TAL SHIAR DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE REPORT

UNCLASSIFIED//AOR RUSSIA, UK

Russia Wages Shadow War Against United Kingdom To Undermine Its Support for Ukraine

Produced by the Tal Shiar Directorate of Intelligence | @Tal_Shiar_DI | July 2026

We assess that President Putin will continue to order Russian forces to wage a calculated hybrid war against the UK to undermine its support for Ukrainian forces. This is done through shadow fleet sanctions evasion, drone surveillance of nuclear and military sites, and GRU cyber operations targeting UK infrastructure. This multi-domain campaign funds Moscow's Ukraine war, probes UK/NATO defenses, and seeks to weaken British resolve on Ukraine support. Recent interdictions show that assertive action can impose costs and close impunity gaps. Putin is likely calculating that the British leaders do not have the political will to retaliate or take firm measures to shut down the oil fleet despite Russia's military vulnerability from a half-decade-long war in Ukraine.



- **Shadow fleet**: Over 700 vessels enable Russia to export oil worth hundreds of billions, funding the Ukraine war. UK sanctions on 595+ vessels (global lead) and June 2026 Royal Marines interdiction of *Smyrtos* in the Channel show progress, yet many continue via bypass routes.

- **UAS/Drone campaign**: Russian intelligence ran 144+ incidents (Aug 2024–Feb 2026) targeting European nuclear/military sites, including repeated low-altitude incursions over RAF Lakenheath (US assets), Fairford, and other UK bases—launched from shadow fleet vessels with substantial impunity. Incidents near UK military sites doubled in 2025.

- **Cyber & hybrid ops**: GRU units (26165/APT28, 74455/Sandworm, 29155) conduct persistent espionage, credential theft (recent router DNS hijacks), and disruptive attacks on UK gov, NHS-linked labs, and economic targets. Operations complement drone ISR and aim to create political/economic pressure. UK has sanctioned multiple GRU officers/units.



Routes of Russia's shadow fleet near the UK

Putin's Calculus, Endgame & UK Counters

Putin's hybrid campaign sustains Russia's war economy and coerces UK policy shifts on Ukraine by exploiting maritime, aerial, and cyber domains with low risk. The endgame is normalized grey-zone pressure that weakens NATO resolve and UK support for Kyiv. The UK must respond with integrated enforcement, C-UAS deployment, cyber resilience, and allied leadership to close gaps and raise costs for Moscow.

- Why Putin targets the UK: To offset conventional setbacks in Ukraine via low-cost tools (shadow fleet revenue, cheap drone ISR on nuclear assets, cyber persistence). UK leadership in sanctions and hosting US strategic assets makes it a high-value target for punishment and intelligence collection.

- End goal: Force London to reduce military/financial aid to Ukraine or accept a Moscow-favorable settlement; validate hybrid warfare as effective below Article 5 threshold; divide NATO by exposing enforcement challenges and eroding public will.

- UK counter-strategy: (1) Institutionalize/expand shadow fleet interdictions and cargo seizures (coordinate with JEF); (2) Urgently deploy layered C-UAS with updated ROE around critical sites to end impunity; (3) Strengthen NCSC cyber defenses + public attribution/disruptive responses vs

GRU; (4) Lead secondary sanctions on enablers and expose operations to build resilience. Build on the June 2026 Channel precedent.

Conclusion

Russia's shadow war is a deliberate strategy to fund its Ukraine invasion and test Western defenses through deniable means. By expanding interdictions, hardening C-UAS and cyber defenses, and leading allied enforcement, the UK can counter effectively and deter further escalation. Vigilance and resolve are key to protecting UK interests and supporting Ukraine.



Tal Shiar was founded by Nadeem Iqbal, a national security expert who served over 16 years as an intelligence officer for the Department of Defense from 2006-2022. His career began as a counter-insurgency analyst on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Task Force (2006–2013), followed by 9 years as a military analyst in the Syria Branch (2013–2022). He deployed five times in support of combat operations (3× Afghanistan, 2× Iraq), including two rotations with Special Operations Forces focused on counter-terrorism missions in the CENTCOM theater. Additional roles included rotations to CIA Headquarters as the military analyst for the DNI Middle East Task Force and served as the Syria Country Director for Office of Secretary of Defense Policy (OSDP). He was recognized with Joint Civilian Commendation/Achievement Medals, the NATO Medal(x3), the Secretary of Defense GWOT Medal, DoD Expeditionary Award and the OSD Excellence Award.