

Russian Imperial Movement (RIM)

Name: Russian Imperial Movement (RIM)

Type of Organization:

- Neo-Nazi
- white supremacist

Ideologies and Affiliations:

- Monarchist
- neo-Nazi
- paramilitary
- Orthodox Christian
- violent
- white supremacist

Place of Origin:

Russia

Year of Origin:

2002

Founder(s):

Stanislav Anatolyevich Vorobyev

Places of Operation:

Russia, Ukraine, Syria, Libya

Overview

Also Known As:

- Russkoe Imperskoe Dvizhenie¹
- Russkoe Imperskoye Dvizheniye²
- RID³
- RIM⁴
- Imperial Legion⁵
- Russian Imperial Legion⁶
- RIL⁷
- Saint Petersburg Imperial Legion⁸

Executive Summary:

The Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) is a fascist group based in St. Petersburg, Russia, that seeks to create a “mono-ethnic state” led by a “Russian autocratic monarchy,” preferably one descended from the Romanov dynasty that ruled Russia before the 1917 revolution.⁹ Although the group is not sponsored by the Russian state, the RIM has allegedly recruited and trained Russian fighters for Russia’s ongoing conflict with Ukraine.¹⁰ The RIM is best known for having members and sympathizers linked to violent activity abroad. Its militant branch, the Imperial Legion, reportedly has sent fighters to Ukraine, Syria, and Libya.¹¹

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The RIM also runs a training course in St. Petersburg known as “Partizan.”¹² Courses are reportedly led by ex-Russian military members, who conduct trainings on bombmaking, marksmanship, combat medicine, and small group tactics such as assaulting and clearing buildings.

Additionally, the RIM has supported the efforts of neo-Nazi groups in Scandinavia. Two members of the Swedish, neo-Nazi [Nordic Resistance Movement](#), Viktor Melin and Anton Thulin, underwent the Partizan military training course before carrying out a series of bomb attacks against refugee centers in Sweden in January 2017.¹³ During their trial, the prosecutor stated that “attending this paramilitary camp in St. Petersburg was a key step in Melin and Thulin’s radicalization.... We also believe it may be the place where they learned to manufacture the bombs that they used in Gothenburg.”¹⁴

The RIM has also networked with non-Russian white-supremacist groups. According to media reports, in 2020, extremists who belonged to the youth wings of two German far-right political parties—the National Democratic Party (NPD) and The Third Path—attended Partizan, where they received training in weapons, explosives, and close combat.¹⁵ In June 2015, the RIM reportedly worked with the Russian political party Rodina to convene the World National-Conservative Movement (WNCM).¹⁶ Rodina is an extreme-right faction founded in 2003 by Dmitry Rogozin, who served as Russia’s deputy prime minister from 2011 to 2018, overseeing the country’s defense industry.¹⁷ WNCM’s manifesto claims to bring together like-minded activists who believe that the world is governed by “liberalism, multiculturalism and tolerance” that results in “the erosion of nations, massive migration from countries with foreign civilizational bases, falling away from religion, replacement of spirituality by materialism, impoverishment of cultures, destruction of the family and healthy moral values” through “abortion, propaganda of debauchery and acceptance of sexual perversions.”¹⁸

Matthew Heimbach, founder of the U.S.-based Traditionalist Worker Party (TWP), met RIM representatives in the United States in September 2017.¹⁹ Heimbach said of the meeting, “We’re really aiming to have TWP kind of be the representative of America at the future gatherings of the Russian Imperial Movement.”²⁰ According to Heimbach, he and the RIM have been in contact since at least 2015.²¹ Heimbach also stated in 2016 that he had intended to participate in the WNCM conference in 2015 but was unable to due to unspecified circumstances.²² Heimbach was a central organizer of the August 2017 Unite the Right protest in Charlottesville, where a vehicle attack by a white supremacist killed one and injured at least 30 others.²³

The RIM; its militant branch, the Imperial Legion; and the Partizan training course all operate official pages with more than 30,000 followers on the Russian social media site VKontakte (VK). These pages are used to advertise activities, attracts new recruits, and connect with supporters globally.

