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SPECIAL REPORT: The Kremlin is Cultivating an AI-Trained Global Media Cadre for Lasting Influence

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COGNITIVE WARFARE

The Kremlin is Cultivating an AI-Trained Global Media Cadre for Lasting Influence

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Nataliya Bugayova, Jacob Spencer, and Kateryna Stepanenko with Lucianna Marquez and Anna Guethoff

TOPLINES

The Kremlin is growing a global cadre of Russia-trained journalists as part of its cognitive warfare efforts. Russia uses cognitive warfare to shape the decisions and will of its opponents. The Kremlin is expanding state-run international journalism training initiatives, building a global media recruitment pipeline, and expanding training that specifically targets young media professionals abroad. Kremlin-run media is increasingly incorporating AI media training curricula, likely to scale production of content that aligns with Kremlin narratives. The Kremlin's investment in global media talent is not opportunistic, but rather supports Russia's strategic aims. The Kremlin uses media training in Africa and Asia to discredit the West, shape global narratives on the war in Ukraine, and obscure the Kremlin's weaknesses. Russian state media training in the former Soviet states furthers the Kremlin's aim of reestablishing control over those countries. Russian state media training is also a part of the Kremlin's occupation playbook in Ukraine and Georgia. The Russian-trained global journalist cadre is key to the resilience of the Kremlin's cognitive warfare infrastructure, as the cadre operates outside of Russian state structures, allowing it to maintain influence even when Russian media face restrictions.

The Kremlin has been expanding journalism training initiatives, particularly via state-run SputnikPro and RT Academy training programs. Russian state news agency Sputnik

established the SputnikPro international journalism education project in March 2018, and the program has reportedly trained over 15,000 participants as of 2026. The Kremlin's international TV and broadcasting network RT launched the RT Academy English-language journalism training program in February 2024 and claimed that it had trained over 7,000 participants as of August 2026. Kremlin-controlled think tank, the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund (also known as the Gorchakov Fund), established the InteRussia fellowship program for training foreign specialists in multiple fields including journalism in 2021, with funding from the Russian Presidential Grants Foundation. InteRussia partnered with RT's Arabic service to launch a fellowship for journalists from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, and Sudan in May 2026. InteRussia also partnered with SputnikPro to organize training programs in Moscow for Latin American journalists in September and October 2025 and for African journalists in July 2026. The growth of Russian international journalism training events is coupled with the Kremlin's effort to expand its network of Russian state media partnerships with foreign outlets — another pillar of Russian cognitive warfare infrastructure that ISW analyzed in an April 2026 report.

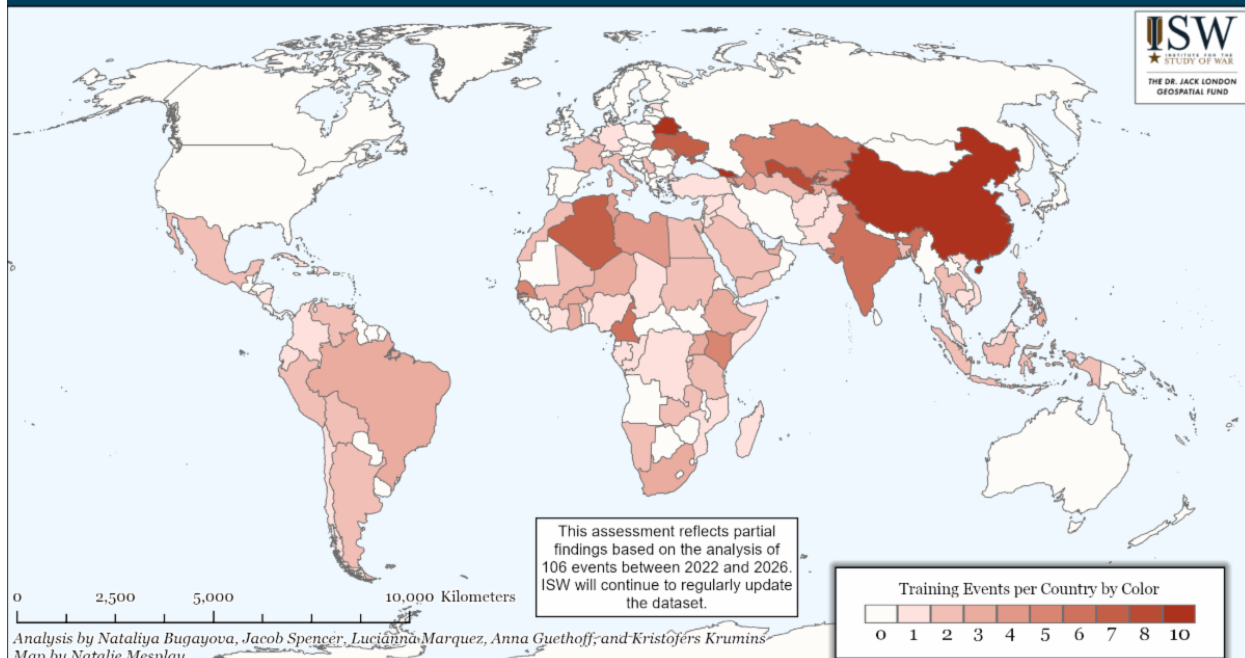
The Kremlin seeks to expand the scale, reach, and longevity of Russia's information influence through its growing journalism training initiatives abroad.

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Russian State Media Journalism Training Events by Country, August 2026



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