

CEP BRIEFING PAPER

Paramilitary Training Activities of Violent Right-Wing Extremists: Threat, Mitigation Opportunities, and Challenges

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Paramilitary Training Activities of Violent Right-Wing Extremists: Threat, Mitigation Opportunities, and Challenges

I. Introduction

In an in-depth [study](#) in 2020, the Counter Extremism Project (CEP), commissioned by the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, analyzed the transnational connectivity of the violent right-wing extremist (vXRW) and terrorist movement in five European countries and the United States. It argued that in particular since 2014 a new leaderless apocalyptic transnational vXRW and terrorist movement emerged, which is responsible for a growing amount of violence in all countries at the center of the study.

The study also outlined that all governments had developed a variety of countermeasures, ranging from prevention and countering violent extremist (P/CVE) approaches, approaches with a focus on executive and intelligence-led measures, to mixed strategies which integrated P/CVE with an increase in executive capacities as well as legal and administrative changes.

However, the study argued that due to the growing transnational connectivity of right-wing extremist and terrorist networks, both offline in physical networking hubs as well as online through specific online ecosystems, transnational measures and mechanisms would be an effective, complementary tool to national strategies and tactics.

From the analysis of the study, five main issue areas emerge, in which further transnational cooperation and coordination could be achieved to mitigate the threat emanating from this movement:

- (1) The further development of a common understanding and legal concepts, better capturing the terrorist nature of this developing threat.
- (2) Development of a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the various online ecosystems that underpin and connect the networks within this transnational movement and the deployment of already existing capacities, which are currently geared to counter Islamist terrorism online.
- (3) More in-depth analytics concerning the financial activities and transnational commercial connections of the vXRW and terrorist movement to allow for the potential adjustment of existing global counter terrorism financing mechanisms.
- (4) Greater awareness and the development of appropriate countermeasures focusing on the training activities within the vXRW movement, in particular paramilitary training. (Topic of this briefing paper)**
- (5) The further development of P/CVE approaches and concepts on a local, national, and transnational level, based on lessons learned.

Throughout 2021, CEP, supported by the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, will address these issues in a series of virtual events, bringing together relevant national and multilateral policy stakeholders. These events will be accompanied by a series of short reports, outlining the main operational and policy issues. Building on the discussions with relevant stakeholders, these papers will contain a range of concrete policy recommendations.

II. Paramilitary training of violence-oriented right-wing extremist and terrorist individuals presents a clear threat

One of the most concerning offline threats emanating from members of the transnational violent right-wing extremist and terrorist movement concerns ongoing paramilitary training activities. In the past few years, paramilitary training activities of members of this movement concentrated on locations in the United States,¹ Central and Eastern Europe,² as well as the Balkans, while in South African right-wing extremists have strengthened their connections to networks in the U.S. and Europe and served as an inspiration.³

The first time, such activities come to the forefront during the conflict in the Ukraine, where a significant number of European and American right-wing extremists traveled to the country to participate in the conflict.⁴ Their recruitment and travel was in many cases organized fairly professionally by groups on both sides of the conflict.⁵ Although the motivation of these extremist foreign fighters was multifaceted as some were simply seeking an adventure or a change in their life,⁶ while others went to Ukraine specifically to gain military training and experience.⁷ Some of these extremists remained in the country whereas others returned or are currently engaged in other conflict zones.⁸ Those right-wing extremist fighters that returned present a latent security risk in their home countries. Their military combat experience, coupled with their extremist ideologies, remain a serious concern.

