# UK court convicts Wagner Group-linked men for arson targeting Ukraine aid warehouse



Late in the evening of March 2024, a warehouse in east London storing supplies bound for Ukraine was deliberately set ablaze, triggering a swift emergency evacuation and mobilizing more than 60 firefighters. The warehouse housed critical equipment such as StarLink satellite devices, vital for Ukraine’s military communications. The fire caused approximately £1 million in damage and narrowly avoided causing injuries to residents nearby. British authorities have since revealed the arson was a calculated act orchestrated by operatives linked to Russia’s Wagner Group, a mercenary force under the control of Moscow’s Defense Ministry, as part of a broader sabotage campaign directed by Russian military intelligence.

In a significant court case, three men—Jakeem Rose, Ugnius Asmena, and Nii Mensah—were found guilty of aggravated arson connected to the London attack. Two other men, including Dylan Earl, who admitted to organizing the arson, had previously pleaded guilty to offenses that fall under the UK’s recently enacted National Security Act, which targets hostile foreign state activities. Several other accused individuals faced related charges, with some acquitted and others convicted on separate counts, including withholding information about plans for further attacks. The case marks a notable use of the National Security Act and spotlights how foreign intelligence entities are increasingly recruiting UK-based individuals through encrypted messaging platforms like Telegram.

The investigation revealed a chilling recruitment process orchestrated through Telegram channels associated with the Wagner Group. Dylan Earl, a 21-year-old British national, was contacted and instructed by a suspected Russian intelligence operative using the handle “Privet Bot.” Their communications—often conducted in Russian and translated via Google—ranged from ominous to almost complacent, with Earl boasting unverified connections to various paramilitary and criminal groups. The orchestrators deliberately targeted Earl due to his perceived qualities, grooming him as a “dagger in Europe.” The recruitment strategy relies heavily on young, often inexperienced individuals from diverse backgrounds, including Ukrainians and other foreigners. According to European intelligence officials, the operational shift towards using untrained proxies became necessary after the backlash against Russian espionage activities following the high-profile Skripal poisoning case in the UK in 2018.

This attack is one incident within a growing pattern of Russia-linked sabotage across Europe since Moscow’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Intelligence sources report more than 70 such incidents, with a worrying escalation in method and violence—from initial acts of vandalism to a rising number of arson attacks, planned bombings, and assassination attempts. Last year alone saw 12 major sabotage efforts compared to just two the year before, indicating an intensifying campaign. Several plots have targeted civilian infrastructure and businesses connected to Ukraine’s war effort, such as attempts to ignite fires in shopping centers across Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania, and an explosive device planted in a store near Vilnius. These operations risk severe casualties and wreak havoc beyond their immediate targets.

The use of Telegram and other encrypted social networks allows Russian intelligence to maintain a deniable and flexible approach. While there is centralized control over target selection and operational directives, handlers sometimes lose grip on their proxies, leading to unintended consequences and increased dangers. This phenomenon was evident in the London warehouse fire, where the recruiter later reprimanded Earl for acting prematurely without approval, warning that payment for the arson would be withheld. Nevertheless, the recruiter vowed to continue sharpening Earl’s skills for more serious sabotage missions.

The Kremlin has consistently denied allegations of involvement in these sabotage campaigns, with spokesperson Dmitry Peskov asserting no solid proof has been presented to support such claims. However, Western intelligence agencies remain concerned about the escalation and complexity of these covert operations. For instance, Germany recently averted a potential disaster when a parcel intended for an aircraft’s cargo hold caught fire in a logistics center, an act believed connected to Russian sabotage efforts. European intelligence leaders warn that these covert actions form part of a wider effort to destabilize NATO countries and disrupt their support for Ukraine.

