# MI6 warns Keir Starmer’s migrant return hubs risk Kremlin infiltration in the Balkans



Sir Keir Starmer's proposal for 'return hubs' aimed at processing failed asylum seekers from the UK has recently come under scrutiny, with MI6 warning that the plan could be compromised by Russian espionage. The proposal involves negotiating agreements with several nations in the Balkans and parts of Africa to relocate individuals whose asylum claims have been denied. Despite the potential benefits, experts are raising concerns over the implications of establishing such facilities in areas influenced by Russia.

The intelligence community has expressed alarm over the growing Russian presence in the Western Balkans, highlighting the region's vulnerability to Kremlin interference. According to sources, Russia possesses multiple tools for destabilisation—from cyber-attacks to disinformation campaigns—making any UK initiative in these territories fraught with risk. A senior security official noted that the proposed hubs would effectively place British interests within a zone of significant Russian influence, raising the likelihood of Kremlin involvement. Given that all six Western Balkan nations have historical ties to Russia, there is a fear that the UK could unintentionally facilitate Russian infiltration by creating these centres.

Despite these warnings, the Labour Party remains committed to pursuing agreements with nations such as Serbia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Starmer emphasised the necessity for effective migrant management, a sentiment resonating further following an embarrassing setback during a recent visit to Albania. Prime Minister Edi Rama publicly rebuffed proposals for Albania's participation in the scheme, reinforcing the challenges facing Starmer's initiative.

Notably, MI6 is particularly cautious about Serbia, where President Aleksandar Vucic has cultivated a close relationship with Vladimir Putin. Reports indicate that Serbia has become a strategic hub for Russian influence, enabling arms shipments and granting visa-free access to Russian citizens. Adding to the complexity is the fact that many Euro-American actors, including some European nations, still refuse to recognise Kosovo's independence. Consequently, the proposal to negotiate return hubs in a non-EU state raises severe legal and diplomatic hurdles for the UK government.

In the broader context of international relations, the implications of the UK's dealings in the Balkans extend beyond migration policy. Both MI6 and the CIA have expressed that the global order faces unprecedented threats reminiscent of the Cold War. With Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine and other destabilising activities across Europe, sustaining a cohesive strategy for dealing with these challenges is becoming increasingly pressing.

As rapport between Serbia and Russia strengthens, concerns about the Balkan region’s stability also rise. Kosovo's leadership, in particular, has warned against Western appeasement of Serbian strategies that bolster Moscow's influence. The emergence of Russian private military companies operating within the Balkans has only complicated matters further, indicating the extent to which Russia might leverage these dynamics to its advantage.

The UK's initiative to deport failed asylum seekers may not only be a domestic issue but also a diplomatic and security dilemma that could reverberate well beyond its borders. With ongoing discussions and potential partnerships in a complex geopolitical landscape, careful consideration of both legal and moral implications remains crucial.

