

**BETWEEN THE SACRED AND THE VIOLENT: THE RUSSIAN IMPERIAL
MOVEMENT AND THE NEW PARADIGM OF TERRORISM**

Abstract:	<p><i>The Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) is an ultra-nationalist and extremist organization that combines imperialist ideology with a rigid view of Russian Orthodoxy. The RIM's distinctive feature is the use of religious symbolism to legitimize both its political goals and violent actions, including involvement in armed conflict and acts of terrorism. The group is known for providing paramilitary training to far-right extremists in Europe, contributing to violent attacks such as the Sweden bombings.</i></p> <p><i>Although designated a terrorist organization by the United States, Canada, Australia, and the European Union, RIM continues to operate relatively freely in Russia, gaining influence through propaganda and recruitment activities. The movement advocates a vision of Russia as a pure Orthodox nation engaged in a sacred confrontation against what it perceives as decadent and demonic Western values.</i></p> <p><i>This article explores the dynamics between religion, nationalism, and political violence within RIM, showing how Orthodox symbolism is instrumentalized to support an extremist agenda. RIM is not only a political movement, but also an ideological force that combines religious radicalism with imperialist goals, generating significant global security risks through collaboration with other extremist groups and by disseminating its messages through social media.</i></p>
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Introduction

The Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) was designated as a global terrorist organization by the U.S. Department of State on April 6, 2020, making it the first white supremacist organization to receive this classification¹. RIM and its leaders, Stanislav Vorobiev, Denis Gariyev, and Nikolay Trushchalov, were labeled as global terrorists due to their provision of paramilitary training and their connections to terrorist attacks in Europe, including in Sweden. This designation freezes their assets in the U.S. and prohibits financial transactions, strengthening international counterterrorism measures². The designation was based on RIM's paramilitary activities and involvement in extreme violence, including support for conflicts in Ukraine and

¹ Mapping Militant Organizations, *Russian Imperial Movement*, April 7, 2023, <https://mappingmilitants.org/node/513/06.09.2024>)

² Michael R. Pompeo, *United States Designates Russian Imperial Movement and Leaders as Global Terrorists* - Press Statement, April 7, 2020, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/united-states-designates-russian-imperial-movement-and-leaders-as-global-terrorists/> (20.09.2024)

participation in terrorist attacks across Europe¹. RIM's classification as a global terrorist organization marked a significant step in combating the influence of this movement².

This designation allows Western governments to impose financial sanctions on RIM members and take legal action against those collaborating with the movement. However, RIM leaders claimed that this label has increased the organization's popularity, aiding in the recruitment of new members³. Similarly, the Australian government-imposed sanctions on RIM on May 18, 2022, on charges of financing terrorism under the United Nations Charter Act of 1945⁴. Likewise, Belgium sanctioned RIM for terrorism on March 28, 2024; Canada listed it as a terrorist organization on April 20, 2023; Switzerland imposed sanctions on August 23, 2024; the European Union on March 28, 2024; France on April 20, 2023; and Monaco on August 14, 2024⁵.

Founded in 2002 in Sankt Petersburg by Vorobyev, RIM established its paramilitary division, the Russian Imperial Legion (RIL), in 2010, led by Denis Gariev, who coordinates all missions and military training sessions⁶. Initially, RIM did not have a significant influence, with its primary goal being the restoration of the monarchy in Russia and the revival of the Russian Empire⁷. RIM has trained foreign fighters and members of extremist groups or organizations at its training camps in Sankt Petersburg. These fighters were involved in terrorist attacks, including in Sweden, where members of the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) carried out bomb attacks in 2016 and 2017 after receiving training from RIM⁸. These actions contributed to justifying RIM's designation as a global terrorist organization⁹. Swedish extremists trained by RIM carried out attacks on migrant centers and a café¹⁰. Thus, the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) was designated as a global terrorist organization by the U.S. in 2020 due to its involvement in terrorist attacks and its training of European extremists. The designation freezes financial assets and allows for international sanctions but has also boosted the group's popularity, facilitating the recruitment of new extremist members.

