

Dear Reader,

Welcome back to the *Classified Insider*, producer Becki here.

The threat from Russia is escalating across Europe - this was the subject of our *previous Intelligence Scoop episode*. This week, I've analysed how Putin is investing in undersea warfare to intimidate NATO and what this could mean for our everyday lives. Read on for that piece.

In our *latest Intelligence Scoop episode*, we tackle a story which has dominated the world for the past three years: the October 7th attacks. David and Gordon dig into whether the success of the attacks were ultimately an intelligence and policy failure on the part of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and whether they ultimately could have been prevented.

[Listen here button]

Meanwhile, episode two of our much-requested Philby series landed in your podcast feeds on Monday. This is one of my favourite episodes to date and features friend of the show Guy Burgess attempting to flee Britain with the collected works of Jane Austen and a stack of cash. What more could you want?

David's coming back to London to launch his latest novel, London Station, next week. If you haven't yet purchased your copy, our friends at Coles Books are offering a discount for Declassified Club members, keep reading for your exclusive code.

Now, onto the world of undersea cables...



BECKI HILLS

Producer of The Rest Is Classified

The Russian Threat Hiding On the Seabed

They weave across the world, lining the seabed, a web of hundreds of wires.

“Your entire day requires or depends on undersea cables,” explains Elisabeth Braw, author of *The Undersea War*, a book which charts the hidden battles beneath the world's oceans.
“Imagine: you check the news, listen to music, check your bank account, turn on the light - all of that involves undersea cables.”

In recent weeks, Russia's covert war with Europe has dramatically stepped up, with Western leaders accusing the Kremlin of launching drone attacks in Germany and plotting assassinations in the US. Deep in our oceans, the threat is particularly acute.

In *last week's Intelligence Scoop episode*, Gordon spoke about Russian reconnaissance missions for undersea sabotage in the event of war.

But what would an underwater attack look like, and what impact would it have on our lives and global security?

I interviewed Braw and Oleksandr V Danylyuk, former special advisor to the head of Ukraine's Foreign Intelligence Service and now a fellow at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), the world's oldest defence and security think tank.

The threat from Russia

Last month, NATO allies caught Russian submarines training with a secretive weapon in Arctic waters near the Svalbard archipelago.

This military technology was “designed to disable critical undersea cables

without leaving any fingerprints," according to *reporting* by Reuters.

While no cables were cut or damaged, as Gordon explains in the episode, the seabed standoff comes amid Western intelligence warning that Moscow is ramping up sabotage operations in Europe and preparing for war with NATO.

Despite the fact that "everything we do in our modern societies depends on undersea data cables", they are inherently vulnerable, explains Braw. "If you put something on the seafloor, it's exposed. You can bury it, but even when something is buried, it is exposed."

This combination of crucial infrastructure and deep vulnerability is precisely why undersea cables are an attractive target for any state looking to sew disruption.

"If, for instance, telecommunication cables are damaged or destroyed, not having any internet will be the least of our worries. People will immediately see far more serious consequences," Danylyuk says.

Setting out what could happen in an extreme scenario, he adds: "Drones and missiles will be in the skies and people will be cut off from the internet, with no means of communication."

What are undersea cables?

Today, more than 1.5 million kilometres of cables line the ocean floor, powering everything from multi-billion dollar financial transactions to video calls.

"We assume 'the cloud' is in the sky, but it's underwater," describes Braw.

About the width of a garden hose and made up of tiny glass fibres, these cables transmit digital data via laser pulses at almost the speed of light.

So what can we do to protect these cables?

In the deep sea, at a depth of more than 2000 metres, bottom trawling fishing is prohibited. In such areas, subsea cables are laid directly on the seabed.

Meanwhile, in shallower waters, the cables are buried to ward against accidental damage by fishing vessels and other marine equipment.

Despite these precautions, there is not “a whole lot you can do to build more security into cables,” Braw argues.

“Cables are already buried - you can bury them further, but that's basically it, and that comes with its own complications.”