Doctrine:

The RIM is an ultranationalist, Orthodox Christian, paramilitary organization that is outwardly opposed to President Vladimir Putin and has the stated aim of restoring the Russian monarchy.²⁴ The group opposes globalization, multiculturalism, and liberalism, and operates alongside other international white-supremacist extremist groups.²⁵

While the group is not officially sponsored by the Kremlin, some analysts believe the Russian government tolerates the RIM. Georgetown University professors Shelby Butt and Daniel Byman argue that one reason for this is that much of the RIM’s activities are focused on aiding extremist groups operating in countries whose governments are opposed to Russia.²⁶ The RIM works with white-nationalist groups in Europe and the United States, in what these groups consider a war against a “globalized elite” who reject “traditional” values.²⁷ The group has also fought alongside the Russian army and other Russian paramilitary formations in Ukraine, Syria, and Libya.²⁸

Organizational Structure:

The RIM has a paramilitary wing, the Imperial Legion, which reports directly to RIM leadership.²⁹ The RIM also runs a weeklong military training course, Partizan, for both its own members and members of foreign white nationalist movements.³⁰ According to RIM leader Stanislav Vorobyev, Partizan courses were created in June 2014 due to the high number of “volunteers” with no military experience, who sought to travel to Eastern Ukraine to fight the Ukrainian government.³¹ After receiving their training, these men traveled to Ukraine as part of the newly formed Imperial Legion.³² Between June and December 2014, the RIM had reportedly sent at least 100 such militants to frontline positions under the banner of the Imperial Legion to fight in Ukraine.³³ Alongside these militants, RIM member Alexander Zhuchkovsky organized more than 30 million rubles worth of shipments of weapons and military equipment to Ukrainian separatists.³⁴

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According to posts on the official Imperial Legion VK page, members of the militant group have gone on to fight alongside other Russian mercenaries in Syria and Libya, with two RIM men dying while fighting alongside Russian-backed warlord Khalifa Haftar.³⁵

Financing:

In a 2015 interview with a sympathetic Russian outlet, RIM leader Stanislav Vorobyev claimed that the Imperial Legion is entirely funded through donations, and that the RIM receives enough money to provide “clothes, shoes, special equipment—communications, body armor” for every militant it sends to Ukraine.³⁶ “If there are twice as many donations, we can send twice as many people,” Vorobyev added. “If there are none, we won’t be able to send anyone.”³⁷

Recruitment:

In June 2015, the RIM reportedly worked with the Russian political party Rodina to convene the World National-Conservative Movement (WNCM).³⁸ Rodina is an extreme-right faction founded in 2003 by Dmitry Rogozin, who served as Russia’s deputy prime minister from 2011 to 2018, overseeing the country’s defense industry.³⁹ WNCM’s manifesto claims to bring together like-minded activists who believe that the world is governed by “liberalism, multiculturalism and tolerance” that results in “the erosion of nations, massive migration from countries with foreign civilizational bases, falling away from religion, replacement of spirituality by materialism, impoverishment of cultures, destruction of the family and healthy moral values” through “abortion, propaganda of debauchery and acceptance of sexual perversions.”⁴⁰

Extremist groups from 28 countries attended WNCM in 2015, including several far-right European political parties. Among them were the [Nordic Resistance Movement](#) (NRM) from Sweden; [Jobbik](#) from Hungary; the [National Democratic Party of Germany](#) (NPD); [Golden Dawn](#) from Greece; British Unity from the United Kingdom; Front National from South Africa. Four U.S.-based groups participated, including the American Freedom Party, American Renaissance, League of the South, and the Traditionalist Youth Network.⁴¹ In 2020, several men belonging to the NPD and The Third Path’s youth movements reportedly attended the RIM’s training camp in St. Petersburg, where they were taught how to use weapons and explosives.⁴²

The RIM, the Imperial Legion, and the Partizan training course are all able to attract foreign interest through their online outreach, largely conducted via their official VKontakte (VK) pages, which have more than 30,000 followers. NRM members who had previously undergone military training by the RIM carried out multiple bomb attacks against refugee centers in Sweden in January 2017. The leader of the Traditionalist Youth Network helped organize the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, after members of his group attended the WNCM conference.⁴³

Training:

The RIM operates a training course in St. Petersburg known as “Partizan.”⁴⁴ The group makes no attempt to hide its training operations, publicizing its address on the Partizan VKontakte social media page, and many foreigners have reportedly taken the course after learning about it online.⁴⁵ Partizan was officially established in June 2014 to provide military training to the many RIM-affiliated men seeking to fight against the Ukrainian government.⁴⁶ However, the RIM had already operated a similar course prior to this.⁴⁷ Many graduates of Partizan formed the core of the Imperial Legion, although the course is open to men unaffiliated with the RIM as well.⁴⁸ According to The Soufan Center, all men who participate in the Partizan course hold white-supremacist and neo-Nazi beliefs.⁴⁹