The religious and nationalist ideology of RIM

RIM identifies as a nationalist far-right group with a strong religious component rooted in Russian Orthodoxy. The group promotes a conservative vision that merges Orthodox Christianity with ultra-nationalist and imperialist ideologies. Their religiosity is central to their justification of a vision for the revival of the Russian Empire, believing that Russian Orthodoxy must play a crucial role in restoring monarchical order and a Russia that is ethnically and religiously "pure"¹¹. The organization promotes the idea that imperial power,

¹ Mapping Militant Organizations, *Russian Imperial Movement*, last modified April 7, 2023, <https://mappingmilitants.org/node/513/> (06.09.2024)

² Taylor Chin, *The Justification for Designating the Russian Imperial Movement as a Foreign Terrorist Organization*, CTEC – The Center on Terrorism, Extremism and Counterterrorism, Middlebury Institute of International Studies, Occasional paper, June 2024, pp. 9-10, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/11bPEu7bg5Xf0sF1xOthBQ9DASIAq1Gz/view?pli=1> (25.09.2024)

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 10-13

⁴ Parliament of Australia, *Russian Imperial Movement – Petition*, 12 February 2024, <https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansardr%2F27600%2F0136%22> (02.10.2024)

⁵ Open Sanctions, *Russian Imperial Movement - Terrorism - Sanctioned entity*, <https://www.opensanctions.org/entities/NK-ARaHWXZ8AFcGWX7qnSyd6o/> (20.10.2024)

⁶ Taylor Chin, *The Justification for Designating the Russian Imperial Movement as a Foreign Terrorist Organization*, CTEC – The Center on Terrorism, Extremism and Counterterrorism, Middlebury Institute of International Studies, Occasional paper, June 2024, p. 6, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/11bPEu7bg5Xf0sF1xOthBQ9DASIAq1Gz/view?pli=1> (25.09.2024)

⁷ Anna Kruglova, *The Russian Imperial Movement, the war in Ukraine and the future of Russian state*, 01 Sep 2023, <https://www.icct.nl/publication/russian-imperial-movement-war-ukraine-and-future-russian-state> (06.09.2024)

⁸ Mapping Militant Organizations, *Russian Imperial Movement*, April 7, 2023, <https://mappingmilitants.org/node/513/> (06.09.2024)

⁹ *Idem*

¹⁰ Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State, *United States Designates Russian Imperial Movement and Leaders as Global Terrorists* - Press Statement, April 7, 2020, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/united-states-designates-russian-imperial-movement-and-leaders-as-global-terrorists/> (20.09.2024)

¹¹ Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Emelie Chace-Donahue, Colin P. Clarke, *Understanding the US Designation of the Wagner Group as a Transnational Criminal Organisation*, 25 Jan 2023, <https://www.icct.nl/publication/understanding-us-designation-wagner-group-transnational-criminal-organisation> (06.09.2024)

supported by Orthodoxy, represents the ideal form of governance. This view is tied to a “belief in the divine right of kings”, emphasizing a return to the Tsarist political structure of Russia¹. RIM grounds its ideology in a combination of Russian extreme nationalism and Russian Orthodoxy, perceived as the core of the ethnic and cultural identity of the Russian people². Orthodoxy is employed to legitimize not only their political agenda but also the violence used to achieve these objectives³. RIM members adhere to a strict structure, maintaining a dualistic vision in which they are to belong to the “Russian Orthodox Church” and support the establishment of “a Russian imperial state”⁴.

RIM does not simply promote Orthodox religion but a specific view of Christianity that closely links Russian identity to Orthodox faith. This perspective is explicit in many of the group’s messages, which criticize what they perceive as the moral decay of modern Russia due to its distancing from religion and genuine spiritual traditions⁵. RIM asserts that the Russian people suffer from a lack of faith and that this spiritual crisis is the reason the nation faces both external and internal threats. They also present themselves as a devout religious minority, preserving the purity of Orthodox life and willing to fight to protect Russian Christianity from perceived enemies, both internal and external⁶. Therefore, Orthodox religion is used, in a distorted way, both as a cultural symbol and as a tool to legitimize the organization’s political and military objectives. In practice, it is a revival of Russian national identity through Orthodox faith, viewed as a unifying factor among Russian populations within territories claimed by Russia⁷. Messianic nationalism and religion are tightly intertwined in RIM’s ideology, promoting a millenarian and “eschatological view of politics”⁸. According to this view, people are living in the end times, with globalism seen as the work of the Antichrist, Islamism as a demonic force, and the Covid-19 pandemic as a strategy by globalists to consolidate the Antichrist’s rule⁹. This religious rhetoric serves as an ideological foundation for many of RIM’s violent actions, including its participation in armed conflicts, such as in Ukraine. Using the notion of defending Christian values, RIM justifies the use of force to protect its ideals and support what it considers a holy struggle against the West and liberal influences, which, according to the group, endanger Orthodox faith and Russian traditions¹⁰. RIM also perceives itself as persecuted for its beliefs, viewing its actions as a form of modern martyrdom in the name of Russian Orthodoxy and a restored monarchy¹¹. Thus, the group’s religiosity is not only a cultural component but an integral part of its nationalist and extremist ideology, justifying radical and violent actions¹². RIM’s ideology is anchored in an extreme anti-liberal stance¹³ and relies on a

