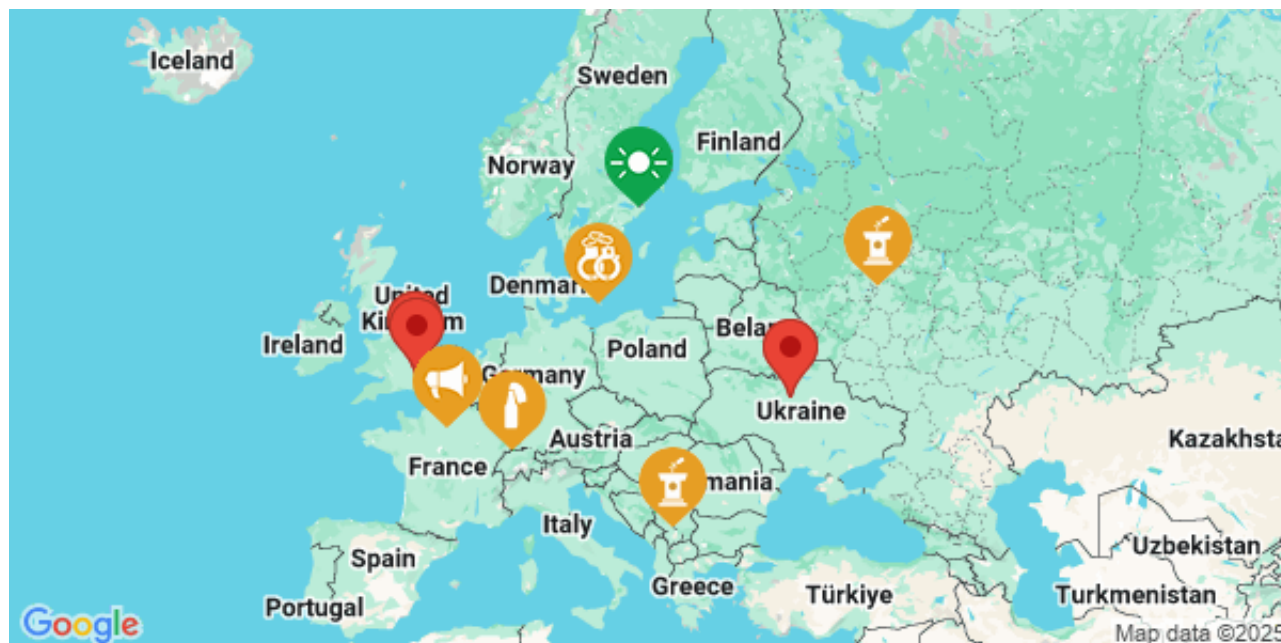




Daily



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MAX - Europe Region Daily Summary - May 18, 2025

Highlights of the Day

- **France:** Unionized taxi drivers to strike, protest nationwide, including in Paris on May 19; maintain heightened vigilance
- **Kosovo:** Authorities take over Serbia-run institutions, utilities, in northern Kosovo as per May 16 reports; protests by ethnic Serbs likely
- **Russia:** Andrey Mordvichev appointed new Commander-in-Chief of ground forces on May 15; suggests attempt to shift ground forces tactics
- **UK:** Second suspect linked to arson attacks on PM Starmer's properties arrested at Luton Airport (LTN) on May 17; suggests coordinated action

Actionable Items

France: Unionized taxi drivers to strike, protest nationwide, including in Paris on May 19; maintain heightened vigilance

Current Situation - On May 19, taxi drivers associated with multiple unions will hold a nationwide strike. The exact timings of the strike remain unconfirmed as of writing. Additionally, in Paris, a vehicle convoy protest is slated to begin at Boulevard Raspail from 07:00 (local time) on May 19. The strike and protests will be held to denounce the bill on the health insurance agreement for medical transport and the cut in regulated fares.

