# MI6 warns Starmer’s return hubs plan may expose UK to Russian interference in the Balkans



Sir Keir Starmer's misguided proposal to establish 'return hubs' for migrants whose asylum claims have been denied is coming under serious scrutiny, particularly with alarming warnings from the intelligence community regarding potential Russian interference. Reports indicate that MI6 has raised concerns that this initiative, which aims to create processing centres in the Western Balkans and select African nations, could become a prime target for Kremlin agents eager to exploit the UK's vulnerabilities.

Starmer's vision of partnering with several Balkan countries, including Serbia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, appears to lack foresight and practical understanding of Britain's strategic interests. Straying from the controversial Conservative government's Rwanda plan, his approach focuses on those who have exhausted all legal avenues for asylum in the UK. However, during a recent visit to Albania, Starmer faced a public rejection from Prime Minister Edi Rama, highlighting the considerable diplomatic hurdles that jeopardize this initiative.

The intelligence community's warnings extend beyond logistics; they reflect a concerning reality that establishing these hubs could inadvertently embed British interests in regions acutely susceptible to Russian influence. “You’d be planting a prime bit of British interest, British real estate, right into an area where Russia has the ability to control and influence much more than elsewhere in the world,” noted a senior security source. This anxiety underscores the danger of permitting hostile influences to gain a foothold within our own plans to manage migration.

The rising Russian presence in the Western Balkans is a troubling backdrop. Once part of communist Yugoslavia, these countries are increasingly vulnerable to Kremlin manipulation. Serbia remains particularly worrisome due to its deep ties with Russia, and President Aleksandar Vucic’s frequent visits to Moscow only serve to strengthen this bond. MI6 has expressed alarm over Serbia’s provision of visa-free entry to Russian citizens, further complicating the geopolitical landscape.

Despite this precarious situation, discussions about establishing return hubs press on, with Kosovo displaying a willingness to consider the proposal. Yet, the legal implications complicate these prospects; Kosovo’s status as a non-signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights and its limited recognition among European nations presents a minefield of diplomatic and legal challenges.

As Starmer continues to champion these plans, the implications of engaging with nations steeped in Russian ties pose serious risks to the integrity of UK national interests. The backdrop of growing Russian activities only heightens the stakes, complicating the already intricate dialogue surrounding migration policy amid a tense geopolitical climate. Securing the UK's influence and safeguarding its security on the European stage must take precedence over the current administration’s faltering migration strategies.

In a parallel context, intelligence agencies in both the UK and the US have voiced alarm at the broader "reckless campaign of sabotage" being waged by Russia across Europe, marking a return to an era of intensified threats reminiscent of the Cold War. As analysts and policymakers grapple with these multifaceted challenges, it will be crucial to develop a cohesive strategy that not only manages migration but also fortifies the UK's standing in an increasingly precarious geopolitical environment.

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

## 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://news.sky.com/story/mi6-and-cia-warn-of-reckless-campaign-of-sabotage-across-europe-being-waged-by-russia-13210838> - MI6 and the CIA have jointly warned of a 'reckless campaign of sabotage' being waged by Russia across Europe. In their first-ever joint remarks, Sir Richard Moore and Bill Burns highlighted the unprecedented array of threats facing the UK and the US, stating that the entire world order is under the most serious strain since the Cold War. They pointed to Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine and described China as 'the principal intelligence and geopolitical challenge of the 21st century'. The intelligence chiefs also revealed that MI6 and the CIA are working tirelessly to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza. ([news.sky.com](https://news.sky.com/story/mi6-and-cia-warn-of-reckless-campaign-of-sabotage-across-europe-being-waged-by-russia-13210838?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/08/britain-faces-fundamental-threat-sovereignty-russian-meddling/> - Alex Younger, the head of MI6, has warned that cyber attacks and attempts to subvert democracy by states like Russia pose a fundamental threat to British sovereignty. In his first major public speech as head of the Secret Intelligence Service, Younger criticised the Kremlin for creating a human tragedy in Syria and highlighted the threat to the UK from high-tech subversion by Moscow. He emphasised that the risks are profound and represent a fundamental threat to sovereignty, which should concern all those who share democratic values. ([telegraph.co.uk](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/08/britain-faces-fundamental-threat-sovereignty-russian-meddling/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2004/10/balk-o27.html> - The book 'Requiem for a State Secret', published in February 2004 by Zoran Mijatovic, former deputy head of the Serbian intelligence agency DB, alleged that Monckton was Britain’s leading agent in the Balkans. Mijatovic, who retired soon after Milosevic’s downfall, blamed Monckton and MI6 for interfering in the restructuring of the DB and lobbying against his reappointment. Monckton’s name did not reach a wider audience until the Belgrade newspaper Nedeljni Telegraf disclosed it in an article on August 11, 2004. In the article, Serbian intelligence officials criticised Monckton for being inept or interfering, citing examples such as his inquiries into the assassination of Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic, spying for Ashdown in Bosnia, not warning about the pogrom against Serbs in Kosovo in March 2004, and blackmailing Milo Djukanovic, the prime minister of Montenegro, to persuade him to back down on his demands for independence from Serbia. ([wsws.org](https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2004/10/balk-o27.html?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_Montenegrin_coup_attempt_allegations> - In October 2016, a coup d'état was allegedly planned in Montenegro on the day of the parliamentary election. The plot was believed to be designed as a last-ditch attempt by the Montenegrin pro-Serbian and pro-Russian opposition to prevent Montenegro's accession to NATO, a move stridently opposed by Russia's government. In 2019, the Higher Court found the accused guilty of plotting to commit 'terrorist acts' and to 'undermine the constitutional order of Montenegro', sentencing 13 people. However, in February 2021, the appellate court annulled the first instance verdict on all counts of the indictment, and the acquittals were upheld on appeal in July 2024. ([en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_Montenegrin_coup_attempt_allegations?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/19/uk-government-registration-scheme-foreign-spies-boris-johnson> - The former head of MI6, Sir John Sawers, has stated that only 10% of Russian spy operations in Europe are uncovered. He praised the Czech authorities for identifying the prime suspects behind a 2014 explosion at a munitions dump containing arms bound for Ukraine, but expressed concern that many other plots had gone undetected. Sawers highlighted the extent of Russian aggressive intelligence activities across Europe, noting that the intelligence services probably only know 10% of what they are doing. He also mentioned that there is a great deal that intelligence services do that the public is simply not aware of. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/19/uk-government-registration-scheme-foreign-spies-boris-johnson?utm_source=openai))