Winning the War of Ideas: How the United States Can Use Counter-Messaging to Fight the Russian Imperial Movement

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The Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) aims to portray itself in a way that conflicts with how it operates. The group wants to be seen as a politically savvy, nationalist group. However, RIM’s actions reveal it to be a violent and international paramilitary group that is a favorite tool of the Kremlin. Members have engaged in Syria, Libya, and Ukraine to justify Russian aggression and have also been linked to other terrorist groups in their training camps and worldwide conventions. The United States’ decision to designate RIM as a terrorist organization expanded the set of counterterrorism tools available, including some used against groups like ISIS and AQ. The SDGT designation successfully allows the US government to incentive corporate entities and economically sanction the group.

Violent white supremacy, however, is not contained within a nation’s borders; RIM demonstrated that groups are increasingly interconnected. For that reason, the United States should investigate RIM’s transnational network of white supremacist organizations. The organization has links to like-minded groups that pose threats to the United States. Twenty years ago, the United States underestimated the rise of Islamic terrorism. The United States needs to counter right-wing propaganda online as part of its CT strategy by using former white supremacists as messengers. Beating RIM will require a holistic CT approach, with resources dedicated to countering their online propaganda. This is the best way to halt the number of members joining and provide opportunities for disengagement from the organization and ideology.

Introduction

Shortly before invading Ukraine in 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed that Ukraine faced a problem with neo-Nazis. "The purpose of this operation is to protect people who for eight years now have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kyiv regime," he said, according to an English translation from the Russian Mission in Geneva. "To this end, we will seek to demilitarize and de-nazify Ukraine, as well as bring to trial those who perpetrated numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including against citizens of the Russian Federation." 1 This rhetoric, which several other high-ranking Russian officials repeated, has since been debunked. Moreover, reports surfaced that the alleged neo-Nazi threat is manufactured by Russia; in fact, the Kremlin is sending neo-Nazi groups into Ukraine to justify its violence. 2 One of the groups being sent to Ukraine is the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM). This is not the first time that RIM has attracted international attention and posed international security threats to the United States and its allies.

In 2020, the US State Department designated the Russian Imperial Movement as a terrorist organization. The 2020 listing was the first time that a far-right group - and three of its leaders - were labeled as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGT) by the United States. The designation symbolized the rising threat of right-wing extremism and the unique threat that this specific organization poses to the United States. A combination of the pandemic, disinformation, and increased political polarization has led to rising rates
of violent right-wing extremism at home and abroad. Since 9/11, jihadists have killed slightly fewer American citizens than far-right terrorists (107 compared to 112 victims). Black separatist/nationalist ideologues, misogynists, and far-left terrorists have killed 12, 17, and 1, respectively.

This paper will look at the dichotomy between how RIM presents itself and how it acts, discuss the current US counterterrorism (CT) strategy against the organization, analyze proposed CT measures, and then offer additional potential countermeasures to better combat RIM’s propaganda in conjunction with the SDGT designation. The United States’ decision to designate RIM as SDGTs is not an effective counterterrorism approach on its own. The United States should counter right-wing propaganda with strong counter-messaging as part of a more comprehensive counterterrorism (CT) strategy. Utilizing former white supremacists will help dissuade potential recruits from joining the organization and persuade members to disengage from the extremist ideology. Deradicalizing, or disengaging from violent political or religious extremism, is a complicated – and necessary - process. This can only be achieved through a carefully coordinated communications approach.

RIM Overview

It is important to understand a terrorist group’s ideology, strategy, and tactics in order to properly assess the best CT strategies to fight it. RIM is a St. Petersburg-based organization, formed in 2002 by Stanislav Anatolyevich Vorobyev, that promotes a white supremacist, right-wing, Orthodox Christian ideology. RIM is a nationalist organization, promoting ethnic Russian nationalism and the restoration of the Russian tsarist regime. RIM is strongly influenced by Russian philosopher Aleksandr Dugin, an ultranationalist – also known as “Putin’s brain” – who believes that it is the country’s religious imperative to spread Russian Orthodoxy through violence. The language used by RIM and other white supremacists is part of a concerted effort to craft “a less recognizable poison for the disillusioned white masses to swallow.”