The Ukraine conflict also increased the role and relevance of Central and Eastern European groups and networks for the transnational movement as a whole. Currently, networks and movements in Central and Eastern Europe provide an important source of inspiration for the transnational violent right-wing extremist and terrorist scene. Interestingly, both pro- and anti-Russian violence-oriented right-wing extremist networks exist in the region, providing for a

¹ Anti-Defamation League: The Militia Movement (2020), <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/the-militia-movement-2020>

² Kacper Rekawek: Looks can be deceiving: Extremism meets paramilitarism in Central and Eastern Europe. CEP Report, June 2021, https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/2021-06/CEP%20Report_Looks%20Can%20Be%20Deceiving_Extremism%20Meets%20Paramilitarism%20in%20CEE_June%202021_1.pdf

³ Haley McEwen: Global white supremacy cult: How the South African radical Right bolsters US extremism, Open Democracy, 11 February 2021, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/global-cult-white-supremacy-how-south-african-radical-right-bolstering-us-extremism/>

⁴ Kacper Rekawek: Career Break or a New Career? Extremist Foreign Fighters in Ukraine. CEP Report, April 2020, https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/CEP%20Report_Career%20Break%20or%20a%20New%20Career_Extremist%20Foreign%20Fighters%20in%20Ukraine_April%202020.pdf

⁵ Kacper Rekawek: Presentation at CEP Webinar "The Logistics Of Foreign Fighters From 3 Ideological Backgrounds", 30 September 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HL6hCKDCcQI>

⁶ Kacper Rekawek: Career Break or a New Career? Extremist Foreign Fighters in Ukraine. CEP Report, April 2020, page 17ff., https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/CEP%20Report_Career%20Break%20or%20a%20New%20Career_Extremist%20Foreign%20Fighters%20in%20Ukraine_April%202020.pdf

⁷ Kacper Rekawek: An effective ban on foreign fighting? Wider implications of the Czech policy towards foreign (terrorist) fighters, C-REX - Center for Research on Extremism, 20 September 2021, <https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/news-and-events/right-now/2021/an-effective-ban-on-foreign-fighting-wider-implica.html>

⁸ Kacper Rekawek: Presentation "The Afterlives of Extremist Foreign Fighters in Ukraine", CEP 25 November 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ld5XraAY-v0&t=1s>

multifaceted and complex threat environment.⁹ Furthermore, Eastern European networks, such as the Russian Imperial Movement, provided paramilitary training for violent right-wing extremist from Western European networks, such as the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM).¹⁰ Subsequently, in April 2020 the U.S. government designated the Russian Imperial Movement and members of its leadership as Specially Designated Global Terrorists, the first time that such a designation was used for a group in the right-wing extremist/terrorist spectrum.¹¹ This highlighted the latent threat of paramilitary training activities for violence-oriented right-wing extremists across international borders.

During the past years, commercially driven weapons and paramilitary training infrastructure has developed in Central and Eastern Europe which does not seem to deploy particular strict know your customer protocols when offering sensitive training services to foreigners. In addition, right-wing extremist networks and groups in the region have established their own paramilitary training infrastructure, including summer training camps for their members. Currently, however, foreign violence-oriented right-wing extremists tend to use the available commercial paramilitary training infrastructure to obtain their training.¹²

Furthermore, the close connection of many networks within the movement to the Mixed Marital Arts (MMA)¹³ scene in Europe and the United States as well as the penetration of violent right-wing extremist individuals in the professional security industry may aid in the preparation for and perpetration of violence and therefore deserves further analysis. In addition to the threat of increasing violence, economic and societal costs of increasing extremist behavior should not be underestimated.¹⁴

Finally, the following is important to note: Certain Central and Eastern European countries – Poland and the Baltic States – feature vibrant paramilitary scenes which, however, are largely controlled and sanctioned by their respective governments. These harness the pro-military enthusiasts into organizations which effectively constitute active military reserves. Such reserves are different from the bottom-up organized and sometimes ideological paramilitary outlets which dominate the paramilitary picture in the likes of Czech Republic or Slovakia.

