

Prospects for American-Russian Cooperation in Countering White Nationalism

Justin Tomczyk^a, Ilya Tolmachev^b, Lee DuWors^c

^a Stanford University

^b Moscow State Institute of International Relations

^c Brown University

Abstract

White nationalism remains an often overlooked terror threat amongst the many national security risks facing the United States and Russian Federation. While typically grounded in domestic theaters, white nationalist groups have increased the frequency and scale of their armed activities by incorporating aspects of transnational cooperation that are tactics often used by larger terrorist networks. This trend has raised questions regarding the ways in which white nationalism represents a new type of international technology-enabled terror threat toward the United States and Russian Federation and how policy makers can best address this challenge. This research paper will explore how white nationalist groups in the United States and Russian Federation have sought cooperation with one another through wider ideological and strategic alignment. This paper will also explore the respective communication techniques of these groups, which have been enabled through the internet and new technologies. This paper will conclude with a reflection on potential avenues of cooperation between the United States and the Russian Federation, drawing on previous examples of collaboration among government officials and non-state actors in combating terrorism.

Introduction

On March 15th 2019, a gunman opened fire in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. The event was live streamed via Facebook to an audience from the websites 4chan and 8chan and a manifesto outlining the shooter's racist motivations was uploaded just moments before the attack.¹ The aftermath of the Christchurch shooting represents one of the most recent examples of a growing connection between white nationalists in the United States and Russian Federation. Following the attack, the shooter's manifesto was translated into a variety of languages and spread throughout Telegram and other messaging networks. Among these translations was a Russian-language copy, which was shared by a group called "Wotan Jugend" and other Russophone white nationalist groups. A physical copy was photographed in Eastern Ukraine and by the hands of members of armed white nationalist militia.² The dissemination of the Christchurch shooter's

¹ Bill Bostock, Kieran Corcoran, and Bryan Logan, "This Timeline of the Christchurch Mosque Terror Attacks Shows How New Zealand's Deadliest Shooting Unfolded," Insider (Insider, March 19, 2019), <https://www.insider.com/christchurch-shooting-timeline-49-killed-new-zealand-mosques-2019-3>.

² "The Russians and Ukrainians Translating the Christchurch Shooter's Manifesto," bellingcat (bellingcat, August 14, 2019), <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/08/14/the-russians-and-ukrainians-translating-the-christchurch-shooters-manifesto/>.

manifesto exemplifies the evolution of white nationalist communities from having a fringe online presence within the internet to circulating amongst organized armed groups active in domestic theaters and conflict-zones. In parallel, white nationalist communities in both countries have shown increased willingness to network amongst and provide political and ideological support to one another. In light of this emerging terror threat, we believe that the United States and Russia should address this issue as part of a wider strategy of cooperation in fighting terrorism.

Methodology

This paper will draw upon existing literature regarding white nationalism and broader online extremism in outlining the scope and scale of this terror threat, alongside FBI indictments and other government documents. While largely grounded in previous qualitative studies on white nationalism, this paper will also examine the use of technology in modern terrorism and efforts by policymakers to respond to this threat. In suggesting potential actions, this paper will draw upon previous joint activities between Moscow and Washington in addressing similar threats.

Defining Domestic Terrorism

There is no internationally agreed upon definition of ‘terrorism’ and multiple definitions of what constitutes domestic terrorism exist across different countries. Both the U.S. and Russia rely upon their own interpretations to define this activity. In the U.S., the “USA Patriot Act” is often used to define what constitutes a domestic terror threat and domestic terrorism, but there are no other federal policies that allow for the prosecution of individuals specifically for planning or conducting such actions.³ The FBI Agents Association, which serves 14,000 FBI employees, has requested that legislation be drafted to resolve this issue to allow for greater use of powers and ease in prosecuting such individuals.⁴

