# Homeless man admits presence at warehouse arson linked to Wagner Group but denies terrorist intent



A homeless man has admitted to being present at the scene of a significant arson attack on a warehouse in Leyton, east London, but told jurors he was unaware of the fire’s connection to “Russian terrorism” at the time. The Old Bailey heard that the blaze, which caused around £1 million in damage, targeted a building used by a company sending humanitarian aid and StarLink satellite equipment to Ukraine in support of the war effort.

The attack, which took place on March 20 last year, was allegedly orchestrated by Dylan Earl, 20, and Jake Reeves, 23, who have both admitted aggravated arson on behalf of the Wagner Group, a private Russian mercenary unit designated as a terrorist organisation by the UK government, as well as offences under the National Security Act. Jurors were told that Earl and Reeves recruited a group of men to carry out the fire as part of a series of planned missions for the Wagner Group.

Among those accused are Paul English, 61, who allegedly drove a Kia Picanto to the warehouse with Jakeem Rose, 23, Nii Mensah, 23, and Ugnius Asmena, 20. Mensah and Rose were captured on CCTV and livestreamed video setting the warehouse ablaze before fleeing the scene, according to the prosecution. Asmena, who has no fixed address and described himself as sofa surfing, gave evidence stating that he only discovered the fire’s connection to Russian terrorism weeks later after researching online. He claimed he had been offered £500 in cash to accompany English but insisted he did not know the full extent of what was planned, having been told only to open car doors silently and not speak afterwards.

During the trial, Asmena admitted to lying in his first police interview, denying he was at the scene and claiming he was with his mother. He explained to the court that he became scared upon realising the fire was linked to national security and terrorist groups, which made him fearful of admitting involvement. However, under cross-examination, he denied playing any part in recruiting English or handing over money, and claimed he believed those involved might have been planning to steal a car when they filled a jerry can at a petrol station en route to Leyton.

The trial also involves other accused individuals, including Ashton Evans, 20, and Dmirjus Paulauskas, 23, charged with withholding information about terrorist activities, which they deny. Earl and Reeves have also admitted to conspiracy to set fire to two other London businesses in Mayfair linked to a Russian dissident supporting Ukraine, and a plot to kidnap their owner on behalf of the Wagner Group.

The attack on the Leyton warehouse attracted significant attention given the role of the targeted business in supplying StarLink satellite equipment to Ukraine. StarLink, owned by Elon Musk’s SpaceX, has been declared the communications backbone for the Ukrainian military, providing vital internet coverage especially where traditional infrastructure is compromised amid the war. Musk has highlighted the importance of StarLink in sustaining the frontline, while Ukrainian authorities have stated concerns that Russian forces have also been using StarLink terminals in occupied regions of Ukraine, complicating the conflict and raising questions about technology use and control in warfare.

Prosecutors allege that the conspirators were motivated by a mixture of financial gain and ideological reasons, with the arson part of broader Russian efforts to destabilise UK support for Ukraine. The extensive case evidence includes CCTV footage, mobile phone records, and digital communications, underpinning the prosecution's claims of a coordinated terrorist campaign.