¹ Lucas Webber, Alec Bertina, *The Russian Imperial Movement in the Ukraine Wars: 2014-2023*, “CTC SENTINEL, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point”, August 2023, Vol. 16, No. 8, p. 26, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-russian-imperial-movement-in-the-ukraine-wars-2014-2023/> (09.09.2024)

² Mapping Militant Organizations, *Russian Imperial Movement*, last modified April 7, 2023, <https://mappingmilitants.org/node/513/> (06.09.2024)

³ Taylor Chin, *The Justification for Designating the Russian Imperial Movement as a Foreign Terrorist Organization*, CTC – The Center on Terrorism, Extremism and Counterterrorism, Middlebury Institute of International Studies, Occasional paper, June 2024, p. 6, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/11bPEu7bg5Xf0sF1xOthBQ9DASIAq1Gz/view?pli=1> (25.09.2024)

⁴ The Cipher Brief, *Russian Imperial Movement Labeled a Specially Designated Global Terrorist Entity*, April 7th, 2020, https://www.thecipherbrief.com/column_article/russian-imperial-movement-labeled-a-specially-designated-global-terrorist-entity (20.10.2024)

⁵ Mapping Militant Organizations, *Russian Imperial Movement*, April 7, 2023, <https://mappingmilitants.org/node/513/> (06.09.2024)

⁶ *Idem*

⁷ Lucas Webber, Alec Bertina, *The Russian Imperial Movement in the Ukraine Wars: 2014-2023*, in CTC SENTINEL, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, August 2023, Vol. 16, No. 8, p. 23, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-russian-imperial-movement-in-the-ukraine-wars-2014-2023/> (09.09.2024)

⁸ Nicolas Lebourg, Olivier Schmitt, *The French ultra-right's attraction to Putin's Russia*, University de Montpellier, published on September 25, 2024, <https://www.umontpellier.fr/en/articles/lattirance-de-lultra-droite-francaise-pour-la-russie-de-poutine> (20.10.2024)

⁹ *Idem*

¹⁰ Mapping Militant Organizations, *Russian Imperial Movement*, April 7, 2023, <https://mappingmilitants.org/node/513/> (06.09.2024)

¹¹ *Idem*

¹² Mapping Militant Organizations, *Russian Imperial Movement*, April 7, 2023, <https://mappingmilitants.org/node/513/> (06.09.2024)

combination of Russian nationalism, Orthodoxy, and anti-Semitism, all supporting the restoration of the Russian Empire and vehemently opposing foreign influences, particularly those from the West¹. Therefore, Orthodox religion is central to legitimizing the group's ultra-reactionary and nationalist ideology. RIM views Orthodoxy as the foundation of Russian national identity and a tool to justify violent actions, presenting the restoration of the Russian Empire as a "sacred mission".

The role of the religious symbolism in mobilizing supporters

RIM uses Orthodox and imperial symbols to legitimize its ideology. It associates religious symbols like the Orthodox cross with nationalist messages, claiming that the restoration of the Russian Empire is a sacred mission, justified by both Orthodox faith and Russia's monarchical history². This combination of religious symbolism and nationalism is part of their strategy for mobilizing and recruiting followers, reinforcing the idea that their struggle is divinely sanctioned³. Religious symbolism plays a central role in RIM's propaganda and public image. The group frequently uses Orthodox symbols, such as the cross and other religious imagery, in combination with monarchical symbols to create a narrative where Orthodox Russia and the pre-1917 Russian Empire are portrayed as eras of national glory and purity⁴. This mix of symbols reinforces RIM's message that the restoration of the Russian Empire is not only a political goal but also a sacred duty, religiously justified⁵. Religious symbolism is frequently employed by RIM to justify both its military actions and its political vision.