Partizan runs for one to two weeks, training groups of between 10 and 15 men at a time. The course consists of “military-style training,” which includes bombmaking, marksmanship, combat medicine, and small-group tactics such as assaulting and clearing buildings.⁵⁰ According to Vorobyev, some of the trainers are former Russian military service members.⁵¹ More than 500 men were trained in the Partizan course and its predecessor between 2011 and 2017.⁵²

Two of the three Swedish neo-Nazis responsible for a string of bombing attacks in January 2017, Viktor Melin and Anton Thulin, participated in the Partizan training course.⁵³ During their trial, the prosecuting attorney stated that “attending this paramilitary camp in St. Petersburg was a key step in Melin and Thulin’s radicalization.... We also believe it may be the place where they learned to manufacture the bombs that they used in Gothenburg.”⁵⁴

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Key Leaders



Stanislav Anatolyevich Vorobyev
Founder and leader



Denis Valiullovlivich Gariyev
Head of RIM's paramilitary arm,
Imperial Legion



**Nikolay Nikolayevich
Trushchalov**
Coordinator for external relations



Alexander Zhuchkovsky
Logistics head

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Violent history:

- **June 2014:** The RIM creates the two-week Partizan training course for men who wish to fight in eastern Ukraine with the RIM’s paramilitary arm, the Imperial Legion. By the end of the year, as many as 100 militants are fighting under the Imperial Legion’s command on the frontlines in Ukraine.⁵⁸
- **February 27, 2015:** The RIM announces the death of one of its members on the frontlines in Ukraine.⁵⁹
- **September 5, 2019:** The Imperial Legion publishes pictures of an awards ceremony on its official VK account along with a caption claiming its members are fighting in Syria “in defense of the Christians.”⁶⁰
- **January 27, 2020:** Imperial Legion announces its second combat death in Libya, where the group fights alongside other Russian mercenary organizations on behalf of General Khalifa Haftar.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Stanislav Vorobyev, Interview by Artem Alexandrov, “????????? ?????????? ??? ?????????? ?? ??? ?? ??? ?? ????? ?? ????? ????????????? ??????????”, ZakS.Ru, January 30, 2015, <https://www.zaks.ru/new/archive/view/135459>.

⁵⁹ Imperial Legion page, VKontakte Post, February 27, 2015.

⁶⁰ Imperial Legion page, VKontakte Post, September 5, 2019.

⁶¹ Mark Krutov, “????? ?????? ??? ?????????? ? ?????? ????? ?????????? ??????, ????? ?????????? ?? ?????????,” Radio Liberty, January 29, 2020, <https://ru.krymr.com/amp/liviya-gibel-rossijskogo-naemnika-v-afrike/30404581.html>.



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Designations:

Designations by the U.S. Government:

⁶² Michael R. Pompeo, "Designation of Russian Imperial Movement as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist, Public Notice 11088 of March 27, 2020," *Federal Register* 85, no. 72 (April 14, 2020): 20804, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/04/14/2020-07835/designation-of-russian-imperial-movement-as-a-specially-designated-global-terrorist>; Nathan Sales, "Designation of the Russian Imperial Movement," U.S. Department of State, April 6, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/designation-of-the-russian-imperial-movement/>.

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Associations:

Ties to extremist entities:

National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD)

In June 2015, the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) attended the RIM's World National-Conservative Movement (WNCM) alongside far-right and white supremacist parties from 27 other countries.⁶³ WNCM's manifesto claims to bring together like-minded activists who believe that the world is governed by "liberalism, multiculturalism and tolerance" that results in "the erosion of nations, massive migration from countries with foreign civilizational bases, falling away from religion, replacement of spirituality by materialism, impoverishment of cultures, destruction of the family and healthy moral values" through "abortion, propaganda of debauchery and acceptance of sexual perversions."⁶⁴

In 2020, German intelligence reported that several men belonging to the NPD's youth movement had attended the RIM's training camp in St. Petersburg, known as Partizan, where they were reportedly shown weapons and explosives techniques and received close combat training.⁶⁵

Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM)

In September 2015, RIM leader Stanislav Vorobyev spoke at a summit hosted by the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) where he also donated \$150 to the group.⁶⁶ Vorobyev wore a uniform that he described as a symbol of their fight against "Jewish oligarchs in Ukraine" and warned of "a full-scale war against the traditional values of Western civilization."⁶⁷ In August 2017, the NRM's leader said in an interview that he "sees [the RIM] as friends."⁶⁸ The RIM reportedly advised the NRM on how to grow its support base, telling the Swedish group to set up a political party and create an English-language website.⁶⁹

Two NRM members, Viktor Melin and Anton Thulin, traveled to St. Petersburg in the summer of 2016 to partake in the Partizan course.⁷⁰

Melin, Thulin, and a third man then carried out a string of bomb attacks on refugee centers in Sweden in January 2017.⁷¹

During the trial of Melin and Thulin, the prosecutor stated that "attending this paramilitary camp in St. Petersburg was a key step in Melin and Thulin's radicalization... We also believe it may be the place where they learned to manufacture the bombs that they used in Gothenburg."⁷²

Ties to countries:

Russia

The RIM is ideologically against the Russian government, but its actions and presence are at minimum tolerated by authorities.⁷³

In January 2015, Vorobyev claimed that Russian police had repeatedly visited RIM's training site in attempts to find proof of illegal activity.⁷⁴ Analysts believe the Partizan course operates with the covert approval of government authorities and may even receive direct support from them.⁷⁵ Imperial Legion members have reportedly fought alongside other state-backed Russian militias in Ukraine, Syria, and Libya.⁷⁶

⁶³ Elizabeth Grimm Arsenault and Joseph Stabile, "Confronting Russia's Role in Transnational White Supremacist Extremism," Just Security, February 6, 2020, <https://www.justsecurity.org/68420/confronting-russias-role-in-transnational-white-supremacist-extremism/>; Anton Shekhovtsov, "Russian Politicians Building an International Extreme Right Alliance," Anton Shekhovtsov's blog, September 16, 2015, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.com/2015/09/russian-politicians-building.html>.

⁶⁴ Anton Shekhovtsov, "Russian Politicians Building an International Extreme Right Alliance," Anton Shekhovtsov's Blog, September 16, 2015, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.com/2015/09/russian-politicians-building.html>.

⁶⁵ Tim Hume, "German Neo Nazis Are Getting Explosives Training at a White Supremacist Camp in Russia," Vice News, June 6, 2020, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/g5pqk4/german-neo-nazis-are-getting-explosives-training-at-a-white-supremacist-camp-in-russia.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth Grimm Arsenault and Joseph Stabile, "Confronting Russia's Role in Transnational White Supremacist Extremism," Just Security, February 6, 2020, <https://www.justsecurity.org/68420/confronting-russias-role-in-transnational-white-supremacist-extremism/>; "Nordendagarna 2015," Nordfront, September 7, 2015, <https://www.nordfront.se/nordendagarna-2015.smr>; Josephine Huetlin, "Russian Extremists Are Training Right-Wing Terrorists from Western Europe," Daily Beast, August 2, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/russian-extremists-are-training-right-wing-terrorists-from-western-europe>.

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67 “Nordendagarna 2015,” Nordfront, September 7, 2015, <https://www.nordfront.se/nordendagarna-2015.smr>; Josephine Huetlin, “Russian Extremists Are Training Right-Wing Terrorists from Western Europe,” Daily Beast, August 2, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/russian-extremists-are-training-right-wing-terrorists-from-western-europe>.

68 Josephine Huetlin, “Russian Extremists Are Training Right-Wing Terrorists from Western Europe,” Daily Beast, August 2, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/russian-extremists-are-training-right-wing-terrorists-from-western-europe>.

69 Josephine Huetlin, “Russian Extremists Are Training Right-Wing Terrorists from Western Europe,” Daily Beast, August 2, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/russian-extremists-are-training-right-wing-terrorists-from-western-europe>.

70 Shelby Butt and Daniel Byman, *Right-Wing Extremism: The Russian Connection*, *Survival* 62, no. 2 (March 2020), 144, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2020.1739960>.

71 Shelby Butt and Daniel Byman, *Right-Wing Extremism: The Russian Connection*, *Survival* 62, no. 2, 144, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2020.1739960>.