Old racist tropes are polished to sound more like conservative foreign policy terms, such as the use of the word “globalism” as a euphemism for “Zionism.”

RIM operates within the Russian political system and maintains close relationships with Rodina, a far-right party co-founded by Russia’s Deputy Prime Minister, Dmitry Rogozin. Together, RIM and Rodina convened the World National Conservative Movement (WNCM) in June 2015, which catapulted the organization to the national stage, cemented its international network, and legitimized it as an asset in the eyes of the Kremlin. WNCM’s manifesto claims to bring together like-minded activists who believe that the world is governed by liberalism, multiculturalism, and tolerance that lead to mass migration, a loss of religiousness, overconsumption, and a lack of family morals and values.

This is a similar strategy to other right-wing extremist organizations. The Patriot Front, for example, seeks support from other Christian, right-leaning citizens by invoking political topics. RIM aims to project an image of a well-connected, politically savvy organization.

Yet this image is vastly different from how it truly operates. RIM is the epicenter of a global network of militant extremists. The Imperial Legion, RIM’s armed wing, prepares Russian militants to fight government security forces through “Partizan,” a training course led by ex-Russian military members. Intelligence suggests the Kremlin approves of – and may even directly support – the Partizan course.
It teaches bomb-making, marksmanship, combat medicine, assault, and building clearance. Imperial Legion members fought in Libya, Syria, and most recently, Ukraine. Analysts believe that RIM members are fighting in Libya on the side of the Libyan National Army, to support the Russian-backed Khalifa Haftar – but it is unconfirmed when RIM entered the region. According to RIM’s own social media, RIM has been sending fighters to Syria to protect Christians in the region since at least April 2019. In addition, RIM fighters have been reinforcing pro-Russian separatists fighting against the Ukrainian government since at least 2014. In 2015, RIM leader Stanislav Vorobyev explained that he does not believe in a separate Ukrainian nation and that the donations to the armed wing provide “clothes, shoes, special equipment—communications, body armor” for every militant it sends to Ukraine.

Partizan also provides paramilitary training to foreign nationals from its facilities in St. Petersburg. Some of these individuals were linked to international terrorist incidents, such as the 2017 bombing in western Sweden by two Swedish participants of Partizan and anti-lockdown protests and vigilante anti-migrant border patrols conducted by members of two German extremist groups (The National Democratic Party and The Third Path) in 2020. The organization is known for having a network of violent members and sympathizers abroad in preparation for the alleged war against the “globalized elite” who reject “traditional” values. It is a violent, paramilitary organization that spreads its ideology online and through in-person training. This ideology is not unique to RIM. The Irish Republican Army (IRA), for example, portrayed itself as an anti-British and non-violent organization, but undoubtedly employed violence. This strategy is common for extremist organizations; the good news is that the United States can learn from past organizations to determine what might hinder RIM.

The Kremlin and RIM

RIM and the Kremlin have a symbiotic relationship because they often share the same international goals. VOA reported that the Kremlin knew – and never hid - what the Russian Imperial Movement was doing. RIM’s recruitment efforts and pledge to send members to combat zones were beneficial to the Kremlin in its aggression against Ukraine. RIM is not officially sponsored by Russia, but it is tolerated by the Kremlin because it helps spur extremist action in countries opposed to Russia - one of the reasons why the State Department designated RIM as a terrorist organization. RIM has an outsized role on the international stage; it trains, recruits, shares information with, and builds connections with domestic extremists in the United States and its allies. RIM posts content online in English, German, and Russian to spread its ideology, and its propaganda videos include detailed paramilitary training.