The London attack case underscores the evolving nature of Russian covert warfare—leveraging technology, social media, and vulnerable recruits to wage a shadow campaign on European soil. As investigations continue and legal proceedings proceed, authorities highlight the necessity of vigilant counterintelligence and the implementation of robust national security laws to address this multifaceted threat. Sentencing in the London arson case is scheduled for the autumn, with broader trials relating to related conspiracies expected to unfold in the coming months.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ukraine-moscow-kremlin-british-london-b2785287.html), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/13ee37cf869139839f0d4a3ebe7bd80d), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/a00f7429e0688731ff1718d2c3bb855f), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/0adfde4c-2fd6-4d10-b8ea-94ff3dd35b32), [[6]](https://apnews.com/article/0d7a1ec6ab4add8056fd5c5cd20efffc)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ukraine-moscow-kremlin-british-london-b2785287.html), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/a00f7429e0688731ff1718d2c3bb855f), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/0adfde4c-2fd6-4d10-b8ea-94ff3dd35b32), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/man-admits-arson-attack-ukraine-linked-business-london-2024-10-25/), [[6]](https://apnews.com/article/0d7a1ec6ab4add8056fd5c5cd20efffc)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ukraine-moscow-kremlin-british-london-b2785287.html), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/0adfde4c-2fd6-4d10-b8ea-94ff3dd35b32)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ukraine-moscow-kremlin-british-london-b2785287.html), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/a00f7429e0688731ff1718d2c3bb855f)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ukraine-moscow-kremlin-british-london-b2785287.html), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/a00f7429e0688731ff1718d2c3bb855f)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ukraine-moscow-kremlin-british-london-b2785287.html), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/a00f7429e0688731ff1718d2c3bb855f), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/0adfde4c-2fd6-4d10-b8ea-94ff3dd35b32), [[6]](https://apnews.com/article/0d7a1ec6ab4add8056fd5c5cd20efffc)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ukraine-moscow-kremlin-british-london-b2785287.html), [[7]](https://www.ft.com/content/b83353a7-bdf0-486b-8f12-d2834261d44f)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ukraine-moscow-kremlin-british-london-b2785287.html), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/a00f7429e0688731ff1718d2c3bb855f), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/0adfde4c-2fd6-4d10-b8ea-94ff3dd35b32), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/man-admits-arson-attack-ukraine-linked-business-london-2024-10-25/), [[6]](https://apnews.com/article/0d7a1ec6ab4add8056fd5c5cd20efffc)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ukraine-moscow-kremlin-british-london-b2785287.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/13ee37cf869139839f0d4a3ebe7bd80d> - A British court convicted three men of arson in a March 2024 attack on a London warehouse storing aid for Ukraine. The plot was allegedly orchestrated by Russia’s Wagner Group, acting on behalf of Russian military intelligence. The arson caused approximately £1 million in damage and is part of a broader campaign of disruption across Europe attributed to Moscow and its proxies. Two other men had previously pleaded guilty to orchestrating the attack for Wagner and to offenses under the UK’s National Security Act 2023. Sentencing is scheduled for the fall.
3. <https://apnews.com/article/a00f7429e0688731ff1718d2c3bb855f> - A UK jury convicted three men—Jakeem Rose, Ugnius Asmena, and Nii Mensah—of aggravated arson in connection with a March 2024 attack on a warehouse in east London that stored supplies for Ukraine, including generators and StarLink satellite equipment. Authorities say the attack was orchestrated by agents of Russia’s Wagner mercenary group, acting on behalf of Russian military intelligence. The arson caused approximately £1 million ($1.35 million) in damage and is seen as part of a broader campaign of disruption across Europe attributed to Moscow and its proxies. Two other men, Dylan Earl and Jake Reeves, had already pleaded guilty to orchestrating the attack for Wagner and to offenses under the UK’s National Security Act 2023. Paul English, 61, was acquitted, claiming ignorance of the arson plot. Ashton Evans was found guilty of withholding information on a related plot, while another accused, Dmitrijus Paulauskas, was acquitted of all charges. The case is notable for being the first to include charges under the UK’s newly implemented National Security Act. Sentencing is scheduled for the fall.