The organization presents itself as a defender of Orthodox values in the face of modernism, liberalism, and multiculturalism, promoting a militant version of Orthodoxy. RIM members see the war in Ukraine as an opportunity to protect Orthodox faith and expand the borders of "New Russia," a concept that includes eastern and southern Ukraine⁶. RIM appeals to a strong religious symbolism rooted in Russian Orthodoxy to lend legitimacy to its nationalist ideology and violent actions⁷. The group projects the idea that Russia is the only "pure" Orthodox nation, called to save traditional Christian values from the "decadent" influences of the West⁸. Russian Orthodoxy is presented not merely as a religion but as an essential component of national identity, thus shaping a narrative of "holy war" where violence is justified as a necessary means of defending the faith. This religious narrative aids in mobilizing supporters both inside and outside of Russia, giving them a sense of divine mission⁹. The Orthodox cross and other religious symbols are used as elements of legitimacy, invoking a direct connection between Orthodox tradition and the Russian monarchy. RIM views these symbols as part of the "natural" identity of the Russian people, in opposition to the "foreign" values brought by liberalism, democracy, and secularism¹⁰. These religious symbols are often used in protests and demonstrations alongside images of the last Tsar of Russia, Nicholas II, whom RIM views as a religious martyr for the Russian

¹³ Lucas Webber, Alec Bertina, *The Russian Imperial Movement in the Ukraine Wars: 2014-2023*, "CTC SENTINEL, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point", August 2023, Vol. 16, No. 8, p. 24, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-russian-imperial-movement-in-the-ukraine-wars-2014-2023/> (09.09.2024)

¹ Mapping Militant Organizations, *Russian Imperial Movement*, April 7, 2023, <https://mappingmilitants.org/node/513/> (06.09.2024)

² Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Emelie Chace-Donahue, Colin P. Clarke, *Understanding the US Designation of the Wagner Group as a Transnational Criminal Organisation*, 25 Jan 2023, <https://www.icct.nl/publication/understanding-us-designation-wagner-group-transnational-criminal-organisation> (06.09.2024)

³ *Idem*

⁴ Mapping Militant Organizations, *Russian Imperial Movement*, April 7, 2023, <https://mappingmilitants.org/node/513/> (06.09.2024)

⁵ *Idem*

⁶ Lucas Webber, Alec Bertina, *The Russian Imperial Movement in the Ukraine Wars: 2014-2023*, in CTC SENTINEL, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, August 2023, Volume 16, Issue 8, p. 23, p. 25, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-russian-imperial-movement-in-the-ukraine-wars-2014-2023/> (09.09.2024)

⁷ Daniel J. White, Jr., *Vanguard of a White Empire: Rusich, the Russian Imperial Movement, and Russia's War of Terror*, Naval Postgraduate School (U.S.), Center for Homeland Defense and Security, Monterey, California, USA, March 2024, p. 14, <https://www.hsdl.org/c/abstract/?docid=881387> (20.10.2024)

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 17

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 71-73

¹⁰ Mapping Militant Organizations, *Russian Imperial Movement*, April 7, 2023, <https://mappingmilitants.org/node/513/> (06.09.2024)

nation¹. Imperial and Orthodox symbols are essential in their propaganda messages, being used to create a link between the present and the glorious past of Orthodox Russia². Moreover, RIM's religious symbolism includes references to biblical elements, used to denounce behaviors and values the group considers "immoral" or "decadent"³. For instance, RIM uses the story of Sodom and Gomorrah to condemn decadence and other behaviors it deems deviant, describing them as condemned by God and destructive to Russian society⁴.