In conclusion, while Sir Keir Starmer's plans for migrant return hubs aim to tackle an urgent domestic challenge, they must navigate a minefield of international security concerns, particularly the lurking threat of Russian operatives capitalising on migration strategies. The intersection of immigration policy, international relations, and national security makes any such venture perilous, demanding thorough examination and robust contingency planning from UK authorities.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14766851/Keir-Starmers-plans-return-hubs-migrants-UK-hijacked-Russian-spies-MI6-warns.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/c6bb168f-4869-4a15-99a8-23048488705b)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14766851/Keir-Starmers-plans-return-hubs-migrants-UK-hijacked-Russian-spies-MI6-warns.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2gz4re394o), [[5]](https://frontliner.uk/western-appeasement-of-serbia-risks-balkan-stability-kosovo-warns/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14766851/Keir-Starmers-plans-return-hubs-migrants-UK-hijacked-Russian-spies-MI6-warns.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/c6bb168f-4869-4a15-99a8-23048488705b), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/aug/27/balkans.warcrimes)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2gz4re394o), [[5]](https://frontliner.uk/western-appeasement-of-serbia-risks-balkan-stability-kosovo-warns/), [[4]](https://www.lbc.co.uk/news/dearlove-mi6-chief-warns-russian-sabotage-is-already-happening-europe/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14766851/Keir-Starmers-plans-return-hubs-migrants-UK-hijacked-Russian-spies-MI6-warns.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/c6bb168f-4869-4a15-99a8-23048488705b), [[7]](https://www.nationalmemo.com/russias-shadow-war-wary-europe)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://frontliner.uk/western-appeasement-of-serbia-risks-balkan-stability-kosovo-warns/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/aug/27/balkans.warcrimes)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14766851/Keir-Starmers-plans-return-hubs-migrants-UK-hijacked-Russian-spies-MI6-warns.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/c6bb168f-4869-4a15-99a8-23048488705b), [[4]](https://www.lbc.co.uk/news/dearlove-mi6-chief-warns-russian-sabotage-is-already-happening-europe/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14766851/Keir-Starmers-plans-return-hubs-migrants-UK-hijacked-Russian-spies-MI6-warns.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/c6bb168f-4869-4a15-99a8-23048488705b> - Sir Keir Starmer has confirmed that the UK is in discussions with several countries, primarily in the Western Balkans, to establish 'returns hubs' for individuals whose asylum applications have been rejected in the UK. These hubs would serve as temporary processing centres before deportation to the individuals' countries of origin. During a visit to Albania, Starmer emphasised the need for effective migrant returns, although Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama clarified that Albania would not participate in the scheme. The model differs from the Conservative Party's Rwanda plan, as it only involves those who have exhausted legal avenues in the UK. Despite rising small boat crossings in 2025, the Home Office has deported 24,000 migrants in a nine-month span—the highest since 2017. Starmer acknowledged the scheme is not a definitive solution but a component of a comprehensive strategy to manage illegal migration. The UK plans to continue detailed assessments to ensure the program is legally compliant and cost-effective. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/c6bb168f-4869-4a15-99a8-23048488705b?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2gz4re394o> - The heads of MI6 and the CIA have warned that the international world order is under threat in a way not seen since the Cold War. In a joint article, Sir Richard Moore and William Burns highlighted the challenges posed by Russia's actions, including the war in Ukraine and a 'reckless campaign of sabotage' across Europe. They also noted the resurgent threat from the Islamic State and the geopolitical challenge posed by China. The intelligence chiefs emphasised the need for cooperation between the UK and the US to address these threats and maintain global peace and security. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2gz4re394o?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.lbc.co.uk/news/dearlove-mi6-chief-warns-russian-sabotage-is-already-happening-europe/> - Former MI6 chief Sir Richard Dearlove has warned that Russia is already engaging in 'grey conflict' across mainland Europe, including the UK. He explained that this involves activities such as cutting cables and causing engineered breakdowns that could affect national infrastructure. Dearlove emphasised that Russian military intelligence has the capability and skill to carry out these acts, and that the UK should be prepared for potential disruptions in daily life. ([lbc.co.uk](https://www.lbc.co.uk/news/dearlove-mi6-chief-warns-russian-sabotage-is-already-happening-europe/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://frontliner.uk/western-appeasement-of-serbia-risks-balkan-stability-kosovo-warns/> - Kosovo has warned that Western appeasement of Serbia risks destabilising the Balkans. The article highlights Serbia's deepening ties with Russia, including hosting a Russian private military company (PMC) Wagner Recruitment Cultural Centre in Belgrade, which facilitates the recruitment of young Serbs to fight alongside Russian forces in Ukraine. Serbia's policies actively support Russia's war machine through the purchase of Russian, Chinese, and Iranian weapons, while simultaneously allowing Russia to use Serbia as a hub for espionage in Europe. Kosovo's Prime Minister Albin Kurti stated that Kosovo plans to exercise full sovereignty over its own affairs and will resist Western pressure to compromise with Serbia's illegal activities. ([frontliner.uk](https://frontliner.uk/western-appeasement-of-serbia-risks-balkan-stability-kosovo-warns/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/aug/27/balkans.warcrimes> - The article discusses allegations that MI6 was involved in a Balkan spy plot, as reported by a Croatian magazine. The magazine claimed that MI6 pressured the Croatian prime minister to allow British intelligence to eavesdrop on individuals believed to be in contact with a Croatian war crimes suspect. The British government declined to comment on intelligence matters. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/aug/27/balkans.warcrimes?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.nationalmemo.com/russias-shadow-war-wary-europe> - The article discusses Russia's covert operations in Europe, including the attempted coup in Montenegro. Russian agents stirred up protests against NATO and funded demonstrations. Montenegro prosecutors charged that two Russian spies and two Serbian nationalists plotted to assassinate the prime minister, storm Parliament, and install an anti-NATO government. Western officials have obtained information confirming Montenegro's charges that Russian spies attempted the overthrow of a European government. ([nationalmemo.com](https://www.nationalmemo.com/russias-shadow-war-wary-europe?utm_source=openai))