

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

RT

JULY 18, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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DIRECT KINETIC ESCALATION BETWEEN MAJOR BLOCS SIGNALS SYSTEMIC INSTABILITY AND THE ACCELERATED DECAY OF THE UNIPOLAR ORDER

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

July 18, 2026, marks a critical juncture in the global security environment, defined by the simultaneous escalation of direct and proxy conflicts across three continents. The broadcast narrative portrays a world in which the United States is struggling to maintain its hegemony against a backdrop of domestic fiscal insolvency and military overreach, while a "Global South" led by China, Russia, and the BRICS nations actively constructs a parallel economic and political architecture. The core of the day's developments lies in the overt kinetic conflict between the US and Iran, which has now transitioned into a multi-front regional war impacting global energy security and maritime trade routes through the [blockade of the Strait of Hormuz](#).

Simultaneously, the Eastern European theater has entered a more aggressive phase. The Russian military has reported significant territorial gains in the Donbas, including the

[capture of Krasny Liman](#), while Ukraine has responded with "asymmetric" terror tactics, targeting Russian logistics hubs and civilian retail infrastructure with mass drone swarms. Internal political stability in Ukraine is deteriorating rapidly, with the [sacking of the Defense Minister](#) triggering mass protests that suggest a widening rift between the military command and the presidential administration. This convergence of events highlights a global system transitioning from managed competition to uncontained conflict, where civilian infrastructure is increasingly viewed as a valid military target by all parties.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Regional War in West Asia:** The US-Iran conflict has reached a "seventh night of consecutive attacks," with Iran successfully targeting [US bases in Kuwait and Jordan](#) and striking critical desalination infrastructure, threatening the existence of Gulf monarchies.
- **Russian Breakthrough in Donbas:** Russian forces have secured the strategic hub of Krasny Liman and are advancing within [five kilometers of Kramatorsk](#), signaling a potential collapse of Ukrainian organized defenses in the Donetsk Republic.
- **Ukrainian Government Reshuffle and Unrest:** The dismissal of Mikhail Fedorov and his replacement by SBU-linked [Yevgeny Kumara](#) has sparked nationwide protests in Ukraine, with demonstrators voicing anger over forced mobilization and military failures.

- **Global Favored Nation Status Shift:** A major global study reported by the network indicates that [China has surpassed the US](#) in global favorability (46% to 36%), reflecting the "PR world war" loss by Washington.
- **BRICS Architecture Hardening:** Discussions in Kenya and South Africa emphasize [de-dollarization](#) and [technological transfer](#) as the primary mechanisms for "economic liberation" from the Bretton Woods institutions.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization

- The conflict in Ukraine is shifting toward [continuous strikes on cargo vessels](#) in Odessa and Chernomorsk to sever Western supply links.
- US military reports indicate a significant [failure of Patriot missile systems](#), with hit rates reportedly less than 4% against modern ballistic threats.

Critical Infrastructure Security

- The targeting of the [desalination plants in Kuwait](#) represents a strategic shift where water security is weaponized to force diplomatic concessions.
- Drone strikes on [Wildberries retail warehouses](#) in Russia are characterized as economic terrorism aimed at disrupting ordinary civilian life.

Macroeconomics & Trade

- Global oil prices are volatile, with [Brent crude climbing to \\$85](#) per barrel as shipping through the Strait of Hormuz drops to "a handful of ships."

- The US national debt is reported at [39.4 trillion dollars](#), with critics arguing that foreign military aid is bankrupting domestic infrastructure and veteran care.

