# UK uncovers vast espionage ring led by Wirecard fugitive targeting journalists and diplomats



Using an array of covert technologies and elaborate schemes, a UK-based espionage group orchestrated a sophisticated surveillance operation that has now come to light as one of the largest spying investigations undertaken by British counterterrorism services. This elaborate ring, primarily composed of five Bulgarian nationals, was directed by Jan Marsalek, the former chief operating officer of Wirecard, who is currently a fugitive believed to be hiding in Russia.

The details of the operation are both astonishing and alarming. Over three years, from 2020 to 2023, this group meticulously gathered intelligence on various targets, including investigative journalists, Russian dissidents, and even diplomats. Commander Dominic Murphy from the Metropolitan Police described the scale of this operation as “unbelievable,” noting the seizure of an extensive collection of equipment: 33 audio devices, 55 visual recording gadgets, 221 mobile phones, 495 SIM cards, and several drones, among other items. Such tools included advanced spy gear, like hidden cameras inside everyday objects—a Minion toy encasing a camera, for instance—and two neckties designed specifically for surveillance purposes, reminiscent of the spy fiction genre.

The ringleader, Orlin Roussev, demonstrated technical prowess, mastering the art of forgery and hacking, which facilitated the group's activities. He boasted to Marsalek about being akin to the fictional character “Q” from the James Bond series, claiming he had transformed his home into what he described as an “Indiana Jones warehouse.” Roussev now faces a sentence of 10 years and eight months, while his accomplices received varying prison terms for their participation in the elaborate espionage schemes.

The operations spanned not just the UK but also extended across Europe, highlighting a disturbing trend in modern espionage where state-sponsored activities are increasingly outsourced to individuals lacking formal affiliations. This espionage network was primarily motivated by financial gain rather than ideological allegiance, a significant revelation indicating the ongoing complexities of contemporary espionage tactics. Prosecutors noted that communications between Roussev and Marsalek revealed plans to intercept signals at a U.S. military base in Germany, underlining the severity of the threat posed.

One particularly notable undertaking involved the targeting of Christo Grozev, a prominent journalist with connections to high-profile investigations into Russian state actions, including the 2018 Salisbury incident. Additionally, the group aimed to monitor a U.S. airbase where Ukrainian soldiers were being trained, thus directly implicating the spies in a broader geopolitical conflict. Allegedly, the group’s strategic approach included the deployment of “honey traps” to gather intelligence, employing interpersonal relationships as a tool for surveillance and infiltration.

Recent court proceedings highlighted the chilling nature of their tactics. Prosecutor Alison Morgan KC elaborated on the risky methodologies employed, underscoring that, while no physical harm had been reported, the espionage represented a grave threat to UK national security. The court also revealed plans that involved staging protests outside the Kazakh embassy to manipulate intelligence-sharing with Kazakhstan, further illustrating the lengths to which the group was willing to go to curry favour with foreign authorities.

In light of these events, officials in the UK emphasised the urgent need for vigilance regarding foreign espionage activities. The Met Police reported that about 20% of their counterterrorism efforts are now directed at tackling threats from states like Russia and Iran, reflecting a significant shift in the security landscape. The implications are vast, resonating throughout both the realms of national security and the broader geopolitical environment.

