: A return of hundreds of thousands of traumatized veterans without support. Likelihood: High. Impact: Explosion in [violent crime and domestic instability](#). Mitigations: Expanding the prison-colony system to house returning combatants.

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- The transcripts do not provide a clear picture of **Ukrainian attrition rates**, which is essential for understanding the actual sustainability of the conflict.
- There is a lack of detail on the **actual efficacy of the Oreshnik missile**, with reports varying from total destruction to hitting a "garage cooperative."

- The **internal sentiment in Beijing** is filtered through a Russian lens; more direct evidence of China's red lines for Putin is missing.
- The **status of Russia's tactical nuclear arsenal** and the command-and-control stability during this period of elite fragmentation remains a critical unknown.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

The "Elite Complaint" as a Managed Information Op: It is possible that the "horror" shared by Kremlin elites with the Guardian is a **deliberate leak** sanctioned by Putin to signal to the West that a "more dangerous" hardline faction is ready to take over if he is ousted, thereby securing his own position.

The China Dependency as a Trojan Horse: Rather than becoming a raw material appendage, Russia may be **leveraging its dependency** to entangle Chinese interests so deeply in its survival that Beijing will be forced to intervene militarily to prevent a Russian collapse.

Black Swan Event: A large-scale sabotage incident at a Russian nuclear power plant, falsely blamed on Ukrainian drones, used as a pretext for the first actual use of a tactical nuclear weapon in the theater.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- Prepare for a **long-term "war economy"** posture from Moscow that is immune to traditional sanctions-driven diplomacy.

- Strengthen **border defenses in the Baltics** to prevent "accidental" drone penetrations from escalating into regional war.
- Engage directly with **Armenian and Central Asian leaders** to provide alternatives to Russian energy and technology dependencies.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Total Capital Exit:** Any remaining assets in Russia should be considered [lost or subject to state seizure](#); there is no legal framework for private property.
- **Supply Chain Diversification:** Companies relying on Russian raw materials through "third-country" intermediaries face **extreme regulatory and ethical risk**.
- **Cybersecurity Investment:** The transition to an "information war" posture suggests a significant **increase in state-sponsored cyber-sabotage** against global infrastructure.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

The reporting highlights a shift toward **coercive and emergency legislation** designed to facilitate the war effort and suppress domestic dissent.

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **Digital Registry Law:** Legislation to [automate mobilization summonses](#) and restrict travel for non-compliant citizens.
- **Anti-Western "Information War" Policy:** A framework proposed by Alexander Kharichev to [treat all foreign media](#) as hostile psychological operations.

- **Bishkek Transport Reform:** A local mandate in Kyrgyzstan to [ban cash payments](#) for transport, causing civil debate over constitutional currency rights.

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Alexander Kharichev's Speech:** At a national electoral forum, calling for [aggressive indoctrination](#) of the youth.
- **Dmitry Medvedev's Statement:** Confirming that [contract recruitment rates](#) have slowed significantly in early 2026.
- **Armenian Ministry Statement:** Responding to [Russian energy threats](#) and affirming their commitment to European integration.

KEY STORIES

- **Kremlin Elite's Crisis of Confidence:** High-level Russian officials express [deep frustration and lack of future vision](#) to Western journalists, citing Putin's self-destructive path.
- **Oreshnik Missile Deployment:** Russia uses a new [ballistic missile system](#) as a psychological weapon against Ukraine, signaling potential nuclear escalation.
- **Drone Strikes on Moscow Suburbs:** Residential areas in Khimki, Balashikha, and Krasnogorsk hit by [Ukrainian drones](#), with victims reporting minimal state support.
- **Recruitment Quality Crisis:** The Russian military is [recruiting disabled individuals and addicts](#) through "shadow" markets to avoid mass mobilization.
- **Armenian Gas Blackmail:** Russia threatens to [increase gas prices for Armenia](#) in a bid to influence its upcoming parliamentary elections.

- **The Sinicization of Russia:** Russian schools and cultural institutions [pivot toward China](#), emphasizing the study of Mandarin and Chinese social models.
- **Domestic Violence Surge:** Return of [war veterans with PTSD](#) leads to an explosion in domestic violence and a lack of state intervention.
- **Torture of Bakhrom Khamroev:** Human rights activists report [severe medical neglect and torture](#) of a prominent prisoner in a Russian penal colony.
- **Portugal's Drug Model Debate:** Analysis of [Portugal's decriminalization](#) as an alternative to the repressive Russian war-on-drugs narrative.
- **Shoigu Conspiracy Rumors:** Speculation about a [coup attempt or internal purge](#) involving the former Defense Minister.
- **Starlink in Kyrgyzstan:** The arrival of [satellite internet](#) in Bishkek as a tool for technological independence from Russia.
- **Lithuanian Air Alarm:** First [real air raid sirens](#) in Lithuania in decades following Russian drone provocations.

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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