Religious symbolism, combined with nationalist and imperial symbols, helps create a group identity for RIM members, who see themselves not only as political activists but as soldiers for a divine cause, defenders of Orthodox faith and Russian ethnic identity⁵. This use of sacred symbols gives RIM members a sense of mission that goes beyond mere politics, transforming their violent actions into a form of "modern crusade" for national rebirth⁶. RIM uses Russian Orthodox symbols and other religious imagery to justify violence, blending spiritual traditions with nationalism. These symbols legitimize far-right extremist ideology and attract supporters through a distorted religious mythology that promotes sacrifice and struggle against the perceived "enemy". Thus, religion becomes a strategic tool for mobilization and online recruitment⁷. "Approximately 40% of posts" by movement members "on social media" include religious themes. These references are often linked to the idea that Russia must return to a "natural" state and restore the monarchy, presented as a God-given order⁸. Additionally, RIM associates many of Russia's modern problems with the abandonment of Orthodox religion and the "assassination of the last Tsar", seen as a "curse" upon the nation⁹. Their symbolic messages thus frequently include religious iconography and descriptions of their fighters, depicted as "Knights of Christ" and "martyrs"¹⁰.

RIM's propaganda is highly active online, using social networks such as VKontakte to spread nationalist messages and recruit members¹¹. The messages include narratives of authenticity and legitimacy, presenting the group as a defender of Russian traditions and a guarantor of "true values". RIM also portrays itself as an organization that understands the concerns and grievances of the public, thus building an emotional connection with its audience¹². Through social media and other media channels, RIM aggressively propagates its ideology, portraying Russia as a "holy nation" that must save the West from what it considers to be moral decay. This propaganda is effective in mobilizing supporters and recruiting new members, who join the movement believing they are part of a divine mission to save civilization¹³. Thus, religious symbolism, combined with imperialistic and anti-liberal ideas, transforms the political struggle into a perceived divine one. Religion thus becomes a tool for mobilization, offering justification for the group's radical goals and extremist actions.

¹ *Idem*

² Taylor Chin, *The Justification for Designating the Russian Imperial Movement as a Foreign Terrorist Organization*, CTEC – The Center on Terrorism, Extremism and Counterterrorism, Middlebury Institute of International Studies, Occasional paper, June 2024, p. 6, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/11bPEu7bg5Xf0osF1xOthBQ9DASIAq1Gz/view?pli=1> (25.09.2024)

³ Mapping Militant Organizations, *Russian Imperial Movement*, April 7, 2023, <https://mappingmilitants.org/node/513/> (06.09.2024)

⁴ *Idem*

⁵ Mapping Militant Organizations, *Russian Imperial Movement*, April 7, 2023, <https://mappingmilitants.org/node/513/> (06.09.2024)

⁶ *Idem*

⁷ Sara Morrell, *Mapping Extremist Discourse Communities on Telegram: The Case of the Russian Imperial Movement*, "Global Network on Extremism&Technology", 18th of September 2023, <https://gnet-research.org/2023/09/18/mapping-extremist-discourse-communities-on-telegram-the-case-of-the-russian-imperial-movement/> (30.09.2024)

⁸ Anna Kruglova, *For God, for Tsar and for the Nation: Authenticity in the Russian Imperial Movement's Propaganda*, in *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 47, No. 6, 2024, pp. 652-654, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2021.1990826> (30.09.2024)

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 652-654

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 656-657

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 649

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 654-656

¹³ Daniel J. White, Jr., *Vanguard of a White Empire: Rusich, the Russian Imperial Movement, and Russia's War of Terror*, Naval Postgraduate School (U.S.), Center for Homeland Defense and Security, Monterey, California, USA, March 2024, pp. 36-40, <https://www.hsdl.org/c/abstract/?docid=881387> (20.10.2024)

RIM and the international extremist networks

RIM maintains strong ties with other far-right extremist groups within Russia and abroad, including neo-Nazi groups. Although RIM does not officially define itself as a neo-Nazi organization, many of its members share similar extremist beliefs, including antisemitism and xenophobia towards immigrants¹. RIM's extremism is not limited to regional conflicts; it has a global dimension. The group actively seeks connections with other supremacist and extremist organizations in Europe and the USA, playing a significant role in the transnational white supremacist movement². RIM organizes military training sessions for extremists from other countries and participates in international conferences with other far-right groups, helping expand cooperation networks among these organizations³. RIM stands out for its international alliances with extremist groups, such as the NRM and US-based supremacist groups. These collaborations facilitate the exchange of ideologies, propaganda, and paramilitary training. Partizan, RIM's paramilitary wing, provides training not only for its members but also for other extremist groups, strengthening global networks of radicalization⁴. RIM has become a central pillar of far-right extremism in Russia and Europe, actively supporting terrorist attacks and providing paramilitary training to extremists worldwide⁵. The training provided at its camps in St. Petersburg reflects its ties to other international extremist groups, such as NRM, Germany's National Democratic Party, and U.S.-based organizations like the Traditionalist Worker Party (TWP), which provides logistical and material support⁶. RIM has also trained the youth wing of the German neo-Nazi group The Third Path in advanced military tactics⁷. RIM has been accused of engaging in terrorist attacks, including the 2022 bombings in Spain, where letter bombs were sent to embassies and official residences⁸. Between November and December 2022, RIM was accused of involvement in sending six letter bombs in Spain, including to the residence of the Spanish Prime Minister and the USA and Ukrainian embassies⁹. These attacks demonstrate that RIM is not limited to extremist propaganda but has both the capability and intent to conduct violent attacks outside Russia, amplifying its international security risk¹⁰.