RIM is a successful tool of the Kremlin because it created an international network of extremists. The transnational network helps to undermine and divide democracies, by sharing information and empowering other actors. Numerous American neo-Nazis traveled to Russia to attend networking conferences, where they were welcomed with open arms – a vast difference from how Russia treats internal dissent. In turn, white supremacists perceive benefits in supporting Russia. Firstly, they claim to have the same enemy – “globalism” and the “system” of elites. Second, both challenge the liberal world order and the current foreign policy...
approach. Third, they use similarly sexist language and masculine imagery. Both white supremacy and Putin’s ideology also have misogynistic roots. This is not a coincidence, as each of these claims happens to be antithetical to democratic institutions and the West. This allows white supremacists an opportunity to bond over qualities that separate them further from the United States.

Social media further enables white supremacists. Its decentralized structure allows individuals to connect and share information in a new way, enabling terrorists to directly and quickly reach a large audience without significant infrastructure, an ideal environment for “lone wolf” attacks. The fewer people believe in the value of political solutions, the more violence and division look like viable solutions. The Kremlin copies how RIM uses social media to further its agenda and will likely continue to impact US politics by influencing the political narratives in the United States. The Russian government uses sites like Gab and Parler to capitalize on existing support for the far-right, encourage chaos, and decrease trust in governments.

These efforts by the Kremlin have had successes in the United States, most notably related to the 2016 US presidential election, for which eleven Russian military intelligence officers were named in connection with a hacking conspiracy to undermine Hillary Clinton’s campaign. More recently, a January 2022 YouGov poll showed that Republicans viewed Putin more favorably than Democratic politicians, and in February 2022, two Republican members of Congress chanted for Putin and against Democrats. Previous Kremlin efforts focused on small, niche, social media websites but are gaining more prevalence on mainstream sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

Current CT Strategy: Overview of the SDGT Designation

Counterterrorism tools are chosen based on the threat that the terrorist organization poses, and the State Department’s decision to designate RIM as an SDGT in August 2020 demonstrated the significant threat that it posed to the United States. SDGT is both a symbolic and practical step in the fight against international white supremacist networks. Under Executive Order (EO) 13224 – authorized by the International Emergency Economic Powers Act – the President can declare national emergencies and direct the Departments of State and Treasury to designate foreign groups or individuals as Specially Designated Global Terrorists. The SDGT designation allows the United States to fight international white supremacy, by utilizing the power of sanctions. Significantly, the SDGT designation of RIM is the first time that the United States recognized a white supremacist group as an SDGT. Previously, the designation was reserved for jihadi terrorist groups, including ISIS, al-Qaeda (AQ), and its affiliates.

It is important to note that labeling a terrorist organization does not always create the desired effect. Terrorist designations can create a backlash effect because the listing is used as a status symbol and recruiting tool. There are several reasons why measuring the impact of a terrorist designation is difficult: a) it is difficult to connect national security strategy to direct outcomes and changes in how terrorists act; b) it is difficult to measure progress because of the challenges associated with measuring a counterfactual; c) it is hard to define how tactics impact strategy outcomes; and d) clandestine groups do not broadcast metrics. The designation itself does not change terrorists’ behavior, but the financial, legal,
The tools in the counterterrorism “toolbox” can be grouped into seven categories: diplomatic, information, military, economic, financial, intelligence, and law enforcement, also known as DIMEFIL. Different policies allow decision-makers the opportunity to use different tools, and the SDGT designation unlocks a set of CT policy tools that can be used against RIM: financial, law enforcement, and information. The first tool is financial, and it has largely been a success. For example, the Department of Treasury designated al-Shabaab financial facilitators and weapons smugglers, who are closely integrated with ISIS-Somalia. The SDGT designation allowed the Treasury to target the network of weapons traffickers, their associates, and affiliated businesses. An SDGT designation also allows the federal government to block and interdict assets of those affiliated with the organization. It can lead to criminal prosecutions, although it more commonly leads to civil penalties. Financial institutions are required to freeze RIM’s assets after being alerted by the State and Treasury Departments. The United States has an outsized impact on the global financial system, so these measures are particularly effective at blocking RIM’s access to assets in the US and the ability to move money. The SDGT designation successfully allows the US government to incentivize corporate entities and economically sanction groups such as RIM.