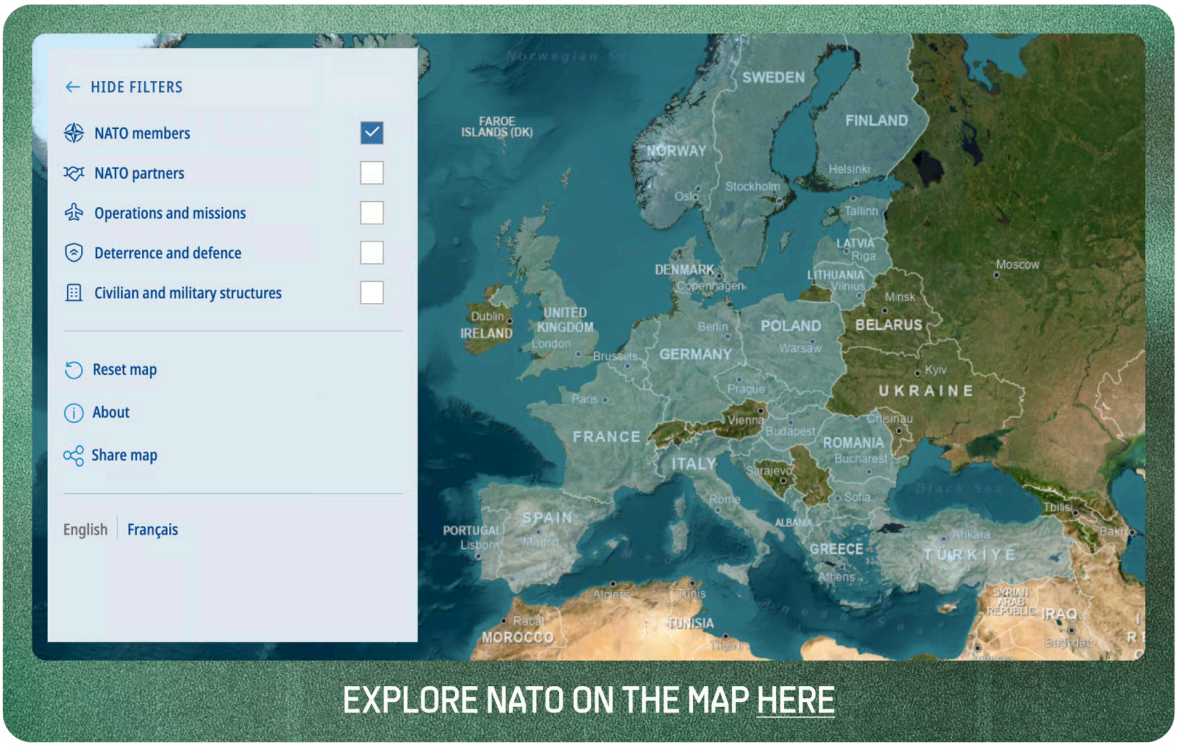
Many governments and telecoms companies have explored solutions for this vulnerability problem without success.

“You could do crazy things like put a steel cap on them,” Braw explains, “but then it would be extremely difficult for repair crews to get to them. And if you were to adopt some sort of 100% security measure, then the cable would be so expensive that it would no longer be commercially viable.”

Russia’s undersea capabilities

Russia has invested heavily in undersea warfare technology in recent years as it seeks to assert dominance over NATO, explains Danylyuk.

NATO has created a de facto barrier between Russia and mainland Europe which means that President Putin’s only route through which to approach Europe is via international waters.



“What we've seen in recent years is that Russia is willing and unafraid to use any tool at its disposal to cause harm,” explains Braw. “That [strategy] just

happens to coincide with mysterious cable incidents in European waters."

Last year, Putin said in a speech that "all NATO countries are fighting [Russia]" and he regularly comments on the threat he believes the alliance poses to his country's security.

Danylyuk argues that seabed warfare provides another front from which Russia can attack NATO and sits within a wider military strategy.

"It is noteworthy that even while Russia is waging a difficult and exhausting war against Ukraine, it does not stop spending its limited resources on creating expensive infrastructure [like deepsea submarines] that has no significance for victory in that war, but is extremely necessary in the event of a prolonged conventional war with the West."

When the Soviet Union collapsed in December 1991, Russia mothballed many of its military functions, but one highly-secretive naval unit remained and has been growing steadily ever since.

This is the unit reportedly responsible for the training operation foiled near Svalbard and the mission conducted in British waters earlier this year.

Commonly known as GUGI and publicly tasked with 'deepsea research', this is essentially the Russian Special Forces of the sea. The group reports directly to the Ministry of Defence and President Putin himself.