Networking and Online Communication Among White Nationalist Communities

The internet has been instrumental in establishing global communication and communities of white nationalists, both within their own countries and internationally. As social media platforms have continued to evolve over the past decade, so too have the ways in which white nationalists have taken advantage of platforms, both tailored or appropriated to their needs. For example, Stormfront was founded in 1995 and is one of the older white supremacist online communities with over 300,000 registered members. It has been described by the Southern Poverty Law Center as “what may be the Western world's most popular forum for racists, Holocaust deniers and criminals to post articles, engage in discussions and share news of upcoming racist events.”⁵ In a similar yet distinct vein, 4chan and 8kun (formerly 8chan) are image boards where users may post anonymously and interact with many disparate interest groups and communities, such as video game enthusiasts or music fans. These imageboards are known for having a very limited

³ United States House of Representatives, “H.R.3162 - Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT ACT) Act of 2001”. Congress.gov, October 23, 2001, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-bill/3162>

⁴ Quint Forgey, “FBI Agents Warn Domestic Terrorism Poses 'Threat to the American People',” POLITICO, August 6, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/08/06/fbi-domestic-terrorism-threat-to-american-people-1449105>.

⁵ “Stormfront: A History,” Hatewatch (Southern Poverty Law Center, March 26, 2015), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2015/03/25/stormfront-history>.

moderation policy. Given the often lenient moderation policies, white nationalists openly post content designed for recruitment, propagandization, or discussion aimed at a uniquely global user base. The U.S. and Russia both possess certain technical means to address these white nationalist communities, but are both hampered by a lack of adequate cooperation amongst themselves and other countries to appropriately monitor or address potentially violent threats.

In the United States, the First Amendment of the Constitution provides for freedom of speech, which allows for the expression of opinions no matter how hateful (with a gray area existing in terms of allowable “threatening” speech). With this in mind, Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act (CDA) explicitly states that “No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider.”⁶ This law effectively protects any website, such as 4chan or Facebook, from legal repercussions for how their users utilize their platforms. The possibility for legal action against such sites is especially limited when they are hosted outside of the U.S. For example, 8chan is currently hosted in the Russian Federation.⁷ Historically, the site has been a haven for piracy, illegal content, and multiple posts by white nationalist shooters who have shared manifestos or links to livestreams of their attacks.^{8,9} In light of its content, 8chan was only delisted by its American-Canadian domain provider in response to public outcry,¹⁰ not due to legal pressure by the U.S. government. It was after this delisting that the site changed to its current Russian-based provider. While the First Amendment still broadly provides legal protections for hate speech, a recently proposed challenge to Section 230 of the CDA may reclassify social media platforms from providers of information to publishers of information, which would remove much of their current legal protections.¹¹ This would likely require a website to monitor and police its content, as it would no longer be exempt from liability.

In Russia, the government body responsible for monitoring internet content is the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor). This service seeks to restrict access to any materials deemed illegal or otherwise banned by the Russian Federation.¹² If Roskomnadzor finds banned materials online, it will notify web hosting

⁶ “Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act,” Electronic Frontier Foundation (Electronic Frontier Foundation), accessed May 23, 2020, <https://www.eff.org/issues/cda230>.

⁷ Anthony Cuthbertson, “8chan Returns as Far-Right Extremists Find New Online Home,” The Independent (Independent Digital News and Media, November 5, 2019), <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/8chan-qanon-8kun-russia-trump-a9186336.html>.

⁸ Caitlin Dewey, “This Is What Happens When You Create an Online Community without Any Rules,” The Washington Post (WP Company, January 13, 2015), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2015/01/13/this-is-what-happens-when-you-create-an-online-community-without-any-rules/>.

⁹ Kelly Weill, “8chan Refugees Worried They’re Downloading Child Porn,” The Daily Beast (The Daily Beast Company, August 8, 2019), <https://www.thedailybeast.com/8chan-refugees-worried-theyre-downloading-child-porn-on-peer-to-peer-site-zeronet>.

¹⁰ Isabel Togoh, “Tucows Drops 8chan Domain Registration After El Paso Shooting,” Forbes (Forbes Magazine, August 5, 2019), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/isabeltogoh/2019/08/05/tucows-drops-8chan-domain-registration-after-el-paso-shooting/>.