Assessments & Forecast - Given the mobilizational capabilities of the organizing unions, the slated strike is likely to be widely adhered to, resulting in significant disruptions to taxi services nationwide. The associated protest in Paris is likely to draw participation in the low to mid-hundreds of vehicles. Given heightened sentiments around the protest issues, the vehicle convoy protest carries a latent risk of unrest, particularly as protesters will likely block roads. Such actions increase the likelihood of clashes with police, as they will prompt authorities to use forceful dispersal methods. With that, authorities are likely to deploy a bolstered security presence along Boulevard Raspail to monitor proceedings and to reroute traffic as needed.

Recommendations - Those operating or residing in Paris on May 19 are advised to maintain heightened vigilance near Boulevard Raspail due to the latent risk of unrest at the taxi drivers' convoy protest and allot for associated travel-related disruptions. Allot for disruptions to taxi services nationwide.

Source: [ENDT](#)

Notable Events

Denmark: Far-right figure Rasmus Paludan fined 10,000 DKK for desecrating Quran on May 16; anti-Islam Quran-desecration protests likely

Current Situation - On May 16, the district court on Bornholm Island fined Rasmus Paludan, founder and leader of the far-right anti-Islam Stram Kurs party, and another member of Stram Kurs 10,000 DKK each for desecrating a Quran in June 2024. Both were found to have violated a law banning "inappropriate treatment of a religious text," which was implemented in December 2023. Paludan announced he will appeal the ruling.

Assessments & Forecast - The ruling is notable, as it marks the first case involving the new law on desecrating religious texts, which was passed amid sustained international criticism following repeated Quran desecrations in Denmark. However, such legal measures are unlikely to deter similar actions, as they are often capitalized on by far-right actors as evidence of state censorship, aimed at maximizing visibility among supporters. That Paludan publicly stated he will appeal the ruling also supports this. Supporters of Paludan are liable to carry out Quran-desecration protests in solidarity, especially in the Netherlands and Sweden, where there is a precedent for such protests. Any Quran-desecration protest will carry a high risk for counter-protests, including potential public disorder in affected cities.

Source: [Politiken](#)

France: Two women attacked in Pyrenees metro station in Paris on May 17; underscore threat of violence against women on public transport

Current Situation – On May 17, at approximately 08:20 (local time), a man strangled a woman from behind on the escalators at Pyrenees metro station before fleeing. Around 09:30, the same individual returned and assaulted a second woman in a similar manner. Both victims were hospitalized. The suspect was apprehended shortly afterward. The motive is unconfirmed.

Assessment & Forecast – Given that the Pyrenees station is located in Paris's 20th arrondissement, an area where issues related to drug addiction and mental illness are prevalent, this suggests that mental health issues or substance abuse may have been contributing factors. While no recent incidents with a comparable modus operandi have been reported, the attacks underscore a persistent threat of violence against women in public transport. This follows a separate incident on May 9, when two female RATP employees were assaulted in the metro. Given this, further acts of violence targeting women, particularly those carried out by individuals with psychiatric disorders or substance abuse problems, remain a credible risk in the short to medium term – particularly at stations such as Chateau Rouge, Barbes-Rochechouart, Stalingrad, Gare du Nord, La Chapelle, and Crimea.

Source: [Le Parisien](#)

Kosovo: Authorities take over Serbia-run institutions, utilities, in northern Kosovo as per May 16 reports; protests by ethnic Serbs likely

Current Situation – As per May 16 reports, Kosovar authorities have taken control of several Serb-run facilities in the ethnic Serb-majority regions of North Mitrovica and Zubin-Potok, northern Kosovo. The operations targeted key institutions, a Serb-run water utility company and plant, along with other local administrative offices, factories, and facilities.

Assessments & Forecast – The actions, coming amid persistent political deadlock in Kosovo, likely at least partially reflect an attempt by Prime Minister Albin Kurti to shift focus from domestic criticism by asserting a firm stance against Serbian autonomy as a show of political strength. Regardless, the takeover of the water plant is likely to adversely impact ethnic Serbs in northern Kosovo, with the Serb List party warning of reduced access to drinking water. With that, ethnic Serbs are liable to stage protests in the near term, as also seen following similar closures of parallel Serb institutions in September 2024 and January 2025, with such protests posing a heightened risk of violence. Meanwhile, this is also likely to impede efforts to normalize relations between Serbia and Kosovo, particularly given that the EU has denounced the move as escalatory.