RIM leader Stanislav Vorobiev acknowledged in an interview in early February 2023 that the movement has sympathizers in the United States, Spain, New Zealand, and Australia, and recruits new members, including for its military wing, through social media accounts¹¹. RIM has provided financial assistance to NRM, indicating a partnership beyond shared ideologies, and a RIM leader spoke at "Nordic Days" in 2015, an event hosted by NRM, revealing some level of cooperation or ideological alignment

¹ Lucas Webber, Alec Bertina, *The Russian Imperial Movement in the Ukraine Wars: 2014-2023*, "CTC SENTINEL, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point", August 2023, Vol. 16, No. 8, p. 24, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-russian-imperial-movement-in-the-ukraine-wars-2014-2023/> (09.09.2024)

² Mapping Militant Organizations, *Russian Imperial Movement*, April 7, 2023, <https://mappingmilitants.org/node/513/> (06.09.2024)

³ *Idem*

⁴ Talya Ackerman, *The Russian Imperial Movement: Digital Crusades and Orthodox Christian Supremacy*, "GARNET - Global Affairs and Religion Network", April 19, 2024, Student Events, <https://garnet.elliott.gwu.edu/2024/04/19/february-2-2024-the-russian-imperial-movement-digital-crusades-and-orthodox-christian-supremacy-by-talya-ackerman/> (30.09.2024)

⁵ Daniel J. White, Jr., *Vanguard of a White Empire: Rusich, the Russian Imperial Movement, and Russia's War of Terror*, Naval Postgraduate School (U.S.). Center for Homeland Defense and Security, Monterey, California, USA, March 2024, pp. 42-43, <https://www.hsdl.org/c/abstract/?docid=881387> (20.10.2024)

⁶ Anna Kruglova, *For God, for Tsar and for the Nation: Authenticity in the Russian Imperial Movement's Propaganda*, "Studies in Conflict & Terrorism", Vol. 47, No. 6, 2024, pp. 648-649, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2021.1990826> (20.10.2024)

⁷ Counter Extremism Project, *Russian Imperial Movement Provides Weapons & Combat Training to German Neo-Nazis*, June 11, 2020, <https://www.counterextremism.com/press/russian-imperial-movement-provides-weapons-combat-training-german-neo-nazis> (20.10.2024)

⁸ Mapping Militant Organizations, *Russian Imperial Movement*, April 7, 2023, <https://mappingmilitants.org/node/513/> (06.09.2024)

⁹ *Idem*

¹⁰ Mapping Militant Organizations, *Russian Imperial Movement*, April 7, 2023, <https://mappingmilitants.org/node/513/> (06.09.2024)

¹¹ Mark Greenblatt, *Russian Imperial Movement linked to terror campaign in Europe*, "Scripps News", Feb 10, 2023, <https://www.scrippsnews.com/world/europe/russian-imperial-movement-linked-to-europe-terror-campaign> (20.10.2024)

between the two groups¹. In September 2017, a RIM representative spent an extended period in the United States “connecting” with TWP, another far-right, national-socialist organization². TWP was active in promoting white supremacy and antisemitic ideologies before disbanding in 2018 due to legal challenges and internal conflicts. Closely allied with other white supremacist organizations, TWP was involved in the violent Charlottesville protest in 2017³. One of TWP’s founders, Matthew Heimbach, became associated with the “alt-right”. Heimbach is described as “a virulent antisemite” who promotes an extreme version of Orthodoxy to support “white nationalist views”. He believes that “traditional religion is crucial to preserving white heritage and culture” and sees it as “a bulwark against secular humanism, multiculturalism, and globalism”⁴.