72 Josephine Huetlin, “Russian Extremists Are Training Right-Wing Terrorists from Western Europe,” Daily Beast, August 2, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/russian-extremists-are-training-right-wing-terrorists-from-western-europe>.

73 Josephine Huetlin, “Russian Extremists Are Training Right-Wing Terrorists from Western Europe,” Daily Beast, August 2, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/russian-extremists-are-training-right-wing-terrorists-from-western-europe>; Shelby Butt and Daniel Byman, *Right-Wing Extremism: The Russian Connection*, *Survival* 62, no. 2 (March 2020), 144, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2020.1739960>.

74 Stanislav Vorobyev, Interview by Artem Alexandrov, “?????????? ?????????????? ??? ?????????? ?? ??? ?? ??? ?? ????? ?? ????? ?????????????? ???????????,” ZakS.Ru, January 30, 2015, <https://www.zaks.ru/new/archive/view/135459>.

75 Shelby Butt and Daniel Byman, *Right-Wing Extremism: The Russian Connection*, *Survival* 62, no. 2 (March 2020), 144, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2020.1739960>.

76 *White Supremacy Extremism: The Transnational Rise of the Violent White Supremacist Movement* (New York: Soufan Center, 2019), 34, <https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Report-by-The-Soufan-Center-White-Supremacy-Extremism-The-Transnational-Rise-of-The-Violent-White-Supremacist-Movement.pdf>; Stanislav Vorobyev, Interview by Artem Alexandrov, “?????????? ?????????????? ??? ?????????? ?? ??? ?? ??? ?? ????? ?? ????? ?????????????? ???????????,” ZakS.Ru, January 30, 2015, <https://www.zaks.ru/new/archive/view/135459>; Imperial Legion page, VKontakte Post, February 27, 2015; Imperial Legion page, VKontakte Post, September 5, 2019; Mark Krutov, “????? ??????? ??? ?????????? ? ?????? ????? ?????????? ??????, ????? ?????????? ?? ?????????,” Radio Liberty, January 29, 2020, <https://ru.krymr.com/amp/liviya-gibel-rossijskogo-naemnika-v-afrike/30404581.html>.

Russian Imperial Movement (RIM)

Rhetoric:

Stanislav Anatolyevich Vorobyev, 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 Voivodeship...Ukrainian nationalists are mainly young people born 23 years ago who are brainwashed.”⁷⁷

Denis Valliullovich Gariyev, January 2017

“We see Ukrainian-ness as rabies...A person is sick. Either quarantine, liquidation, or he’ll infect everyone.”⁷⁸

Denis Valliullovich Gariyev, January 2017

“By and large, we are learning how to kill.”⁷⁹

Unidentified RIM spokesman, September 2017

The RIM seeks to “continue to establish contacts with right-wing, traditionalist and conservative organizations around the world to create a ‘Right-wing International.’...for us the task is to share the experience of political [and] information warfare and joint squad tactics training.”⁸⁰

Imperial Legion VK post, October 25, 2019

Referencing a picture of a British bomber pilot’s patch showing U.K. and U.S. flags:

“And who will say that killing Americans is not a charitable cause, with such garbage on their sleeves.”⁸¹

⁷⁷ Stanislav Vorobyev, Interview by Artem Alexandrov, ZakS.Ru, January 30, 2015, <https://www.zaks.ru/new/archive/view/135459>.

⁷⁸ Andrew Roth, “A Right-Wing Militia Trains Russians to Fight the Next War—with or without Putin,” *Washington Post*, January 2, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/a-right-wing-militia-trains-russians-to-fight-the-next-war--with-or-without-putin/2017/01/02/f06b5ce8-b71e-11e6-939c-91749443c5e5_story.html.

⁷⁹ Andrew Roth, “A Right-Wing Militia Trains Russians to Fight the Next War—with or without Putin,” *Washington Post*, January 2, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/a-right-wing-militia-trains-russians-to-fight-the-next-war--with-or-without-putin/2017/01/02/f06b5ce8-b71e-11e6-939c-91749443c5e5_story.html.

⁸⁰ Casey Michel, “Russian, American White Nationalists Raise Their Flags in Washington,” ThinkProgress, September 22, 2017, <https://thinkprogress.org/russian-american-nationalists-washington-5bd15fd18eaf/>.

⁸¹ Imperial Legion page, VKontakte Post, October 25, 2019.