⁹ Counter Extremism Project (CEP), Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism – Transnational Connectivity, Definitions, Incidents, Structures and Countermeasures, November 2020, page 13ff., https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/CEP%20Study_Violent%20Right-Wing%20Extremism%20and%20Terrorism_Nov%202020.pdf

¹⁰ These extremists were subsequently responsible for a range of bomb attacks in Sweden in 2016 and 2017, see Counter Extremism Project (CEP): Nordic Resistance Movement, <https://www.counterextremism.com/supremacy/nordic-resistance-movement>

¹¹ US Department of State: United States Designates Russian Imperial Movement and Leaders as Global Terrorists. Press Statement Secretary Michael R. Pompeo, 7 April 2020, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/united-states-designates-russian-imperial-movement-and-leaders-as-global-terrorists/index.html>

¹² Kacper Rekawek: Looks can be deceiving: Extremism meets paramilitarism in Central and Eastern Europe. CEP Report, June 2021, https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/2021-06/CEP%20Report_Looks%20Can%20Be%20Deceiving_Extremism%20Meets%20Paramilitarism%20in%20CEE_June%202021_1.pdf

¹³ Robert Claus: Ihr Kampf. Wie Europas extreme Rechte für den Umsturz trainiert. Die Werkstatt GmbH 2020.

¹⁴ Neil Ferguson, Johannes Rieckmann, Tim Stuchtey: Die Kosten des Extremismus. BIGS and CEP Report, February 2019, https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/Standpunkt_9%202019%20Ph2.pdf

III. Challenges

The complex threat environment in Central and Eastern Europe, characterized by the existence of multiple right-wing extremist networks and groups from various ideological orientations, ranging from pro-Russian groups to networks espousing an internationalist strategy, termed “Intermarium,” promoting a conservative “reconquista” against the liberal West,¹⁵ each with their own connections to violence-oriented right-wing extremists abroad, requires careful analysis and multifaceted approaches.

Currently, there seems to be a research gap outside the immediate region concerning an in-depth understanding of these networks and their ties, both online and offline to violence-oriented right-wing extremist networks, groups, and individuals abroad. Furthermore, both the existing commercially available as well as ideologically driven paramilitary training infrastructure is not yet sufficiently mapped,¹⁶ complicated more detailed threat assessments. Furthermore, apart from anecdotal information, financial flows towards as well as the network function of paramilitary training facilities in Central and Eastern Europe are not yet well understood.¹⁷

From a regulatory perspective, the commercial provision of weapons and paramilitary training does not yet seem to be sufficiently regulated within the European Union, resulting in a lack of effective standards for know your customer procedures within commercial facilities.¹⁸ As a consequence, compiled data on how many of such facilities exist, their location, and what training they provide is not available. What is encouraging is the European Union’s move to strengthen its regulation concerning precursor chemicals that can be misused for the construction of homemade explosive devices.¹⁹ Similar controls could be adopted in international fora to further mitigate this threat.²⁰

¹⁵ Counter Extremism Project (CEP), Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism – Transnational Connectivity, Definitions, Incidents, Structures and Countermeasures, November 2020, page 15., https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/CEP%20Study_Violent%20Right-Wing%20Extremism%20and%20Terrorism_Nov%202020.pdf

¹⁶ For a first overview see: Kacper Rekawek: Looks can be deceiving: Extremism meets paramilitarism in Central and Eastern Europe. CEP Report, June 2021, https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/2021-06/CEP%20Report_Looks%20Can%20Be%20Deceiving_Extremism%20Meets%20Paramilitarism%20in%20CEE_June%202021_1.pdf

¹⁷ See for example: Jonas Miller: Im Visier: Bayerische Neonazis planen den Umsturz. BR24, 3 November 2021, <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/bayern/im-visier-bayerische-neonazis-planen-den-umsturz,SnLF2lJ>

¹⁸ So far, EU regulation seems to focus primarily on the acquisition and possession of weapons but delegates the regulation concerning training downwards to the EU Member States, which is a necessary but not yet sufficient step. See for example: Directive (EU) 2021/555 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 March 2021 on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32021L0555&rid=1>

¹⁹ REGULATION (EU) 2019/1148 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 20 June 2019 on the marketing and use of explosives precursors, amending Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 and repealing Regulation (EU) No 98/2013, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019R1148&from=EN>

²⁰ Lena Maassen: World Shield Against IEDs Needed Now. Counter Extremism Project. The CounterPoint Blog, 9 July 2021, <https://www.counterextremism.com/blog/world-shield-against-ieds-needed-now>