Geopolitical Competition & Bloc Politics

- South Africa's [National Council of Provinces](#) is actively seeking to mirror Russia's resilience model, focusing on energy security and trade through committee-to-committee diplomacy.
- France is accused of "economic colonization" in Africa through the [CEA Franc](#) and a "Trojan Horse" approach to military pacts with nations like Kenya.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Weaponization of Logistics and Subsistence

A prominent theme across all transcripts is the expansion of warfare from military assets to the basic requirements for human life. The [destruction of desalination facilities](#) in the Gulf and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz suggest a "total war" philosophy intended to induce state collapse through resource deprivation. This trend is mirrored in Eastern Europe, where drone strikes now routinely target [civilian distribution centers](#) and food supply chains, moving the "front line" into the heart of domestic urban environments.

The Crisis of Institutional Trust in the West

The broadcasts repeatedly highlight a perceived decay in Western democratic institutions. In the US, the narrative focuses on the [media's refusal to air presidential addresses](#) and the "Deep State's" alleged disregard for the Constitution. In Europe,

protests in Ireland over [gas prices and demographics](#) are used to frame a story of governments that have become "enemies" of their own populations, contrasting this with the "principled" stances of the BRICS nations.

The Failure of High-Tech Deterrence

A strategic subtheme emerges regarding the ineffectiveness of Western military hardware. Detailed critiques of the [F-35's 28% operational readiness](#) and the "cheating" on Patriot missile tests suggest that the US security umbrella is a "paper tiger." This narrative serves to embolden regional actors like Iran and the Houthis to take more aggressive kinetic actions, believing that Western retaliation can be saturated and neutralized by high-volume, low-cost drone and missile swarms.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

United States: The US is portrayed as a nation on the brink of [civil war or another "coup"](#). The internal dynamics are characterized by extreme polarization, with the Trump administration facing a "Deep State" that reportedly controls the military-industrial complex. The [Safe America Act](#) and the re-investigation of the 2020 election are central flashpoints, while the growing [homelessness crisis among 32,000 veterans](#) provides the moral ammunition for isolationist factions to demand a withdrawal from foreign entanglements.

Ukraine: The country is facing a crisis of governance. The [general mobilization](#) has become so unpopular that it has triggered street protests and "kidnappings in broad daylight" by recruitment officers. The firing of Fedorov and the resulting "PR campaign"

between the Defense Ministry and the military command indicate a breakdown in the chain of command, with the network suggesting that Zelensky is increasingly beholden to [Western oligarchs and the EU](#).

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

The international system is framed as a [fracturing multipolar arena](#) where the "conceptual West" is being pushed out by a rising "Global South." Russia is projecting power as a stabilizing force and a mentor to African and Middle Eastern nations seeking sovereignty. China is portrayed as the ["number one economy"](#) and a more effective influencer of global oil prices than OPEC. The posture of the US is framed as ["imperial overstretch,"](#) with its withdrawal from Afghanistan being a precursor to a wider retreat from the Middle East as regional allies like Kuwait and Oman begin to prioritize their own safety over US strategic interests.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The global economic state is highly precarious, with multiple vectors indicating a potential shift toward a depression more severe than the 1930s if the Middle East war expands to target energy infrastructure. Market sentiment is bearish, particularly in Asia, following the [3% drop in the Nikkei 225](#). De-dollarization is no longer a theoretical goal but a practical imperative being implemented by the BRICS Development Bank.

Key Economic Vectors:

- **Energy:** Brent crude at [\\$85/barrel](#); US crude near \$80. Gas prices in Ireland at [\\$9/gallon](#).

- **Infrastructure Investment:** Iran's [Chabahar port](#), a key trade corridor for India, was hit by US strikes, threatening Central Asian trade viability.
- **Labor/Social Costs:** \$800 million spent in the US for [homeless veteran housing](#) is described by critics as inefficient "money laundering."

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Key personnel shifts today signal a move away from technocratic administration toward "war footing" and hardened ideological governance.

