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Russian Sabotage Plot Targets London Restaurant Owner

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In the heart of London's Mayfair, the Michelin-starred Hide restaurant is renowned for its opulent dining, boasting a lavish menu with £36 black truffle scrambled eggs and a striking oak staircase that winds through its three floors. Overlooking Green Park, it's a haven for the elite, where champagne carts glide past tables adorned with dishes served on nests

of hay. Yet, this culinary gem has recently been thrust into the spotlight for far darker reasons.

Investigators have uncovered a chilling plot, allegedly orchestrated by Russian operatives, to kidnap the restaurant's owner, a vocal critic of Vladimir Putin, and set the building ablaze. The scheme, thwarted by authorities, involved a group of young British men arrested before they could act. These individuals were linked to a gang convicted this week of an arson attack on a Ukraine-associated warehouse in east London, causing £1 million in damages in March 2024.

Prosecutors revealed the warehouse attack was masterminded by agents of the Wagner Group, a mercenary outfit absorbed by Russia's Defence Ministry in 2023. Kevin Riehle, a lecturer in Intelligence and National Security at Brunel University, suggested Russian military intelligence likely directed the operation through Wagner. The 21-year-old ringleader, Dylan Earl, admitted guilt in planning the Hide plot, exposing a broader campaign of Russian sabotage across Europe.

Commander Dominic Murphy, head of the Metropolitan Police's Counter Terrorism Command, described the incidents as a stark example of Russia using proxies to advance its agenda. A Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) study recorded 34 suspected Russian hybrid attacks in Europe in 2024, nearly triple the number from 2023. These attacks, blending propaganda, deception, and sabotage, aim to destabilise Western societies.

Across the continent, reports detail assaults on rail networks, undersea cables, and critical infrastructure, alongside GPS disruptions and assassination attempts. In Germany, car exhausts have been filled with

expanding foam, while explosive parcels have targeted cargo flights. Sascha Dov Bachmann, a professor of law and security at the University of Canberra, described these as classic Russian “cloak and dagger” operations, designed to erode public trust in governments. “It’s meant to make people feel unprotected,” he told ABC.

The Kremlin has denied involvement, dismissing allegations of a sabotage campaign. Yet, the recruitment of young men and teenagers via platforms like Telegram and gaming chatrooms signals a shift. Ken McCallum, head of MI5, noted Russia’s increasing reliance on proxies for “dirty work.” Court documents from the London warehouse case revealed how Earl, active on Wagner-affiliated Telegram channels, was groomed by a Russian operative who recommended he watch *The Americans* as a “manual” for espionage.

The plot against Hide’s owner, Yevgeny Chichvarkin, a Russian tycoon supporting Ukraine, included plans to target his businesses, including Hedonism Wines. Jon Richardson, a visiting fellow at the ANU Centre for European Studies, explained that using young recruits allows Russia to obscure its involvement. “These activities are carried out with fewer obvious Russian fingerprints,” he said. While the damage from amateur saboteurs is often minimal, their actions fuel psychological warfare, sowing distrust, particularly towards Ukrainian refugees, who are sometimes implicated as pawns.

Recent incidents, from rail sabotage in the Netherlands to arson attacks on France’s high-speed rail before the Paris Olympics, underscore the growing threat. NATO leaders, meeting recently, pledged 5% of GDP to defence and reaffirmed support for Ukraine. Yet, Jon Richardson, a former

Australian diplomat, warned that Western responses remain limited.

“There hasn’t been enough done to deter these actions,” he said.

As Europe bolsters intelligence sharing and imposes sanctions, including Poland’s closure of a Russian consulate in May, the hybrid threat persists. Peter Reesink, director of Dutch military intelligence, cautioned in April that Russia’s risk-taking is intensifying, likely to continue regardless of the Ukraine conflict’s outcome. For now, the shadow war casts a long shadow over Europe’s security and over places like Hide, where fine dining has become an unlikely battleground.