The Old Bailey trial continues as the court examines the full scope of the alleged plots and the individuals’ roles in what is described as an unprecedented attack linked to the Wagner Group on British soil.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/wagner-group-arson-accused-scared-by-news-of-russian-terrorism-court-told-OJ7ZPDO4AVN6HFK26B2MD5YZ4A/), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/0d7a1ec6ab4add8056fd5c5cd20efffc)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/wagner-group-arson-accused-scared-by-news-of-russian-terrorism-court-told-OJ7ZPDO4AVN6HFK26B2MD5YZ4A/), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/0d7a1ec6ab4add8056fd5c5cd20efffc), [[4]](https://www.dw.com/en/uk-man-charged-with-russia-backed-arson-attack-in-london/a-68931167)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/wagner-group-arson-accused-scared-by-news-of-russian-terrorism-court-told-OJ7ZPDO4AVN6HFK26B2MD5YZ4A/), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/0d7a1ec6ab4add8056fd5c5cd20efffc)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/wagner-group-arson-accused-scared-by-news-of-russian-terrorism-court-told-OJ7ZPDO4AVN6HFK26B2MD5YZ4A/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/wagner-group-arson-accused-scared-by-news-of-russian-terrorism-court-told-OJ7ZPDO4AVN6HFK26B2MD5YZ4A/), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/0d7a1ec6ab4add8056fd5c5cd20efffc)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://alethonews.com/2025/03/09/), [[7]](https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-starlink-musk/32814348.html)
* Paragraph 7 – [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/0d7a1ec6ab4add8056fd5c5cd20efffc), [[5]](https://kyivindependent.com/two-more-men-charged-over-alleged-wagner-linked-arson-attack-on-ukrainian-business-in-london/), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/06dec3cafa7be7293f481f160806ee2f), [[4]](https://www.dw.com/en/uk-man-charged-with-russia-backed-arson-attack-in-london/a-68931167)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/wagner-group-arson-accused-scared-by-news-of-russian-terrorism-court-told-OJ7ZPDO4AVN6HFK26B2MD5YZ4A/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <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 for attacks on two other Mayfair businesses owned by a Russian dissident supporting Ukraine. The attack was orchestrated by Dylan Earl, 20, and Jake Reeves, 23, 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.
3. <https://apnews.com/article/06dec3cafa7be7293f481f160806ee2f> - A British man accused of plotting to torch a London business connected to Ukraine has been charged with conducting hostile activity to benefit Russia, prosecutors said Friday. Dylan Earl, 20, is connected to Russia's Wagner mercenary group, which the U.K. government has declared a banned ... Earl is accused of fraud, carrying ... . "Included in the alleged activity was ... ," said Nick Price, head of ... . He allegedly planned and paid others to ... "Mr X" in the court charges. Earl is the first person to be ... NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ... "remain vigilant regarding covert Russian activities ... ."
4. <https://www.dw.com/en/uk-man-charged-with-russia-backed-arson-attack-in-london/a-68931167> - A 20-year-old British man is accused of organizing an arson attack on a ... London in March 2024 for the benefit of Russia, the Crown Prosecution Service reported on Friday. Dylan E., from Leicestershire in central England, is accused of organizing and conducting an arson attack on two units at an industrial park in Leyton, east London, on March 20. The fire required 60 firefighters to extinguish. Court documents allege the suspect was working on behalf of the Wagner Group, a private Russian mercenary unit. He is accused of recruiting and paying others to carry out an arson attack. Four other suspects have also been charged with aggravated arson in connection with the attack. One of the accused was charged with accepting material from an unspecified foreign intelligence service. All five suspects are to appear at the Central Criminal Court — known as the Old Bailey — in London on May 10.
5. <https://kyivindependent.com/two-more-men-charged-over-alleged-wagner-linked-arson-attack-on-ukrainian-business-in-london/> - Two more men have been charged in connection with an alleged arson attack on a Ukrainian ... business in London, reportedly orchestrated by Russia's Wagner Group. The attack, which occurred on March 20, 202 ... , targeted a warehouse in Leyton, east London, that supplied humanitarian aid and StarLink satellite equipment to Ukraine ... The fire caused approximately £1 million in damage. The two men, Ashton Evans, 20, ... , face charges related to failing to disclose information about terrorist ... . The main suspects, Dylan Earl, 20, ... have already admitted to the crime. The case highlights the increasing concerns over Russian interference in the UK and the use of Wagner Group operatives for such activities.
6. <https://alethonews.com/2025/03/09/> - Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, has stated that the Ukrainian military is fully dependent on the Starlink internet system, describing it as the "backbone of the Ukrainian army." He claimed that turning off the system would result in the collapse of the entire frontline. Musk's comments underscore the critical role of Starlink in Ukraine's military communications amid the ongoing conflict with Russia. The system has been instrumental in providing reliable internet access for Ukrainian forces, especially in areas where traditional communication infrastructure has been compromised. Musk's remarks also highlight the geopolitical implications of satellite internet services in conflict zones.
7. <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-starlink-musk/32814348.html> - Ukrainian authorities have alleged that Russian forces are using Elon Musk's Starlink satellite internet system in occupied territories of Ukraine. The Ukrainian military claims that Russian troops have deployed Starlink terminals to enhance their communications and operations in these regions. This development raises concerns about the potential violation of U.S. sanctions, as Starlink services are intended to support Ukraine's military efforts against Russian aggression. The situation underscores the complex dynamics of modern warfare, where control over communication infrastructure can significantly influence military capabilities and strategies.