- **Yevgeny Kumara (Ukraine):** Appointed as Acting Defense Minister. An SBU major general described as the [organizer of drone attacks on Russia](#). His rise signals an intent to pursue asymmetric warfare over conventional battlefield success.
- **Mikhail Fedorov (Ukraine):** Sacked as Defense Minister. Analyzed as a [technocrat](#) who fought corruption but was "uncomfortable" for the military-industrial complex.
- **Alexander Sirsky (Ukraine):** Current Commander-in-Chief. He is a winner in the recent power struggle but faces [intense criticism](#) and protests from soldiers and civilians alike.
- **Ayatollah Khamenei (Iran):** Assassinated in February 2026. This retrospective reference establishes the [motive for the current war](#) and Iran's refusal to negotiate with the "Great Satan."

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

Lead Stories: The Russian capture of [Krasny Liman](#) and the direct kinetic strikes between the [US and Iran](#) dominated the cycle. RT focused heavily on the "inhumane" nature of Ukrainian drone strikes on civilian marketplaces, positioning Russia as the defensive party. The US domestic crisis regarding [veteran neglect](#) and election interference was given significant airtime to illustrate Western internal decay.

Buried Stories: Mention of an [Ebola outbreak in Africa](#) was positioned as a story of US "offloading health risks" rather than a public health crisis. The internal dissent within the Russian military, if any, was completely absent.

Emotional Tone: The tone was one of ["Dr. Doom" realism](#)—somber, analytical, and highly skeptical of Western official narratives. It combined nationalistic pride (for Russia and BRICS) with a fear-inducing forecast for the Western world.

Conspicuous Omissions: There was no mention of the operational costs or casualty figures for Russian forces in the capture of Krasny Liman. Details regarding the exact state of the Iranian nuclear program were left as [speculative](#), omitting any international agency verification.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The day's framing establishes a binary world: a corrupt, declining Western empire versus a pragmatic, ascending multipolar coalition.

COUNTRIES

- **Russia:** Portrayed as strong, resilient, and the defender of the "noble nation of Iran." It is framed as "liberating" territory rather than conquering it ([liberation of Donbas](#)).
- **United States:** Framed as a "rogue state" that disregards the Constitution and international law, focused solely on "making money by any possible means" under the [Trump administration](#).
- **China:** Characterized as the "stable future" and the [stabilizing force](#) world leaders now look to, rather than Washington.
- **South Africa:** Portrayed as a principled leader of the Global South, honoring the [Mandela legacy](#) by challenging Western "apartheid-backing" policies.

LEADERS

- **Vladimir Putin:** Framed as a confident leader who has correctly [assessed the American decline](#).
- **Donald Trump:** Portrayed as an erratic "narcissist" ([narcissist sl politician](#)) who is "robbing Peter to pay Paul" and whose foreign policy is dictated by making money for the military complex.
- **Vladimir Zelensky:** Framed as a "dictator" who is [winning the "war of lies"](#) but losing the war of reality, desperate enough to purge his own cabinet to survive.
- **Emmanuel Macron:** Characterized as the ["African raider"](#) attempting a surreptitious economic colonization of Africa.

NON-STATE & CORPORATE ACTORS

- **BRICS Development Bank:** Framed as the engine of [economic liberation](#) for the Global South.

- **SBU (Ukraine Intelligence):** Framed as a [terrorist organization](#) now directly controlling the Ukrainian military apparatus.
- **Raytheon/Lockheed Martin:** Framed as corrupt "contractors" who [rigged tests](#) and profited from ineffective weapons.

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

The Meta-narrative of the day is "The Truth vs. Western Disinformation." RT positions itself as the only outlet providing ["context"](#) over content. Significant psychological operations are noted:

- **Narrative Seeding:** The claim that the US [willfully targeted the Minab school](#) in a "double tap" strike is used to neutralize US accusations of Russian war crimes.
- **Propaganda:** The broadcast uses "expert" whistleblowers like [Karen Katowsky](#) to undermine the honor of the US military from within.
- **Censorship:** The network frames the US media's decision to not air Trump's speech as ["malfeasance,"](#) implying that Western populations are being kept in the dark about their own government's actions.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Gulf State Realignment:** If the US continues striking Iran from bases in Kuwait and Qatar, those nations will likely [expel US forces](#) to avoid the total destruction of their desalination and energy infrastructure.