Source: [KOHA](#)

Russia: Andrey Mordvichev appointed new Commander-in-Chief of ground forces on May 15; suggests attempt to shift ground forces tactics

Current Situation - On May 15, President Vladimir Putin signed a decree dismissing General Oleg Salyukov from his position as Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Ground Forces, reassigning him as Deputy Secretary of the Russian Security Council. Colonel General Andrey Mordvichev, who played a key role in Russian operations in Mariupol in 2022 and oversaw Russia's seizure of Avdiivka in Donetsk in February 2024, has been appointed the new Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Ground Forces.

Assessments & Forecast - Salyukov's dismissal and reassignment was likely due him turning 70 on May 21, as Russian law mandates retirement at age 70 unless an exemption is granted. Nonetheless, the decision was also likely influenced by setbacks in Russian advances, with the UK Ministry of Defence reporting in April that Russia's pace of advance has decreased monthly since November 2024 when forces gained over 700 square kilometers. In contrast, Russian forces captured 143 square kilometers in March 2025. As such, Mordvichev's appointment points to a likely shift in ground tactics, with Mordvichev known to use attritional, infantry-led assaults. This will exacerbate concerns that Russia is preparing a large-scale offensive despite ongoing peace talks.

Source: [Reuters](#)

Sweden: Diplomat suspected of espionage found dead in Stockholm, as per May 16 reports; unlikely to be foul play

Current Situation - A senior Swedish diplomat was found dead in central Stockholm during the overnight hours (local time) of May 15-16. Media reports claim the diplomat is the same diplomat arrested on May 11 on suspicion of espionage by Sakerhetspolisen (Sapo), the Swedish Security Service. However, Sapo has not confirmed these reports. A police spokesperson confirmed that an investigation is underway but stated that there are no suspicious circumstances surrounding the death.

Assessments & Forecast - If the deceased is confirmed to be the arrested diplomat, that the death took place amid an active espionage investigation is likely to prompt speculation regarding possible foreign interference, particularly given that officials have pointed at Russia as a potential actor behind espionage activity. However, considering police statements, the death was likely caused by suicide or a medical condition, rather than homicide or other crime. Indeed, this is further supported by reports that the diplomat sought medical attention for injuries following his arrest, alleging excessive use of force by police. Regardless, authorities are liable to heighten oversight of diplomatic staff and increase internal security checks to prevent any additional breaches.

Source: [Aftonbladet](#)

Switzerland: Unrest by pro-Palestinian elements recorded at Eurovision 2025 in Basel on May 17; highlights risk at events involving Israel

Current Situation – On May 17, widespread unauthorized protests and unrest were recorded in Basel, denouncing Israel’s participation in the Eurovision Song Contest 2025. Incidents of unrest included pro-Palestinian demonstrators throwing glass bottles at the police, burning Israeli flags, and attempting attacks on the Israeli Eurovision representant. Police responded by firing rubber bullets and tear gas at protesters, with multiple arrests made. Previously, the Israeli National Security Council advised Israelis in Basel to avoid confrontations and keep a low profile.

Assessments & Forecast – The events in Basel indicate a heightened risk of unrest at major international events involving Israel, exacerbated by ongoing Israel-Hamas tensions and widespread protests across Europe. The unauthorized gathering of around 600 pro-Palestinian demonstrators, despite official bans, shows that such groups are often undeterred by restrictions, complicating security efforts. Direct threats and attempts to disrupt the Israeli Eurovision representative highlight significant personal security risks for individuals visibly associated with Israel. Similar incidents are likely at future sports, cultural, or public events featuring Israeli participation, especially where Israeli or Jewish symbols are displayed and anti-Israel sentiments are elevated.

Source: [Aftonbladet](#)

UK: Iranian nationals arrested for “national security offense” aimed to target journalists per May 17 reports; reflects threat to dissidents

Current Situation – On May 17, the Metropolitan Police stated that the [three Iranian nationals arrested in London on May 4 on suspicion of a “national security offense” were planning to target London-based journalists](#). Police stated that “the foreign state to which the charges relate is Iran.” The suspects carried out surveillance and reconnaissance with the intent of carrying out “serious violence” against journalists of a Persian-language media channel that produces coverage critical of Iran.