The second CT tool is a combination of intelligence and law enforcement measures. This tool has limited success because civil liberty protections granted by the First Amendment limit law enforcement from investigating US citizens who potentially consume RIM content. The First Amendment curtails the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security’s ability to investigate Americans but guarantees more authority to investigate individuals and groups associated with terrorist organizations. This differs from the expansive European and Canadian laws, which grant authorities the ability to outlaw domestic extremist groups and surveil suspects.

The SDGT designation is successful, however, against foreign agents of RIM or non-US citizens who provide support to RIM. They can be investigated, surveilled, and potentially prosecuted under SDGT. Even though the designation has not yet changed how law enforcement organizations investigate or build cases, it could lead to greater interagency cooperation between the domestic and international terrorism offices at the Department of Homeland Security, State Department, and National Counterterrorism Center, or through the Joint Terrorism Task Force. Furthermore, the designation will allow law enforcement to share intelligence with partners, aiding in the fight against terrorism. The 2018 National Strategy for Counterterrorism, a strategy document that complements the government’s rights to designate terrorists under SDGT, declares that the US government will work with state and local law enforcement, civil society, the private sector, and allied governments in the fight against terrorism. Measures by the State and Treasury Departments restrict RIM members from traveling to the United States and designate them as terrorists themselves. Additionally, RIM leadership is now restricted from building relationships with US citizens in person.

The third CT tool unlocked under the SDGT designation is related to information. This is considered the biggest failure of the campaign against RIM because recruitment and the sharing of ideology are done online and are therefore not impacted by the SDGT designation. Like other right-wing extremist
groups, RIM relies heavily on the Internet for recruiting, training, fundraising, propagating its ideology, and defining its enemies. RIM was banned from Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, it began moderating its content and moved to different platforms, including Google Forms and Russian social media sites, like VKontakte (the Russian equivalent of Facebook). Despite de-platforming initiatives, RIM has continued to recruit, train, fundraise, and spread its propaganda online through pages on Russian social media sites with more than 30,000 followers. Compelling technology companies to police users or require labels on extremist content risks violating First Amendment protections and is therefore not an effective CT strategy on its own.

**Evaluation of Current CT Strategy**

Gauging the success of CT strategies is challenging because it is impossible to know whether the outcome was a result of the strategy or some other factor. Terrorists are independent actors and often do not behave like the US government, nor do they share details about the outcome of certain strategies implemented against them. An internal schism, the death of a leader, or a shift in ideology could change the activity of the terrorist organization instead of it being a direct result of a CT measure. It is important to try to measure the effectiveness of certain strategies, however, because it “would allow policymakers to more efficiently allocate resources toward those activities having the greatest success.”

There are three outcomes one can use to quantitatively measure the effectiveness of CT programs: a) frequency, location, and targets of attacks; b) the number of groups and membership; and c) the frequency, lethality, simultaneous attacks, and types of weapons used before and after the designation. The US Government measures success by looking at the frequency of attacks, as well as the quantity of CT information shared. RIM has not committed a major attack outside of war zones since July 2020, suggesting that the current CT strategy is successful. However, a closer analysis paints a different picture. Since the 2020 terrorist designation, RIM engaged in violent campaigns, trained individuals who have perpetrated violent acts, and influenced a global network of white supremacists. In December 2022, German police arrested nearly 3,000 federal and regional law enforcement officers with connections to – if not support from – the Russian Imperial Movement.

The COVID-19 pandemic also changed the nature of how extremist groups spread propaganda. Increasingly more content is shared online, and actors see themselves as part of a global conversation. To reflect this change, counterterrorism success should thus be measured based on influence through online propaganda — a more qualitative measure than incidents or attacks. Influence can best be measured by how many people disengage from the right-wing ideology, but it can alternatively be measured by the presence (or absence) of key RIM messages online. One problem confounding a comprehensive evaluation of the strategy against RIM is that the United States designated RIM and its leaders as terrorists only in 2020. While there is not a set amount of time established in the literature on the length of time to measure progress against an organization, effectiveness is often measured across a longer period than two years. One can therefore use other terrorist organizations as case studies to predict how RIM may react to certain measures, but a more accurate assessment will be difficult until after a longer period of time.
Ineffective Proposed CT Strategy – FTO Designation