Finally, the defensive mechanisms of global social media platforms against their misuse by violence-oriented right-wing extremist entrepreneurs remain inadequate. Recent research demonstrates that such individuals continue to misuse such global platforms for commercial purposes, including for the sale of unregulated arms, such as crossbows or knives.²¹

IV. CEP policy options

- Raise awareness among appropriate national authorities on the potential threat emanating from violence oriented right-wing extremists obtaining paramilitary training in commercial facilities.
- Increase data collection and analysis focusing on both the available commercial and ideologically driven paramilitary training infrastructure and potential connections between them.
- Explore the possibility of establishing an EU-wide database of operating commercial facilities, including information concerning the training that is offered, the weapons and materials used as well as the beneficial ownership of these facilities.
- Work towards establishing closer cooperation with governments in non-EU countries in which similar facilities operate and have been used by violence-oriented right-wing extremists in the past.
- Increase data collection and compilation of data concerning violence-oriented right-wing extremists that have traveled or aspire to travel to such facilities to obtain commercial training. This could be done through a specially dedicated project at the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL).
- Explore the possibility to strengthen national as well as European Union regulation focusing on commercial paramilitary training facilities and setting appropriate standards for customer due diligence as well as cooperation mechanisms with appropriate government authorities. One example could be the new legislative approach of the government of the Czech Republic, which essentially banned ideologically motivated paramilitary formations.²²
- Increase information exchange between appropriate government authorities in those countries from which violence-oriented right-wing extremists travel to obtain paramilitary training and authorities in those countries in which such commercial facilities operate. This

²¹ Ritzmann, Alexander and Holznagel, Daniel, Wo Wölfe Kreide Fressen. Die Rechtsextreme Infrastruktur auf Facebook, Instagram, YouTube und Twitter, CEP Report, November 2021, <https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/2021-11/CEP%20Bericht%20-%20Die%20rechtsextreme%20Infrastruktur%20auf%20Facebook%2C%20Instagram%2C%20Youtube%20und%20Twitter%20-%20public%20version.pdf>

For an English summary of the report see here:

<https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/2021-11/CEP%20Policy%20Brief%20-%20The%20extreme%20right-wing%20infrastructure%20on%20Facebook%20etc.%20Nov%202021.pdf>

²² Zákon č. 14/2021 Sb., <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2021-14>

could also include administrative measures that temporary ban travel of such individuals to obtain such training.

- Raise awareness among global social media platforms on the threat posed through the misuse of their services by violence-oriented right-wing extremist entrepreneurs, in particular when this misuse also includes the commercial sale of non-regulated weapons.

ANNEX

CEP Report: "Looks can be deceiving: Extremism meets paramilitarism in Central and Eastern Europe"

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Author: Kacper Rekawek, PhD

June 2021

This report is a first overview of the existing paramilitary training infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The region hosts a variety of paramilitary organizations. Some of these consider themselves anti-systemic, i.e. anti-democratic, anti-liberal, nativist, authoritarian, and also, at times, pan-Slavic or pro-Russian (apart from the Ukrainian case).

They are sometimes an integral part of the far-right political scene (Hungary, Ukraine) or exist largely outside it (Czech Republic, Slovakia) but their members share a lot of views with e.g. the broader Western European far-right or its most aggressive and militant component, the extreme right-wing (XRW).¹

CEE paramilitary groups are transnationally connected but their connections are directed eastward (i.e. with Russia or Russian groups or individuals). At the same time, the region's far-right radicals and right-wing extremist would be more, albeit not exclusively, oriented towards the West – as is demonstrated during trademark “nationalist” events in CEE – for example, the Independence Day March in Poland or the Day of Honour in Hungary, which attract a wide range of right-wing extremists from Europe and the United States.

The CEE far-right radicals and right-wing extremists are often perceived as militant, but their organizations are not paramilitary in nature (apart from the Ukrainian case). Their disconnect from the local paramilitary scenes is not the source of their international appeal. The pull factor of these networks and their inspiration for networks in the West mostly stems from the perception among right-wing extremists in the West that CEE is a homogenous, traditional, Christian, “white” region of Europe in which right-wing extremists are allegedly free to “be themselves.”