- **Ukrainian Military Coup:** The rising friction between the ["technocratic camp"](#) of the sacked Fedorov and the "hardliners" under Kumara, combined with soldier punishments for anti-Sirsky social media posts, makes a military-led takeover in Kiev highly probable in the coming months.
- **Nuclear Proliferation:** Iran is hypothesized to be "pregnant" with a [nuclear warhead](#), awaiting the first sign of an Israeli nuclear strike to reveal its deterrent capability.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Expect an intensification of [Russian breakthroughs](#) in the Donbas as Ukrainian internal strife paralyzes the front-line chain of command. Global oil prices will likely reach [\\$90/barrel](#) as the Hormuz blockade persists.

Medium Term (1-6 Months): The [Save America Act](#) and 2020 election interference "reveals" will dominate the US midterm elections, potentially leading to widespread civil disruption or state-level secessions if the results are contested.

Long Term (1-5 Years): The shift to a [BRICS-mediated single currency](#) for Africa and the Middle East will likely render the US dollar a regional currency, ending the "petrodollar recycling" era and forcing a structural collapse of the US defense industrial base.

RISK ASSESSMENT

- **Global Freshwater Famine in the Gulf:** Direct targeting of water desalination plants could trigger a mass exodus from the region. **Triggers:** Iranian retaliation for continued US infrastructure strikes. **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** Existential for Gulf nations; 65 million people displaced ([depopulating the region](#)). **Mitigations:** US-Iran ceasefire implementation of the Islamabad MoU.
- **US Domestic Kinetic Unrest:** Rapidly declining public trust in institutions leading to "violent breakdown." **Triggers:** November midterm election disputes and the [Safe America Act](#) controversy. **Likelihood:** Medium-High. **Impact:** Total loss of US global projection capability. **Mitigations:** Legislative reform to increase local state autonomy ([letting states have more control](#)).
- **NATO proxy war contagion:** Spillover of the Ukraine war into direct NATO-Russia kinetic conflict. **Triggers:** Ukrainian "spider web" drone attacks using [Western-provided technology](#) deep in Russian territory. **Likelihood:** Medium. **Impact:** Global thermonuclear war. **Mitigations:** Immediate cessation of Western arms shipments.
- **Global Economic Depression:** A crisis worse than the 1930s. **Triggers:** targeting of [critical global energy infrastructure](#) in Iran and the Gulf. **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** Widespread starvation and systemic collapse in the West. **Mitigations:** Return to the JCPOA-style diplomacy.

- **Disintegration of the NATO Alliance:** Internal collapse of the defense bloc. **Triggers:** A potential [Israeli attack on Turkey](#) or Greece's reaction to such a conflict. **Likelihood:** Low-Medium. **Impact:** End of the transatlantic security order. **Mitigations:** Diplomatic "shuttle diplomacy" led by non-US actors.

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- The transcripts mention the [assassination of Khamenei](#) but provide no context on how the current Iranian leadership was formed or its internal stability.
- There is a lack of data on [Russian casualty rates](#) in the Donbas, making it impossible to assess the true sustainability of the current offensive.
- The claim that [14 US soldiers](#) have been killed compared to "thousands" of Iranians lacks third-party verification and likely underreports US regional casualties.
- The "Sanchez Effect" of rising RT viewership in the US is cited ([tens of millions watching](#)) but not independently audited, potentially masking actual viewership numbers.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

- **The "Managed Collapse":** The apparent US "overreach" is actually a strategic pivot to force Europe and the Middle East to take responsibility for their own defense, freeing US resources for a concentrated "Black Swan" kinetic strike on China's [tech and human capital base](#).