The SDGT designation allows the government to incentivize corporations and sanction groups – however, some analysts believe that the designation is not an effective military or law enforcement tool, nor does it properly stop individuals from being drawn into the ideology. The Secretary of State can designate a group as an FTO if it meets three criteria: it is a foreign entity, engages in terrorism, and threatens the United States. 48

Advocates of this type of countermeasure believe that RIM should be designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), either in addition to or instead of an SDGT, even though listings are not mutually exclusive and can both be applied to foreign groups. The State Department’s SDGT designation is different from the more well-known FTO designation. Under an FTO listing, the FBI and Justice Department have more leeway to pursue criminal cases, as they are able to investigate anyone with close ties to FTOs. Since September 11, 2001, most charges have been related to individuals providing material support to a terrorist group. FTO has most frequently been applied to jihadi terrorist organizations and has not been applied to a far-right or white supremacist group to date. 49

There are several reasons why RIM has not been designated as an FTO. The first reason is that under the authority for SDTG designation, EO 13324, the government can sanction individuals and entities that provide training to terrorists. 50 As RIM has a proven history of training an international network of white supremacists, this may be a particularly effective tool against the group; an FTO designation, on the other hand, more narrowly targets terrorist organizations that impact the United States. As the US has a documented list of individuals that have been trained through RIM and because RIM has not launched a physical attack against the US, FTO is less effective. The second reason is the SDGT is faster to officially designate and thus allows rapid action on countering the group. FTOs require a letter of concurrence from high-ranking officials in the Departments of Justice and Treasury to be sent to the State Department, as well as advance notification to Congress of the designation. The EO process does not require letters of concurrence nor advance notice to Congress, thus expediting the process. 51 Third, SDGT designations last longer than FTO designations - indefinitely compared to a renewal every two years. Moreover, FTO listings are subject to administrative reviews every five years, which entails a compilation of classified and open-source information to demonstrate whether the statutory criteria are satisfied. If the Attorney General, Secretary of the Treasury, and Secretary of State determine that the group no longer meets the legal requirements for an FTO designation, it is taken off the list. 52 If RIM was removed from the FTO list, it would send a troubling message about how the US views white supremacist groups. It is much harder to remove an SDGT designation, signifying the importance of countering RIM’s influence.

Ineffective Proposed CT Strategy – State Sponsor of Terror

Since 2020, Congress has debated the best way to combat RIM. The House Committee on Homeland Security voted to approve the Transnational White Supremacist Extremist Review Act, which “require[s] that the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) ‘develop and disseminate a terrorist threat assessment of foreign white extremist groups.” 53 This would have helped counter RIM – and other white supremacist groups – by giving DHS
the authority to centralize collection of this intelligence. The legislation, however, does not seem likely to pass in the Senate because of how polarized the topic of white supremacy has become. In April 2022, members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee wrote a letter to Secretary of State Blinken urging him to consider whether Russia meets the threshold for state-sponsored terrorism. They cited Russia’s war crimes in Ukraine and support of US-designated terrorist groups, like RIM, as examples. Putin has used non-state groups to engage in terrorist activity, prior to and during the Ukraine conflict. These two Congressional recommendations are largely symbolic because specific sanctions enabled by the label are already imposed on Russia. Such sanctions include arms embargoes, trade restrictions, and foreign aid suspensions. Furthermore, the United States will not likely designate Russia as a state sponsor of terror because the political implications of this label constitute a serious escalation in tensions.

**Potentially Effective Proposed CT Strategy – Counter-Messaging**

The current SDGT designation provides some CT tools but is not comprehensive on its own. Additional measures should be taken to ensure that the United States can spread counter-messaging to decrease the public and sympathizers’ support and share information with foreign partners. Exposing the falsities in RIM’s messages is one of the best ways to counter the organization’s ability to recruit and spread its propaganda. The government can play an important role in decreasing the demand for radical and extremist messaging.