In 2014, Matthew Heimbach “was publicly rebuked by the priest at his Orthodox Christian church, who said that Heimbach “must cease and desist all activities...promoting racist and separationist ideologies”⁵. Heimbach met with RIM members in the United States in September 2017, expressing TWP’s desire to serve as a representative for America at future RIM-organized gatherings. According to Heimbach, his ties with RIM date back to 2015. Heimbach played a central role in organizing the Unite the Right protest in Charlottesville in August 2017, where a car attack by a white supremacist caused one death and injured many others⁶. Following academic research, Iulian Dinulescu concluded that neo-legionary religious fanaticism, based on the ideology of the Archangel Michael Legion in Romania, known as the Iron Guard, remains relevant through a combination of ultra-nationalist, religious, and antisemitic ideas. Research revealed that Matthew Heimbach, an American extremist, considers Corneliu Zelea Codreanu an inspiration. During the violent protests in Charlottesville on August 12, 2017, Heimbach appeared wearing a shirt with Codreanu’s image, expressing admiration for the legionary leader. This event, which included violence resulting in deaths and injuries, demonstrated the influence of Romanian neo-legionary ideology on the American far-right, confirmed by experts such as Radu Ioanid⁷.

RIM is also involved in cooperation with other neo-Nazi groups, including Rusich and the Wagner Group⁸. Despite its connections with international extremist groups, RIM’s stance toward the Russian government remains ambiguous, allowing it to remain active without severe repression⁹. RIM actively engages with the global community, striving to broaden its worldwide impact. The movement partners with various extremist factions, including white supremacist groups across Europe and the United States, to propagate its aggressive ideology¹⁰. By April 2024, RIM had “over 50,000 followers online”¹¹. Since 2015, RIM has expanded its international networks by creating a World National-Conservative Movement in collaboration

¹ Lucas Webber, Alec Bertina, *The Russian Imperial Movement in the Ukraine Wars: 2014-2023*, “CTC SENTINEL, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point”, August 2023, Vol. 16, No. 8, p. 24, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-russian-imperial-movement-in-the-ukraine-wars-2014-2023/> (09.09.2024)

² *Ibidem*, p. 24

³ SPLC, *Traditionalist Worker Party*, “The Southern Poverty Law Center”, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/traditionalist-worker-party> (12.09.2024)

⁴ *Matthew Heimbach: Five Things to Know*, “Anti-Defamation League” May 01, 2018, <https://www.adl.org/resources/news/matthew-heimbach-five-things-know> (12.09.2024)

⁵ *Idem*

⁶ Counter Extremism Project, *Russian Imperial Movement Provides Weapons&Combat Training To German Neo-Nazis*, June 11, 2020, <https://www.counterextremism.com/press/russian-imperial-movement-provides-weapons-combat-training-german-neo-nazis> (20.10.2024)

⁷ Iulian Dinulescu, *Fanatismul religios legionar: de la apariția în România la promovarea de către extrema dreaptă din Statele Unite ale Americii*, Top Form, 2020, pp. 127-128

⁸ Anna Kruglova, *The Russian Imperial Movement, the war in Ukraine and the future of Russian state*, 01 Sep 2023, <https://www.icct.nl/publication/russian-imperial-movement-war-ukraine-and-future-russian-state> (06.09.2024)

⁹ Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Emelie Chace-Donahue, Colin P. Clarke, *Understanding the US Designation of the Wagner Group as a Transnational Criminal Organisation*, 25 Jan 2023, <https://www.icct.nl/publication/understanding-us-designation-wagner-group-transnational-criminal-organisation> (06.09.2024)

¹⁰ Taylor Chin, *The Justification for Designating the Russian Imperial Movement as a Foreign Terrorist Organization*, CTEC – The Center on Terrorism, Extremism and Counterterrorism, Middlebury Institute of International Studies, Occasional paper, June 2024, p. 18, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/11bPEu7bg5Xf0sF1xOthBQ9DASIAq1Gz/view?pli=1> (25.09.2024)