As the dust settles following this extensive investigation, the legacy of the espionage ring serves as a stark reminder of the complexities faced by intelligence agencies in addressing modern threats, especially as states increasingly rely on non-national actors to undertake clandestine operations.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/bulgarian-spies-russia-threat-spyware-b2749286.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-spy-ring-leader-jailed-uk-nearly-11-years-2025-05-12/> - Orlin Roussev, leader of a UK-based Russian spy ring, was sentenced to 10 years and eight months in prison for espionage. Operating under the direction of Wirecard fugitive Jan Marsalek, Roussev directed a group of six Bulgarian nationals engaged in espionage for Russia. The group collected surveillance on journalists, dissidents, and Ukrainian soldiers being trained at a U.S. base in Germany. Roussev and two others pleaded guilty, while three others were convicted in March. Roussev’s deputy, Bizer Dzhambazov, received 10 years and two months; Katrin Ivanova was sentenced to nine years and eight months; Vanya Gaberova to eight years minus time served; Tihomir Ivanchev to eight years; and Ivan Stoyanov to six years and four months. Authorities stated the group was not directly employed by Russian intelligence and operated largely for financial gain. Prosecutors described their actions as an industrial-scale threat to British national security. Communications between Roussev and Marsalek revealed extensive plans, including intercepting signals at a U.S. military base and humorous references to prior Russian operations in the UK. Marsalek, believed to be in Russia, remains at large. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-spy-ring-leader-jailed-uk-nearly-11-years-2025-05-12/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://apnews.com/article/a54930d91023a9f29f793a9908c2b541> - Six Bulgarian nationals have been sentenced in the UK for conducting espionage operations for Russia, receiving prison terms of up to nearly 11 years. The group, using Hollywood-inspired code names, plotted operations across the UK and Europe from 2020 to 2023, targeting journalists, diplomats, and military personnel. Though no physical harm occurred, prosecutors emphasized the serious threat posed. Ringleader Orlin Roussev, sentenced to 10 years and 8 months, worked for fugitive Jan Marsalek, an alleged Russian agent linked to the Wirecard scandal. Co-defendant Biser Dzhambazov, Roussev’s lieutenant, received 10 years and 2 months. The group used covert spy equipment and plotted schemes including "honeytraps" and even kidnapping. Christo Grozev, a targeted journalist, shared the destabilizing impact of being monitored. The court viewed their actions as grave threats to national security. Other group members received sentences between 5 and nearly 10 years. Romantic entanglements and manipulation within the group further complicated the case, though the judge maintained their culpability. All six face deportation after serving their sentences. UK officials underscored the ruling as a strong message against hostile espionage operations on British soil. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/a54930d91023a9f29f793a9908c2b541?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/65c17f2f-64ad-42f3-b035-fef3f22c6bda> - Orlin Roussev, a Bulgarian national and leader of a Russia-backed spy ring in the UK, has been sentenced to 10 years and eight months in prison for espionage. Operating under the direction of Wirecard fugitive Jan Marsalek, Roussev was found guilty of gathering intelligence for Russia, including tracking individuals deemed adversaries by Moscow, posing serious threats to their safety. The spy ring, active between 2020 and 2023 across multiple European countries, also surveilled journalists and Russian dissidents and planned to monitor Ukrainian soldiers. Roussev’s close associate Biser Dzhambazov received a 10-year sentence, and other members were jailed for five to nearly ten years. All were Bulgarian nationals residing in the UK and face deportation after serving time. Marsalek, believed to reside in Russia, orchestrated tasks for the group through encrypted messages, including espionage and weapons procurement for the Ukraine war. The court heard how Roussev equipped his home for spy activity, amassing a trove of surveillance gear. While some members claimed they were deceived about their activities, Roussev denied any ideological allegiance, asserting financial motivation. The case exemplifies the emerging trend of states outsourcing espionage to non-nationals, reflecting modern espionage’s evolving methods. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/65c17f2f-64ad-42f3-b035-fef3f22c6bda?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://apnews.com/article/10f42e45bde7d8f15a3c07c6a6540f39> - Six Bulgarian nationals are facing sentencing in London's Central Criminal Court after being convicted of conducting espionage for Russia across Europe. Ringleader Orlin Roussev and his accomplices used elaborate codenames such as “Jackie Chan” and “Mad Max” to mask their sophisticated intelligence-gathering network. Their operations, active between 2020 and 2023, spanned the UK, Austria, Spain, and Montenegro, and targeted journalists, diplomats, and Ukrainian troops. Roussev and associates Orlin Dzhambazov and Ivan Stoyanov pleaded guilty to espionage and use of false identity documents, while Katrin Ivanova, Vanya Gaberova, and Tihomir Ivanchev were convicted in March. Prosecutors highlighted the group's intent to kidnap or eliminate Kremlin critics and noted their surveillance of a U.S. airbase in Germany. Their spy gear, found at Roussev’s residence, included hidden cameras, jamming devices, and trackers concealed in everyday items. The group was linked to Jan Marsalek, a fugitive wanted for financial crimes. A failed “honeytrap” plot to ensnare a Bulgarian journalist and a plan targeting Bellingcat’s Christo Grozev further underlined their threat. The sentencing could result in up to 14 years of imprisonment for their roles in what authorities have called “industrial-scale espionage.” ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/10f42e45bde7d8f15a3c07c6a6540f39?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/17c95018-436d-43c8-8ee6-d3b05ef11521> - At a London court hearing, it was revealed that Orlin Roussev, a Bulgarian spy and leader of a UK-based espionage group working for Russia, helped fugitive former Wirecard executive Jan Marsalek plan an airlift from Kabul for the CIA in 2021. This mission aimed to evacuate over 200 personnel from Afghanistan during the chaotic NATO withdrawal. Roussev’s legal team claimed he should be credited for this operation, arguing it was a humanitarian act. However, prosecutors disputed this, insisting the operation was financially motivated and had no official connection to the U.S. government. The court also reviewed Telegram messages between Marsalek and Roussev, indicating their involvement in multiple covert and illicit ventures, including arms and diamond trades in Africa, plans to rival Elon Musk's Starlink with Chinese partners, and efforts to support Russia's military using drone technology. The messages, found during a 2023 raid on Roussev’s UK home, also shed light on Marsalek’s life in exile in Russia, including his espionage for Russian intelligence, language studies, and cosmetic surgeries to alter his appearance. All six members of the spy ring, including Roussev, have pleaded guilty or been convicted of espionage and face sentencing. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/17c95018-436d-43c8-8ee6-d3b05ef11521?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://apnews.com/article/70ecdfe510f63e2d1ab2b3d5f3272e79> - Three Bulgarian nationals have been convicted in the UK for conspiring to spy for Russia across Europe. Katrin Ivanova, Vanya Gaberova, and Tihomir Ivanov Ivanchev were found guilty of espionage and use of false identity documents. Their operations, active between 2020 and 2023, targeted Russian dissidents, journalists, and Ukrainian soldiers. The group used sophisticated spy equipment, including hidden cameras and jamming devices, and operated under the direction of Orlin Roussev, who had previously pleaded guilty. The case highlights the trend of states outsourcing espionage to non-nationals, reflecting modern espionage’s evolving methods. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/70ecdfe510f63e2d1ab2b3d5f3272e79?utm_source=openai))