GUGI's "main tasks include seabed warfare and deepsea operations, including the installation of equipment for intercepting underwater telecommunications, damaging and destroying underwater infrastructure, seabed mapping and the deployment of Russia's own underwater surveillance and navigation systems," explains Danylyuk.

Underwater surveillance uses sound waves, light, and specialised sensors to detect, track, and map objects beneath the water's surface, where standard radio waves and GPS cannot penetrate.

Working alongside other units of Russia's defence intelligence network, GUGI has developed small, uncrewed submarines capable of diving to thousands of metres below sea level.

The type of uncrewed subs developed by GUGI are highly valuable but "relatively cheap to produce", Danylyuk continues, offering Russia new

opportunities to conduct sabotage operations without any risk of direct human cost.

Submarines are built to resist the pressure of the water above them, which rises with every metre they descend.

So, with some undersea cables lying at depths of up to 8,000 metres on the ocean floor, the greater a submarine's diving capabilities, the bigger the threat they pose to undersea infrastructure.

Plus, at deeper levels, underwater activity becomes far trickier to surveil and track, meaning that Russian vessels are able to operate with greater freedom.

Is an undersea war with Russia coming?

Recorded Future, a US cybersecurity firm, *published a note* earlier this week arguing that "Russia has increasingly used violations of NATO territorial waters and targeting of undersea cables to test NATO's resilience, collect intelligence, and keep NATO in a reactive, defensive posture."

The note cites an *incident last month* in the Black Sea, where Romanian authorities intercepted and destroyed an explosive-laden Russian maritime drone near the Neptun Deep offshore gas project.

According to Recorded Future, the drone was meant to do two things at once: threaten Romania's offshore energy infrastructure, and see how quickly NATO reacted.

In the event of Russia carrying out an attack on subsea cables, this "act of limited aggression" would likely come as part of a wider military operation, explains Danylyuk.
He believes that training exercises like the one exposed near Svalbard are "being prepared for something much bigger, like a full scale confrontation [with NATO]."

If Russia were to launch an attack on the UK, for instance, "they would attack military infrastructure and civilian infrastructure on the surface with drones and missiles, and in parallel they would definitely attack underwater telecommunication cables," Danylyuk continues.

What are governments doing?

In April, former UK Defence Secretary, John Healey revealed that three Russian submarines conducted a “covert” operation over cables in the North Atlantic.

A British warship and aircraft were deployed “to track and deter any malign activity by these vessels,” he said at the time.

In a speech directly addressing Vladimir Putin, Healey said: “We see you, we see your activity over our cables and pipelines. And you should know that any attempt to damage them will not be tolerated, and will have serious consequences.”

The then-telecoms minister Liz Lloyd announced new plans to toughen protections for subsea internet cables. “As hostile activity by Russia and others grows, protecting these cables matters more than ever for our economy, security and daily lives,” she said.

The only way to protect the cables from the threat of sabotage operations is to “create a deterrence and damage someone before they are able to damage you,” explains Danylyuk.

A combination of burial techniques and deterrence policies are being adopted across the world.

In June, the UK government published its Defence Investment Plan in which it committed to investing “£330m in the next four years on critical underwater infrastructure protection.”