¹¹ Ethan Ingram, *Stopping Online Terrorism: Pulling the Plug on the Russian Imperial Movement*, “The International Affairs Review”, <https://www.iar-gwu.org/blog/iar-web/stopping-online-terrorism> (30.09.2024)

with Rodina (“Motherland”) - the far-right Russian party. The organization does not exclusively focus on “defending the white race or Christians,” but extends invitations to 58 groups worldwide, including countries such as Thailand, Japan, Syria, and Mongolia, as well as the United States¹. RIM is not an isolated entity but part of an expanding global network of white nationalist groups. These groups collaborate to produce propaganda, recruit new members, and share paramilitary skills². Thus, RIM collaborates with international extremist groups, consolidating transnational terrorism networks and facilitating the exchange of ultranationalist ideologies. Through military training and online propaganda, it recruits global members and supports violent attacks. The organization, allied with other neo-Nazi groups, poses a global threat to international security.

Conclusions

RIM represents a complex phenomenon of political and religious extremism that combines Russian nationalism, Orthodox religiosity, and paramilitary violence to achieve its objectives. Although founded on the ideology of restoring the Russian Empire, RIM has evolved into a transnational movement capable of destabilizing multiple regions, both through direct actions and by collaborating with other far-right extremist groups and organizations across Europe and the USA. A distinctive feature of RIM is its use of Orthodox religious symbolism to justify violence. The group instrumentalizes Russian Orthodoxy not only to legitimize its political agenda but also to mobilize public support. By crafting an eschatological narrative that portrays Russia as the ultimate defender of Christian values against the “decadent” West, RIM forges a link between national and religious identity, offering its supporters a sense of divine mission. This narrative leads to a progressive radicalization of its followers, transforming them into “soldiers of faith”, ready to use violence to defend Orthodoxy and Russia from perceived internal and external threats. Thus, religion becomes not merely an ideological framework but a catalyst for violent action, justifying terrorism and armed conflicts. Religious concepts are manipulated to turn political struggle into a modern “crusade” against globalism and liberalism, with a focus on Russian national and ethnic values.

Internationally, RIM has transformed these ideas into a mechanism for global mobilization, recruiting extremists from various countries and providing them with military training and logistical support. Thus, RIM has managed to create a transnational network that extends beyond mere ideology to become a functional infrastructure for terrorism. Its network of collaborators includes neo-Nazi groups, white supremacist movements, and other far-right organizations, such as the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) and the Traditionalist Worker Party (TWP) in the USA. Active involvement in international conflicts, like the one in Ukraine, demonstrates how RIM exploits regional instability to advance its own goals. Recruiting volunteers for combat and expanding its influence in other war zones, such as Syria and Libya, reflects the group’s global ambitions. Furthermore, its involvement in terrorist attacks, like those in Sweden and Spain, shows that RIM is capable of inciting violence not only in Russia but on other continents as well. Another important dimension of RIM’s strategy is its use of social media platforms for propaganda, recruitment, and coordination of violent actions. Through networks like VKontakte and Telegram, the group spreads messages of hate, promotes the superiority of Russian nationalism, and attracts new recruits from around the world. Notably, RIM not only disseminates its extremist ideology online but also organizes paramilitary courses for extremists, strengthening its global networks of radicalization. Despite being sanctioned and labeled a terrorist organization by numerous states and international bodies, RIM persists in its activities under the lenient oversight of the Russian government. This ambiguity in its position relative to the Russian state allows it to expand its influence and act within a “gray area” between national legality and transnational terrorism.

In conclusion, RIM is not merely a political or religious movement, but an extremely dangerous phenomenon that combines religion, nationalism, and terrorist violence into a form of globalized extremism. With its ability to mobilize supporters internationally, forge alliances with other extremist groups, and use modern technology for propaganda and recruitment, RIM poses a major threat to global security.

¹ Nicolas Lebourg, Oliver Schmitt, *The French ultra-right's attraction to Putin's Russia*, University de Montpellier, September 25, 2024, <https://www.umontpellier.fr/en/articles/lattirance-de-lultra-droite-francaise-pour-la-russie-de-poutine> (20.10.2024)

² Mark Greenblatt, *Inside the Global Fight for White Power*, July 23, 2022, “Reveal”, <https://revealnews.org/podcast/inside-global-fight-for-white-power/> (20.10.2024)

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