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/0adfde4c-2fd6-4d10-b8ea-94ff3dd35b32> - Three men—Nii Kojo Mensah, Jakeem Rose, and Ugnius Asmena—have been found guilty of aggravated arson for a March 2024 attack on a warehouse in east London, which prosecutors linked to Russia's Wagner paramilitary group. The warehouse belonged to Oddisey, a company aiding Ukraine with humanitarian supplies and Starlink technology. The attack was allegedly orchestrated via Russian-linked Telegram forums. British national Dylan Earl, who previously pleaded guilty to violating the UK’s National Security Act, was accused of coordinating the plot online with a suspected Wagner recruiter known as Privet Bot. Ashton Evans was convicted on a separate count related to an unrealized attack on Russian dissident Evgeny Chichvarkin's Mayfair businesses. Another participant, Jake Reeves, admitted to receiving funds from a foreign intelligence service. Prosecutors emphasized the arson was a targeted act carried out on behalf of Wagner, a group banned in the UK as a terrorist organization. Some defendants were acquitted, including Paul English and Dmitrijus Paulauskas on certain charges. The case highlights the increasing use of social networks like Telegram by foreign entities to recruit UK residents for sabotage operations.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/man-admits-arson-attack-ukraine-linked-business-london-2024-10-25/> - Dylan Earl, 20, pleaded guilty to aggravated arson targeting a Ukraine-associated business in London and an offence under the National Security Act aimed at addressing foreign state-hostile activity. The arson occurred in March on property owned by an unidentified 'Mr X' in east London. The UK Crown Prosecution Service alleged Earl's actions were intended to benefit Russia, reflecting current hostile UK-Russia relations influenced by Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Alongside Earl, several other individuals face charges linked to the incident; three men have denied the arson charges, two have not entered pleas, and one denied failing to disclose knowledge of terrorist acts. A related trial will commence in June of the next year.
6. <https://apnews.com/article/0d7a1ec6ab4add8056fd5c5cd20efffc> - The trial of six men accused of arson at an east London business with ties to Ukraine's war effort has begun at the Old Bailey. The prosecution alleges that the March 20, 2024, fire was orchestrated by Russia’s Wagner Group, a designated terrorist organization by the UK. The defendants—Jakeem Rose, Ugnius Asmena, Nii Mensah, Paul English, Ashton Evans, and Dmitrijus Paulauskas—face charges ranging from committing arson to withholding information about planned terrorist attacks. The targeted business in Leyton supplied StarLink satellite equipment to Ukraine and sustained damage worth £1 million ($1.35 million). Prosecutors also revealed plans to attack two more Mayfair businesses owned by a Russian dissident supporting Ukraine. The attack was orchestrated by Dylan Earl and Jake Reeves, who have already admitted to the crime. Earl is said to have contacted Wagner via Telegram and was the first person charged under the UK’s National Security Act 2023. According to the prosecution, some attackers were motivated by financial gain, while others may have had political or ideological reasons. Jurors will review extensive evidence including CCTV, mobile footage, and digital records.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/b83353a7-bdf0-486b-8f12-d2834261d44f> - Germany averted a potential plane crash due to a suspected act of sabotage when a parcel destined for an aircraft's hold caught fire before the flight, according to Thomas Haldenwang, head of Germany's domestic intelligence service. This incident occurred at a DHL logistics center in Leipzig and is believed to be connected to Russian agents. Haldenwang and other German spy chiefs warned of increasing aggressive activities by Russian intelligence services, including espionage and sabotage targeting Germany's military and arms supplies to Ukraine. Western intelligence agencies have raised similar alarms regarding Russian efforts to destabilize European countries, with incidents ranging from arson attacks to assassination plots. This escalation in covert actions by Russia underscores rising tensions between NATO and Russia, further intensified by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.