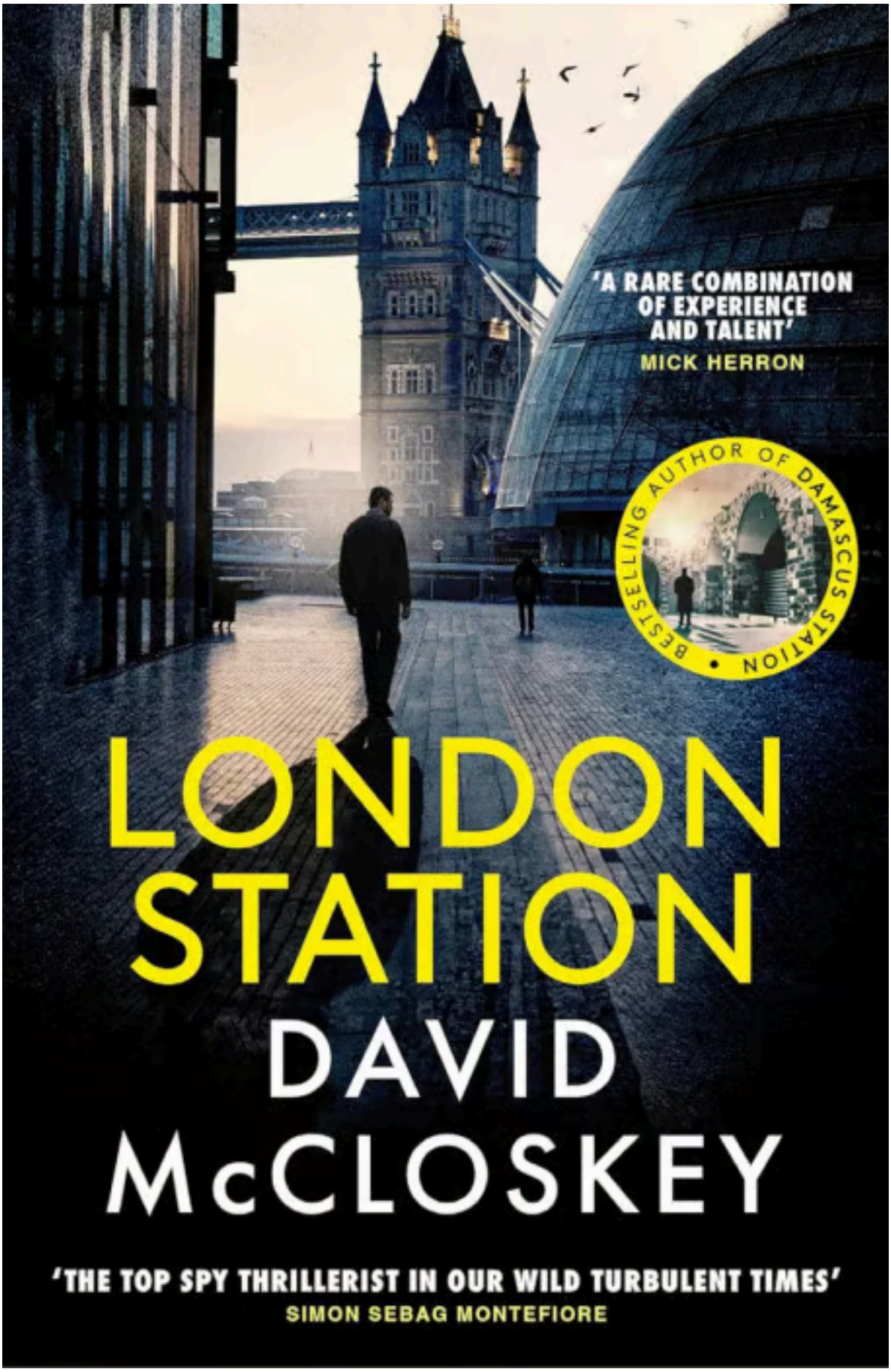
While it is not illegal to survey infrastructure such as undersea cables in international waters, experts continue to warn that the Russian activity we have seen is suggestive of preparation for sabotage.

“Russia has never been scared less than it is now,” says Danylyuk.

It remains unclear whether Putin will escalate his campaign against NATO – but experts agree that if an attack comes, undersea cables will be among the first targets.

London Station

What if the CIA and British intelligence began spying on each other? This is the question at the heart of David's thrilling fifth novel.



A new US Administration has taken office, installing a brash and unconventional CIA Director determined to disrupt the Agency and sceptical of its close relationship with their cousins across the Atlantic.

Case officers, including newly installed London Chief of Station, Artemis Procter, must now navigate a tense environment as old friends become adversaries and no one knows who to trust.

When agents run by both services begin dying, Procter and her team at London Station must decide whether loyalty to the Mission and their friends means disobeying the Agency they serve.

US readers, purchase your copy of London Station NOW.

UK readers, pre-order your copy of London Station from our friends at Coles Books.

Declassified Club members receive 10% off London Station from our friends at Coles Books using the code PROCTER.

COMING SOON...

On Monday, we'll be back with the third episode in our Philby series, which sees Kim watching on as the net closes around him...

In our next Intelligence Scoop, David and Gordon will (finally) be exploring the fascinating world of the polygraph and taking their own lie detector tests.

Plus, stay tuned for some behind the scenes content as we sit down with one of the most exciting film directors in the world of espionage for an upcoming bonus episode.

Guest contributors are always welcome in this newsletter, so if you're an expert in all things espionage and want to talk to us, get in touch.

As ever, please share thoughts and feedback on all things TRIC by emailing *therestisclassified@goalhanger.com*.

Until next week!

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