The United States has previously implemented strategies to counter-message terrorists. For example, a recently declassified 2005 Annex H to the National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism outlines the Defense Department's strategic communications plan for the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). This strategy aimed to create and lead an international effort to deny the terrorists the resources needed by focusing on their extremist ideology. Coordination of manpower, technology, and financial resources enabled the US military, in conjunction with other US agencies and coalition partners, to align their own messaging, share information with partners, and counter jihadi propaganda. A similar strategy can be used against RIM and right-wing extremism.

The United States can model its counter-messaging strategy against RIM on how it countered ISIS’s messages. Like that of ISIS, RIM’s propaganda is varied and directed at numerous audiences. Both groups are successful at developing a core narrative for each audience and in shaping their message. ISIS’s core message is about a caliphate, or model society, for followers and destruction for non-believers. Their network then reinforces the message by creating a sense that the state cannot protect its citizens. This makes it easier to recruit followers and hinder opposition. This message is very similar to how RIM communicates. Unfortunately, US government initiatives are often too centralized, reactive, and risk-averse. A more proactive, decentralized approach would have more success and would allow credible authors the ability to counter RIM’s messages.

The United States should use a three-tiered communication strategy to combat RIM’s extremism. The first tier is international, in which the US government facilitates an effort to help identify and empower trustworthy actors to communicate. The United States would identify former white supremacists from the United States, RIM, and other extremist
organizations to carry the message because of their unique understanding of the path to radicalization and what it takes to disengage from the ideology. Since RIM has a global reach, the actors engaged could be Russian and US nationals, or from some of the organizations trained by RIM in Partizan. The second tier is the national coalition; this is where the United States would work behind the scenes to develop the core narrative that RIM is peddling a dangerous, extremist ideology. A joint task force comprised of White House, DHS, National Security Agency, FBI, CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency, State Department, and Department of Education personnel would be most beneficial because of the expertise on right-wing extremism, the magnitude of its threat, and its methods for communication and radicalization online that each agency possesses. The third tier is local; these are areas where people are at risk of radicalization. This is the most difficult step to identify because a) viewing white supremacist content does not necessarily mean that an individual is radicalized, b) it is not illegal in the United States, and c) it is difficult to convince technology companies to police content on their sites. As previously discussed, the First Amendment protects the right to view online content, complicating the ability of law enforcement to determine who may be radicalizing, as well as the ability of online websites to prohibit certain terms. Close monitoring of RIM’s social media sites by individuals on the ground and members of the intelligence community would provide insight into individuals most at risk of radicalization or those who had been radicalized.\textsuperscript{63} Mandatory training from the Department of Education could help teachers recognize the signs of extremism amongst the demographics of those most at risk – 13–17-year-old males.\textsuperscript{64} In \textit{Breaking Hate}, Christian Picciolini identifies several trends among individuals most at risk to radicalize, such as unresolved emotional, psychological, or physical trauma combined with shame.\textsuperscript{65} However, many people undergo traumatic events in their life. What causes certain people to become radicalized is a combination of “potholes and an imperiled search for identity, community, and purpose (ICP).”\textsuperscript{66} Trained teachers are an integral part of this strategy because they can identify students who exhibit the signs that make them vulnerable to radicalization.

A coordinating structure led by the United States would need to tie all three levels of the structure together. The group would need to be able to discuss securely and quickly, when necessary, in order to adapt to changing threats. The joint task force mentioned above would meet on a regular basis, discuss current threats, prepare recommended talking points, and flag updates for Congress and the President. A communications plan could serve as this coordinating structure that would identify the most effective communication channels and guarantee success.\textsuperscript{67} Ultimately, a long-lasting CT strategy would require the United States to get to the root of the problem. It will take time to change institutions and cultures that allow extremist views. The United States must learn from how it successfully countered AQ to fight RIM (and other right-wing extremist organizations). A combination of laws, government resources, and international cooperation will be necessary.