At the same time, some Western right-wing extremists have demonstrated that they seek opportunities to gain paramilitary experience and training in the CEE. Such training, however, rarely is conducted with likeminded individuals from the CEE or the region's paramilitaries. It is mostly acquired individually and in a commercial fashion at one of the region's many shooting ranges, clubs, or academies. These at times offer sophisticated training options for both local and foreign clients, without stringent know your customer protocols.

Two potential developments would constitute a particular worrying threat for policymakers and security authorities:

- a) If the Western right-wing extremists were to connect with some of the region's pan-Slavic paramilitaries (e.g. via joint Russian acquaintances). The Czech case of the so-called “Czechoslovak Soldiers” described in this report is the indicative for such a potential development.

- b) If the Western right-wing extremists make more concerted use of the sprawling paramilitary infrastructure in Ukraine which, despite external concerns, has so far been geared towards local customers, including members of local right-wing extremist organizations, some with a record of (para)military activities.

Consequently, the policy recommendations of this report are aimed towards mitigating these two potential threats. They advise a focus and further analysis of the CEE's pan-Slavic and non-governmental paramilitaries and their links to Moscow, advise involving Ukrainian authorities in collecting information about foreigners seeking training there, similar to the already ongoing cooperation between the Ukraine and the United States, and explore the possibility to restrict travel of high-risk violent right-wing extremist individuals in order to bar them from accessing the commercial training infrastructure. Finally, the report suggests exploring the existing Czech legal arrangements that bars paramilitary training for civilians as a potential blueprint for similar legal mechanisms.

CEP Report: “Career Break or a New Career? Extremist Foreign Fighters in Ukraine”

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Author: Kacper Rekawek, PhD

April 2020

This report focuses on the few hundred Western individuals with extreme right wing (XRW) or “nationalist” convictions that traveled to fight in the conflict in Ukraine. Many of these individuals had known each other from before the war. They had made an exceptional decision to deploy to a foreign war but otherwise, do not stand out from among their peers in the Western XRW milieu. Many had been members of XRW political parties before the war, some had experience with political militancy.

Neither side of the Ukraine conflict purposefully mobilized foreign fighters along XRW lines. However, it is also true that members of such broader Western milieus must have found elements of the Ukrainian as well as the “separatist” political discourses sufficiently appealing to join. Marrying this discourse with their fatalistic approach to life in the West, where they are allegedly repressed or ostracized and where they think that they cannot get a fair hearing for their ideas, was the key motivation behind their deployment to the war in Ukraine. The conflict provided them with a chance of leaving behind the hated West (“here”) to fight their real or imaginary enemies that is broadly understood as the Western establishment or mainstream (“there”) – in this case, in Ukraine.

The fighters were enchanted with visions of either a nationalist revolution (on the Ukrainian side) or a “Donbass in my country” (on the “separatist” side), a revolt aimed at the overthrow of the hated political order. At the same time, they confess to being too weak to attempt something similar in their countries of origin (too weak for “Donbass in my country”). This admission only strengthened their determination to fight in Ukraine.

Ukrainian units that hosted such fighters did not mind them coming to Ukraine, but the units were not set up with an intention of becoming global XRW hubs. These units would ideologically evolve along the same lines independent from the arrival of Westerners in their ranks. Nowadays, some members of the Ukrainian XRW scene are ready to host and liaise with foreigners as they are keen on making anti-Russian inroads into the Western XRW milieu. They are not, however, hosting them in Kyiv with the view of turning them into XRW terrorists, who could stage attacks upon their return home.

