Under Attack: How Britain Has Disarmed Russian Influence

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For over two decades, diplomatic relations between **London and Moscow** have experienced progressive and relentless deterioration, culminating in an apparently unbridgeable divide following the **Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022**. Despite the cooling of political relations, Russian influence in the United Kingdom has grown extensively, prompting the **Parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC)** to define such presence as the **"new normal"**. An in-depth analysis of the dynamics at play reveals how the United Kingdom is reshaping its **regulatory, economic and military architecture** to counter a multifaceted threat ranging from **illicit capital** to **information warfare** and **critical infrastructure sabotage**.

The Sinister Attraction of Capital: The End of "Londongrad"

In the period preceding the conflict in Ukraine, the United Kingdom represented a destination of choice for the Russian economic elite. The combination of a flourishing real estate market, an **excellent financial sector**, permissive corporate regulation and a network of professionals transformed the British capital into the hub of a veritable **laundering of influence and capital**. **Oligarchs close to the Kremlin** exploited cultural institutions, universities and football clubs (notable the case of the sale of **Chelsea FC** by Roman Abramovich) to gain credibility in civil society and "clean" their reputation.

- **Russian Financial Assets (2023):£8.2 Bn**
- **Frozen Assets (Sanctions):£22.7 Bn**
- **Trade Exchange Collapse:-90%**

Financial assets held by Russian foreign residents in the United Kingdom collapsed from nearly **29 billion pounds** at the end of 2021 to approximately **8.2 billion** at the end of 2023. In parallel, British authorities froze over **22.7 billion pounds** under the **sanctions regime**. To eradicate the flow of funds of dubious origin, Parliament approved two key reforms: the ***Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act 2022*** — which established a public register to identify **beneficial owners of foreign property** and strengthened **Unexplained Wealth Orders (UWO)** — and the ***Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023***, designed to enhance investigative capabilities against **shell companies**.

Hybrid Warfare, Espionage and Legislative Response

Threats from Moscow are not limited to the financial sphere. From the dramatic **poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal** in Salisbury in 2018, attributed to Russian intelligence services, hostile activity has evolved toward increasingly aggressive forms. As highlighted by the Director General of **MI5**, Ken McCallum, investigations linked to state threats have **increased by 48%** in a single year, exposing how the Russian military agency **GRU** is engaged in a "sustained mission to generate chaos on British and European streets" through acts of **sabotage, arson and cyber attacks** channeled through criminal intermediaries.

> "*The international order is under threat in a way not seen since the end of the Cold War. We are witnessing a reckless campaign of sabotage across Europe.*"

> — ***Joint Statement by the heads of MI6 (Sir Richard Moore) and CIA (Bill Burns), September 2024***

The State's response materialized in the ***National Security Act 2023***, a far-reaching measure that introduces offenses for **foreign interference, modern espionage and sabotage**. Among the main innovations is the ***Foreign Influence Registration Scheme*** (FIRS), a public register designed to ensure transparency on lobbying activities on behalf of foreign governments. Moreover, the Government definitively closed in February 2022 the ***Tier 1 (Investor)*** visa scheme — the so-called "golden visas" — and expanded the powers of **national exclusion** for elites linked to Vladimir Putin's regime.

Democratic Integrity, Media and Critical Infrastructure Security

The defense of democratic institutions represents another crucial front. Despite the paper-based electoral system offering protection against direct tampering, attempts at political conditioning manifest through **opaque financing** and **disinformation campaigns**. The *Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000* (PPERA) and the *Elections Act 2022* introduced stricter rules on **donation traceability** and spending limits for foreign third-party actors.

On the information front, the regulatory authority **Ofcom** revoked the broadcasting license from state broadcaster ***Russia Today*** **(RT)** in March 2022 for lack of impartiality and accuracy. Simultaneously, the ***Online Safety Act 2023*** qualified foreign interference as a priority offense, obliging social platforms to block **disinformation sponsored by hostile states**.

In maritime and infrastructure matters, concern is growing over the activities of the **Russian shadow fleet** and **spy ships** (such as the *Yantar*) spotted near British territorial waters with the aim of mapping **submarine cables** and **energy pipelines**. London has intensified **Royal Navy** patrols, updated rules of engagement and activated the ***Joint Expeditionary Force*** **(JEF)** in the Baltic Sea to defend **seabed security** and prevent economic sabotage operations.

Conclusions

The countering of Russian influence marks a **lasting paradigm shift** in the United Kingdom's security policy. With the era of tolerance toward opaque capital closed, London is articulating an **integrated strategy** that merges **regulatory rigor, cyber defense, media protection and military deterrence**. The ability to maintain this operational front will determine the **democratic resilience** and **geopolitical stability** of the Country in the decades to come.

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