An effective counter-messaging strategy would both decrease support for RIM and convince supporters and members to leave the organization, as well as reintegrate former radicals into society. A two-pronged approach of decreasing support and encouraging members to leave would ensure that fundraising decreases and the recruitment messages do not circulate as effectively. If the United States were to
pursue this approach, they should measure the number of attacks, number of RIM members, reach of counter-messaging content, and number of members who leave the organization. Similar to how individuals are radicalized, they are deradicalized through a strong ideology instead of behavior and actions; in the case of RIM, individuals may be deradicalized through an ideology based on a new sense of identity, empathy, and sympathy for others. Strong counter-messaging is critical in order to encourage those with extremist beliefs to defect, deradicalize, disengage, and then reintegrate into society.

Twenty years ago, the United States underestimated the rise of Islamic terrorism. It should not wait for the white supremacist equivalent of September 11, 2001. The United States needs to counter right-wing propaganda online as part of its CT strategy by using former white supremacists as messengers. “The US and its allies must take decisive action to challenge these toxic ideas and counter the operatives who embrace them,” said Ali Soufan, former FBI counterterrorism agent, and Ambassador Nathan Sales, former acting U.S. Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights. Defeating RIM will require a holistic CT approach, with resources dedicated to countering their online propaganda. This strategy will provide the best way to halt the number of members joining and provide opportunities for disengagement from the organization and ideology.

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3 “Terrorism in America After 9/11,” New America, accessed March 28, 2022, http://newamerica.org/international-security/reports/terrorism-in-america/. Data does not show how many people have been radicalized but have not acted violently.
4 “Terrorism in America After 9/11.”
9 Counter Extremism Project, “Russian Imperial Movement (RIM),” Counter Extremism Project, accessed April 5, 2022, https://www.counterterrorism.com/threat/russian-imperial-movement-rim. Stanislav Anatolyevich Vorobyev said in January 2015, “Ukrainian nationalists are separatists. Ukrainian nationalism is an ideology used by the Bolsheviks against the Russian people… There is no Ukraine, there is New Russia [Novorosia]. Even the name ‘Ukraine’ is what the Poles called their extreme territories. The official name for this territory was Russian Vovodeship… Ukrainian nationalism are mainly young people born 23 years ago who are brainwashed.” Denis Valliullovich Gariyev said in January 2017, “We see Ukrainian-ness as rabies… A person is sick. Either quarantine, liquidation, or he’ll infect everyone.”
10 Stanford University, “Russian Imperial Movement.” RIM announced that two of its fighters were killed in combat in January 2020. Analysts believe that the number is likely higher than two.
11 Dunlop, “Aleksandr Dugin’s Foundations of Geopolitics.”
12 Dunlop.
13 Counter Extremism Project, “Russian Imperial Movement (RIM).”
14 Picciolini, Breaking Hate.
15 Bruce Hoffman, Inside Terrorism (Columbia University Press, 2017). The US did not designate IRA as a terrorist organization partially because it had strong diaspora support. Additional research is needed into the effect of Russian diaspora support on US policy toward RIM.
19 McCausland.
20 McCausland.
22 Foggett, Saltskog, and Clarke.
30 Stanford University, “Russian Imperial Movement.”
33 Counter Extremism Project, “Russian Imperial Movement (RIM).”
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40 “Inside The Russian Imperial Movement.”
42 Amy Sturm, “Class 12: Counterterrorism Toolkit.”
44 Foggett, Saltskog, and Clarke, “How Are Putin’s Far-Right Fans in the West Reacting to His War?”
45 Stanford University, “Russian Imperial Movement.”
50 “Inside The Russian Imperial Movement.”
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“Inside The Russian Imperial Movement.”

Carey, “Congress Members Call for Russia to Be Designated State Sponsor of Terrorism.”

“State Sponsors of Terrorism.” “State Sponsors of Terrorism” is a designation applied by the United States Department of State to countries which the Department alleges to have "repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism”. Inclusion on the list imposes strict unilateral sanctions.


Peter R. Neumann, “Options and Strategies for Countering Online Radicalization in the United States,” Studies in Conflict & Terrorism 36, no. 6 (June 1, 2013): 431–59, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2013.784568. North Korea, Cuba, Syria, and Iran are the only countries on the list.

“Annex H To the National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism,” March 4, 2005.


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