The situation is more complex on the “separatist” side. They abhorred the idea of hosting Czech XRW fighters who are intent on staging terrorist attacks back at home (e.g. the Czechoslovak Soldiers in Reserve). However, the Russian Imperial Movement, recently designated as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) by the United States, which previously funneled the fighters into Donbass, is ready to host and train, e.g. members of violent and anti-democratic organizations such as the Nordic Resistance Movement. Simultaneously, the groups such as the Russian National Unity of A. P. Barkashov, an organization with a track record of terrorist activity in the Baltic States, also sent members into the ranks of the “separatist” forces.

The Russian aspect in connection with the XRW issue in the West has so far been understudied. Russian organizations not only train or recruit people from the former Soviet Union to fight in the East of Ukraine but later also funnel them to other conflict zones like Libya or Syria. Moreover, Russia hosts the pipeline through which the XRW foreign fighters joining the “separatist” side were travelling. It did not object to their travel to Moscow, and rarely intercepted them on the way to the Rostov Oblast in the South of the country and close to the Ukrainian border where a rudimentary hosting infrastructure was put in place.

XRW fighters share a set of common beliefs (traditionalism, anti-consumerism, anti-capitalism, anti-socialism, anti-liberalism, dislike/hatred of the EU/NATO/the U.S./Israel, sympathy for president Putin but not necessarily Russia etc.). Therefore, their choice to join different sides of the conflict in Ukraine was not based on ideology. Quite often their choice was influenced by individual or group connections (e.g. the Party of Swedes with the Ukrainian Svoboda) with a “gate keeper” (journalist, activist, humanitarian worker, etc.) closer to a given side. This led to a so-called civil war within the Western XRW milieu with pre-war peers or colleagues shooting at one another in the East of Ukraine.

These – sometimes random – choices of a side in the conflict are an indication of the shallowness of the ideological convictions of the individual XRW fighters. For them the war in Ukraine was post-modern, tribal, memetic in nature as many fought in defense of their preferred symbols, images, and even badges, and not grand ideologies.

Three groups of XRW foreign fighters in Ukraine emerge: the “resetters” (i.e. those wanting a new career in a new country – Ukraine or the “separatist” republics), the “ghosts” (i.e. those coming back and forth to the frontline, after recuperating and fundraising spells back at home), and the “adventurers” (i.e. the restless, publicly available and open about their intention to fight in other wars in the future).

The XRW alumni of the war in Ukraine, especially the adventurers, redeployed to different conflict areas around the world. They are still looking for their “Donbass” wherever they might find it.

Soufan Center: “Special Report: Inside the Russian Imperial Movement”

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April 2020

The U.S. Department of State’s designation of the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) as a terrorist organization is a significant and unprecedented policy step toward taking more concrete action against this group. The State Department’s designation was announced against the backdrop of a growing white supremacist threat in the United States and around the world. The designation underscores the reality that violence stemming from WSE groups pose an equivalent, or perhaps even greater, threat to that of Salafi-jihadist groups like the Islamic State and al-Qaida, to the U.S. homeland.

RIM and the Imperial Legion, the group’s military wing, have been responsible for training white supremacist terrorists and cooperating with U.S.-based white supremacists. RIM also has clear links to the Sweden-based neo-Nazi group, the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM), a group that U.S. President Donald Trump has highlighted in his National Security Strategy on Terrorism as a potential threat to U.S. national security and American interests overseas. It is crucial for the U.S. government to further investigate transnational networks of white supremacy groups abroad, particularly those like RIM and NRM, which have connections to the United States and the West.

The designation unlocks a set of practical policy tools that allow U.S. authorities and the private sector to monitor the activities of RIM and those who associate with it. Additionally, the designation can lead to tangible action. This includes prosecutorial leverage in applying civil and criminal penalties to RIM and its associates; provide the Treasury Department the ability to designate RIM individuals; the freezing of RIM’s assets in the United States; curbing RIM’s entry and that of its leaders and supporters into the United States; and influencing social media and technology companies to take down the group’s hateful and violent content on the internet. The U.S. Government and its relevant agencies should move to operationalize the tools now at their disposal to ensure that the designation is not only symbolic, but results in tangible gains in countering these groups and their broader network.