Assessments & Forecast – The target of the plot aligns with previous Iranian state-backed activity in the UK, with Iranian dissidents commonly targeted in such covert attack plans by Tehran. This was seen in the stabbing of a British-Iranian journalist in London in March 2024, and the arrest of an individual carrying out “hostile reconnaissance” against a London-based news channel critical of Tehran in February 2023. The threat is particularly high in London, as it is home to various Persian-language broadcasters, reporters, and Iranian diaspora communities. As Iran formally designated the media outlet targeted in the recent plot a “terrorist” organization, Tehran will continue to view its staff and journalists as targets of interest.

Source: [BBC](#)

UK: Second suspect linked to arson attacks on PM Starmer's properties arrested at Luton Airport (LTN) on May 17; suggests coordinated action

Current Situation - On May 17, police arrested a 26-year-old individual at Luton Airport (LTN) in connection with a series of arson attacks targeting properties and a vehicle linked to Prime Minister Keir Starmer in North London. This follows the earlier arrest of a 21-year-old Ukrainian national, who has been charged with three counts of arson with intent to endanger life.

Assessments & Forecast - The arrest of a second suspect suggests the attacks were coordinated actions involving more than one individual. The timing and location of the arrest - at an international airport - strongly indicate the suspect may have been attempting to flee the country to evade law enforcement, especially after the earlier arrest of a co-suspect. While the involvement of a Ukrainian national is notable, there is currently no evidence to support a direct link to foreign or state-sponsored activity. On the contrary, available background information indicates the Ukrainian suspect has lived in the UK, has family members fighting against Russian forces, and is described by relatives as supportive of both Ukraine and the UK, making it unlikely he was acting on behalf of Russian interests.

Source: [LBC](#)

Ukraine: Large-scale Russian airstrikes target multiple regions, including Kyiv, on May 18; airstrikes to intensify amid potential talks

Current Situation - In the overnight hours (local time) of May 18, three people were injured and one killed in large-scale Russian airstrikes targeting multiple regions, including Kyiv. As per Ukrainian military reports, 237 Russian unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were launched, predominantly targeting the Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and Donetsk regions. Damage to residential buildings and infrastructure was reported.

Assessments & Forecast - The strikes are in line with an increase in the frequency and scale of Russian strikes in recent months, with the May 18 barrage recorded as the largest UAV strike since the start of the conflict in 2022. The timing—coming just two days after the first reported direct bilateral talks between Russian and Ukrainian representatives in Istanbul on May 16—suggests a deliberate attempt by Moscow to apply pressure on Kyiv. Indeed, Ukrainian officials have described the strikes as attempting to “intimidate” Kyiv during negotiations. Given the anticipated phone calls between US President Donald Trump, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on May 19, further strikes are anticipated in the coming days as Trump increases pressure on both sides to engage diplomatically.

Source: [Reuters](#)

Other Developments

- On May 16, three individuals staged a protest on Kongens Nytorv in central Copenhagen, **Denmark**, holding banners with derogatory statements about Islam and burning a Palestinian flag. The protest, while small, underscores the presence of anti-Islam protesters in Denmark, as well as growing sentiment against the pro-Palestinian protests that began in 2023.
- As per 16 May reports, **Belgian** authorities announced a plan to seal a building illegally used as a short-term tourist rental in Brussels, citing efforts to protect local housing access. The move aligns with broader European crackdowns on unlicensed tourist accommodations, such as in Italy and Spain, amid regionwide housing crises.

Notable Dates

15 JUL	Ukraine Holiday: Day of Ukrainian Statehood
21 JUL	Belgium Holiday: National Day
1 AUG	Switzerland Holiday: National Day
2 AUG	North Macedonia: Republic Day
4 AUG	Iceland Holiday: Commerce Day
4 AUG	UK Holiday: Summer Bank Holiday