- **The "Russian Stalemate":** The capture of Krasny Liman is not a breakthrough but a "trap" where Ukrainian forces are drawing the Russian military into urban [Kramatorsk](#) to initiate a multi-year war of attrition that will bankrupt Moscow's defense industry brace.
- **Black Swan Event:** A total failure of the [AI surveillance "grid"](#) due to a cyber-attack from a non-state actor, leading to a "dark age" of intelligence where both the US and BRICS lose control of their satellite and drone swarms.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- **Security:** Urgent audit of "Operational Test and Evaluation" data for defensive systems ([Patriot systems fraud allegations](#)).
- **Economic:** Diversification of currency reserves away from the dollar to prepare for [BRICS-led de-dollarization](#).
- **Diplomatic:** Strengthening of ties with South Africa to leverage their role in the upcoming [G20 presidency](#).

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chain:** Rerouting of all logistics to avoid the [Chabahar port](#) and the Bab-el-Mandeb straits.
- **Regulatory:** Monitoring of the [Safe America Act](#) for potential impacts on election-related data privacy.
- **Capital Allocation:** Hedging against the [volatility of Asian markets](#) as regional tensions shift from trade wars to kinetic engagement.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Legislative activity on this day focused on election security, veteran welfare, and the regulation of religious institutions in conflict zones.

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **Safe America Act (US):** Aimed at strengthening [election security](#) and preventing foreign interference; critics argue it facilitates "cheating" through restrictive voter ID policies.
- **VA Accountability Act (US):** Intended to streamline [veteran health care](#) and increase transparency; currently stalled amid budget battles.
- **Anti-Church Law (Ukraine):** Passed to allow the [legal registration of Orthodox parishes](#) to be revoked if they are suspected of Russian ties.

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Informal UN Security Council Meeting:** Friday session convened by Russia to document [Ukrainian atrocities](#) and the "glorification of Nazism."
- **African Forward Nairobi Meeting:** A diplomatic charm offensive by [Macron](#) targeting Kenya and Nigeria to secure uranium and retail markets.

KEY STORIES

- **Capture of Krasny Liman:** Russian forces took control of the strategic hub, leading to a breakdown in [Ukrainian organized defenses](#).

- **Minab School Strike:** A US air strike killed [168 civilians](#), mostly children, in Iran; US calls it a mistake, Iran calls it a willful "double tap."
- **Wildberries Warehouse Attack:** A Ukrainian drone strike in Tambov killed [seven night shift employees](#) at a distribution center.
- **Ukrainian Defense Reshuffle:** Mikhail Fedorov was sacked after [six months](#), replaced by "organizer of drone attacks" Yevgeny Kumara.
- **US Veteran Neglect Controversy:** Outgoing GOP lawmaker [Thomas Massy](#) proposed cutting \$3.3 billion in aid to Israel to fund homeless veteran care; proposal rejected by GOP.
- **Strait of Hormuz Blockade:** Iranian forces intercepted a [Thai-flagged ship](#) and closed the waterway as a "red line" against US aggression.
- **China Favorability Milestone:** A study of 42,000 adults found [46% view China favorably](#) vs. only 36% for the United States.
- **Mandela Day Commemoration:** South Africa celebrated the icon's legacy, focusing on the [Nairobi diplomatic pivot](#) and the struggle for "economic freedom."
- **US-Iran Tit-for-Tat:** Seventh night of strikes; US targets bridges in [Bender Abbas](#), Iran targets bases in Kuwait and Jordan.
- **Truth API Launch:** Trump Media announced a service giving [elite firms](#) millisecond access to presidential posts, sparking claims of a "two-tier market."
- **Falklands Banner Investigation:** FIFA launched a probe into [Argentine players](#) for declaring the islands Argentinian during the World Cup.

- **Cyprus Defense Initiative:** President of Cyprus called for a [NATO-like defense structure](#) within the EU, citing NATO's unreliability.

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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