

UK sanctions Russian spies at the heart of Putin's malicious regime

By Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

Published: 2025-07-17 · Archived: 2026-04-05 12:56:06 UTC

- UK exposes and sanctions three GRU units and 18 of their military intelligence officers, responsible for spreading chaos and disorder on Putin's orders
- GRU units exposed for their involvement in the bombing of the Mariupol Theatre, the targeting of Yulia Skripal and cyber operations in support of Putin's illegal war in Ukraine
- action by UK and allies comes amid global threat posed by Russian malign activity

Russian spies and hackers targeting the UK and others are today exposed and sanctioned in decisive action by the UK Government to deliver security for working people.

Today's measures target three units of the Russian military intelligence agency (GRU) and 18 military intelligence officers who are responsible for conducting a sustained campaign of malicious cyber activity over many years, including in the UK.

The GRU routinely uses cyber and information operations to sow chaos, division and disorder in Ukraine and across the world with devastating real-world consequences.

In 2022, Unit 26165, sanctioned today, conducted online reconnaissance to help target missile strikes against Mariupol – including the strike that destroyed the Mariupol Theatre where hundreds of civilians, including children, were murdered.

Today's action also hits GRU military intelligence officers responsible for historically targeting Yulia Skripal's device with malicious malware known as X-Agent – five years before GRU military intelligence officers' failed attempt to murder Yulia and Sergei Skripal with the deadly Novichok nerve agent in Salisbury.

In the UK, Russia has targeted media outlets, telecoms providers, political and democratic institutions, and energy infrastructure. The United Kingdom and our international allies are watching Russia and are countering their attacks both publicly and behind the scenes.

Foreign Secretary, David Lammy said:

GRU spies are running a campaign to destabilise Europe, undermine Ukraine's sovereignty and threaten the safety of British citizens.

The Kremlin should be in no doubt: we see what they are trying to do in the shadows and we won't tolerate it. That's why we're taking decisive action with sanctions against Russian spies. Protecting the UK from harm is fundamental to this government's Plan for Change.

Putin's hybrid threats and aggression will never break our resolve. The UK and our Allies support for Ukraine and Europe's security is ironclad.

The UK government is committed to accelerating its efforts to counter hybrid threats at home, protecting the UK's national security – a key foundation of the Plan for Change – and abroad, working in collaboration with a growing international coalition including all 32 NATO Allies, the EU and its member states, and our partners in the FBI.

That is why the UK has announced the biggest sustained increase in defence spending - rising to 2.6% of GDP from 2027 - since the Cold War, and as highlighted in the National Security Review, the UK is stepping up our focus on tackling hybrid and technology enabled threats. The new UK-EU Security and Defence Partnership will support this, enabling closer cooperation across a wide range of areas.

The Kremlin has also used cyber operations in support of Putin's illegal war – including targeting critical infrastructure like Viasat satellite communications. Some of these attacks were conducted on the eve of the full-scale invasion in 2022 with the express purpose of degrading Ukraine's ability to defend itself.

Russia's insidious activity stretches far beyond Europe. In addition to the GRU Units and officers, the UK is also sanctioning three leaders of "African Initiative", a social media content mill established and funded by Russia and employing Russian intelligence officers to conduct information operations in West Africa. This includes reckless attempts to undermine lifesaving global health initiatives in the region by pushing baseless conspiracy theories to further the Kremlin's political agenda.

Background

The Foreign Secretary laid out how the UK is stepping up our approach to combatting Russian hybrid threats in his Mansion House speech. Read more [here](#).

See this factsheet for further information: [GRU Cyber and Hybrid Threat Operations](#)

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) NAC statement: [Statement of Condemnation by the North Atlantic Council \(NAC\) concerning Russian Malicious Cyber Activities](#)

EU HR / VP Statement on behalf of the European Union Member States: [Hybrid threat / Russia: Statement by the High Representative on behalf of the EU condemning Russia's persistent hybrid campaigns against the EU, its Member States and partners](#)

Hybrid Threats activity refers to overt or covert actions by foreign governments which fall short of direct armed conflict with the UK but cause harm or threaten the safety or interests of the UK or our allies.

Examples of this include:

- Cyber attacks (e.g. hacking government systems or stealing trade secrets)
- Disinformation (e.g. spreading false or misleading information online)
- Sabotage (e.g. damaging infrastructure or supply chains)
- Political interference (e.g. influencing elections or public opinion)

- More information on the Salisbury Poisonings and the Dawn Sturgess Inquiry can be found here: [The Dawn Sturgess Inquiry – Inquiry into 2018 Salisbury poisonings](#)

Below is a full list of those sanctioned today:

- Aleksandr Vladimirovich OSADCHUK
- Anatoliy Sergeyvich KOVALEV
- Artem Valeryvich OCHICHENKO
- The 161st Specialist Training Centre (TsPS) (Unit 29155) of the GRU
- Vladislav Yevgenyevich BOROVKOV
- Nikolay Aleksandrovich KORCHAGIN
- Yuriy Federovich DENISOV
- Vitaly Aleksandrovich SHEVCHENKO
- Ivan Sergeyevich YERMAKOV
- Aleksey Viktorovich LUKASHEV
- Sergey Sergeyevich VASYUK
- Andrey Eduardovich BARANOV
- Sergey Aleksandrovich MORGACHEV
- Artem Adreyevich MALYSHEV
- Yuriy Leonidovich SHIKOLENKO
- Victor Borisovich NETYKSHO
- Dmitriy Aleksandrovich MIKHAYLOV
- African Initiative
- Artyom Sergeevich KUREYEV
- Anna Sergeevna ZAMARAEVA
- Victor Aleksandrovich LUKOVENKO

In addition, we have brought new evidence to light on the following existing designations:

- The Main Centre for Special Technologies (GTsST) (Unit 74455) of the Russian GRU
- The 85th Main Special Services Centre (GTsSS) (Unit 26165) of the Russian GRU
- Yevgeniy Mikhaylovich SEREBRIAKOV
- Aleksey Sergeyevich MORENETS

Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-sanctions-russian-spies-at-the-heart-of-putins-malicious-regime>