There are important differences between the ‘Specially Designated Global Terrorist’ (SDGT) designation – by which RIM is designated – and the Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) designation. It is important to note that an FTO designation provides slightly more leverage to the U.S. Department of Justice, particularly as it relates to pursuing material support charges against U.S. citizens associated with RIM, but this does not in any way diminish both the symbolic and practical importance of the State Department’s SDGT designation of RIM.

The U.S. Congress has taken important steps in recognizing the rising threat of violent white supremacy and far-right extremism, including through proposing legislation. Similarly, the international community, specifically the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (UN CTED), has reported on the threat, including a 320 percent rise in extreme right-wing attacks globally in the last five years, and, as a consequence, has sparked critical discussions to better understand the complexity of the threat, including its transnational nature.

Soufan Center: “White Supremacy Extremism: The Transnational Rise of the Violent White Supremacist Movement”

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September 2019

White supremacy extremism (WSE) is a transnational challenge – its tentacles reach from Canada to Australia, and the United States to Ukraine – but it has evolved at a different pace in different parts of the world.

To make serious progress, the United States should consider building upon Canada and the United Kingdom’s leadership by sanctioning transnational WSE groups as foreign terrorist organizations. U.S. Departments of State and Treasury terrorist designations could hinder the travel of terrorists into the United States; criminalize support to designated individuals and groups; block the movement of assets to those designated; and allow for the Department of Justice (DOJ) to prosecute individuals for providing material support to designated groups.

While there are crucial differences between jihadis and white supremacy extremists, there are also important similarities and particular ways these groups feed off of each other, including: the utility and cycle of violence; use of the internet; propaganda; recruitment; financing; and the transnational nature of the networks.

White supremacy extremist groups and individuals accrue wealth through both licit and illicit sources of finance. WSEs also accrue, move, and store their wealth through various means but as payment processors curb access to their platforms, these groups have relied on cryptocurrency or other alternatives to fiat currency.

WSE operational tradecraft has not significantly evolved over time and remains rooted in the use of conventional weapons, especially light arms. What has changed is the speed in which social media allows for the amplification and glorification of attacks.

The rapid expanse of social media facilitates radicalization and recruitment within the white supremacy extremist domain. Spaces in which radicalized individuals can communicate and share content enable the development of a worldwide, rapidly expanding network of white supremacy extremists.

Recruitment and radicalization goals within white supremacy extremism remain consistent over time, despite traditional methods of spreading propaganda diverging from more modern ones. Extremists intend to expand their influence and power through a variety of recruitment tactics, new and old.

U.S. government efforts to combat the WSE threat remain lacking. The international community has also lagged in developing policies to counter white supremacy extremism. More resources, both financial and human, need to be directed at white supremacy extremism to curb its rise. Governments should review their terrorism laws to ensure that they are sufficiently updated to prosecute individuals who carry out acts of domestic terror.

Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES) Occasional Paper: “Far-Right Group Made Its Home in Ukraine’s Major Western Military Training Hub”

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September 2021

Evidence uncovered in this paper suggests that since 2018, the Hetman Petro Sahaidachny National Army Academy (NAA), Ukraine’s premier military education institution and a major hub for Western military assistance to the country, has been home to Centuria, a self-described order of “European traditionalist” military officers that has the stated goals of reshaping the country’s military along right-wing ideological lines and defending the “cultural and ethnic identity” of European peoples against “Brussels’ politicians and bureaucrats.” The group envisions a future where “European right forces are consolidated and national traditionalism is established as the disciplining ideological basis for the European peoples.”

The group, led by individuals with ties to Ukraine’s internationally active far-right Azov movement, has attracted multiple members, including current and former officer cadets of the NAA now serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Apparent members have appeared in photos giving Nazi salutes and made seemingly extremist statements online.

The group has been able to proselytize Ukraine’s future military elite inside the NAA. Apparent members have also gained access to Western military education and training institutions. One apparent member of the group, then NAA cadet Kyrylo Dubrovskiy, attended an 11-month Officer Training Course at the United Kingdom’s Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, graduating in late 2020. During that time, Dubrovskiy apparently maintained ties to the group. Another apparent member and then NAA cadet, Vladyslav Vintergoller, attended the 30th International Week held by the German Army Officers’ Academy (Die Offizierschule des Heeres, OSH) in Dresden, Germany, in April 2019. Meanwhile, inside Ukraine, members of the group have apparently had access to American military trainers, as well as American and French cadets. As recently as April 2021, the group claimed that since its launch, members have participated in joint military exercises with France, the UK, Canada, the U.S., Germany, and Poland.

The group claims that its members serve as officers in several units of Ukraine’s military. These claims appear credible because of the group’s confirmed presence in the NAA and the fact that some apparent members likely joined Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) units after graduating between 2019 and 2021. Since at least 2019, Centuria has announced several mobilizations, calling on ideologically aligned members of the AFU to seek transfer to specific units where the group’s members serve. To attract new members, the group – via its Telegram channel, which has over 1,200 followers and a dedicated mobilization bot – continues to tout its alleged role in the AFU and access to Western training, military, and exchange programs.

The group has strong ties to Ukraine’s far-right Azov movement, has promoted Azov to NAA cadets, and credibly claimed that its members lectured in the Azov Regiment of the National Guard, the military wing of the Azov movement. The image of strong ties between the former and Centuria’ is further reinforced by the fact that an Azov-linked magazine contemporaneously reported the group’s presence within the NAA in 2018; by supportive

statements from Azov figures; by photos of the group's apparent leaders and members with Azov leaders; and by Centuria's participation in a political rally with the Azov movement. Online, Centuria has been endorsed by leading figures of the Azov movement, and apparent leaders and members of the group have appeared in photos with Azov's leader, Andriy Biletsky, and key spokesman for the movement Yuriy Mykhalchyshyn. The National Corps party, the political wing of the Azov movement, and the Azov Regiment did not return the author's requests to comment.

Centuria's ties to the Azov movement are alarming because the U.S. Congress banned the use of U.S. budget funds "to provide arms, training, or other assistance to the Azov Battalion" in 2018 and has since maintained that provision, including in the 2021 government spending bill. Centuria's access to Western military training through the NAA and its alleged presence in the AFU may benefit the Azov movement. American lawmakers have repeatedly called on the Department of State to designate Azov as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). In the most recent such call, in April 2021, Democratic Congresswoman Elissa Slotkin wrote to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken that "the Azov Battalion [...] uses the internet to recruit new members and then radicalize them to use violence to pursue its white identity political agenda." Yet the U.S. and Western governments have not called on the government of Ukraine to sever ties with the Azov movement, and that far-right organization remains integrated into the government of Ukraine via the Azov Regiment.

When reached for commentary about Centuria's activities, apparent leaders, and ideology, the National Army Academy denied that the group operated within the institution and stated that its probe into the group's alleged activities had turned up no evidence of such activities. But evidence collected in this paper firmly places the group in the academy. The NAA spokesman emphasized the Academy's intolerance of extremism. Belying such statements, in yet another case, an NAA cadet was apparently involved as a firearms instructor with an Azov movement-linked far-right group that the United Jewish Community of Ukraine accused in 2021 of spreading antisemitic propaganda. NAA cadets also appear in photos making gestures alluding to Nazi salutes.

Centuria's evident ability to operate within the NAA and its credible claims regarding its presence in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and access to Western training and military are likely just one of the consequences of the apparent lack of screening—by the Ukrainian authorities and Western governments alike—of Ukrainian servicemen for extremist views and ties to extremist groups. The Ukrainian military's failure to check Centuria activities suggests a level of tolerance on its part for the apparent proliferation of far-right ideology and influence within the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Reached for comment, Ukraine's Ministry of Defense stated that it does not screen those entering the military or military cadets for extremist views and ties. Meanwhile, several Western governments involved in training and arming Ukrainian troops stated, in response to the author's request, that Ukraine is responsible for vetting Ukrainian soldiers trained by the West. None of the Western governments contacted – the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany – vet Ukrainian training recipients for extremist views and ties.