¹¹ Daisuke Wakabayashi, “Legal Shield for Social Media Is Targeted by Trump,” The New York Times (The New York Times, May 28, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/28/business/section-230-internet-speech.html>.

¹² The Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media, The Statute of Roskomnadzor, March 16, 2009. Retrieved from: <https://rkn.gov.ru/about/>

services, who then have three days to remove the illegal content.¹³ If the service provider fails to comply, the website is then blacklisted and all internet providers must restrict access to it. Originally, employees of Roskomnadzor had to manually search for providers who refused to abide by the government's decree, but in 2016 a special system called 'Revizor' was put in place to check automatically whether service providers are blocking blacklisted websites, making Roskomnadzor's function more efficient.¹⁴

White Nationalism in the United States

The current trend of white nationalism in the United States can be considered as the culmination of efforts and activities by previous white supremacist groups and movements. While the most well-known white supremacist groups in the U.S. include organizations with national structures, such as the Ku Klux Klan, white supremacists have also manifested on a variety of local and state levels. Contemporary white nationalism emerged within a wider reactionary wave of internet culture in the late 1990s and early 2000s.¹⁵ At the core of this trend was a forum known as Stormfront. Stormfront was launched in the early 1990s by Don Black, an associate of KKK leader and prominent white nationalist David Duke.¹⁶ While reactionary internet communities include survivalist societies, militia movements, and members of conspiracy cultures,¹⁷ Stormfront was a hub for persons from these societies who subscribed to white nationalist views.¹⁸ American white nationalism often differs from other American white supremacist movements, in that its end goals include either the creation of an ethnostate separate from the United States, or the seizure of power from the federal government in order to enact violence upon non-white persons and other minorities.¹⁹ Elements of the current white nationalist wave and the broader far-right may incorporate neo-pagan, Norse, or Celtic religious elements into their ideology.²⁰

One of the key materials at the center of American white nationalism is "The Turner Diaries", a novel describing the events surrounding a future race war in the United States. It was first published in 1978 by "Andrew MacDonald," the pen-name for prominent American white nationalist figure William Luther Price. The novel's text was initially printed over several issues

¹³ Balashova, Lindell, Kolomychenko. "'Revizor': how the system for monitoring prohibited content works", RBC. Retrieved from:

https://www.rbc.ru/technology_and_media/07/09/2017/59b00e269a79475c24ccf090

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jessie Daniels, "The Algorithmic Rise of the 'Alt-Right,'" *Contexts* 17, no. 1 (2018): pp. 60-65, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504218766547>.

¹⁶ David Schwab Abel, "The Racist Next Door," *New Times Broward-Palm Beach* (New Times Broward-Palm Beach, 19, 1998), <https://www.browardpalmbeach.com/news/the-racist-next-door-6332282>.

¹⁷ Lamy, P. (1996). *Millennium rage: Survivalists, white supremacists, and the Domsday prophecy*. New York: Plenum Press.

¹⁸ Kevin Thompson. "Watching the Stormfront: White Nationalists and the Building of Community in Cyberspace". *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology*, Vol 45, No. 1. Berghahn Books, 2001

¹⁹ Amanda Taub, "'White Nationalism,' Explained," *The New York Times* (The New York Times, November 21, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/22/world/americas/white-nationalism-explained.html>.

²⁰ Shannon Weber, "White Supremacy's Old Gods," *Political Research Associates* (Political Research Associates, February 1, 2018), <https://www.politicalresearch.org/2018/02/01/white-supremacys-old-gods-the-far-right-and-neopaganism>.

of “Attack!”, the magazine of a white nationalist group known as the National Alliance.²¹ Later in the early 1980s, the collected chapters would receive small-scale release from National Vanguard Press and circulate among gun shows and through mail orders.²² While a work of fiction, “The Turner Diaries” cemented certain concepts into the evolving white nationalist movement. This included the “Day of the Rope,” referring to a day of mass violence against minorities, and the framing of white nationalists as a small band of insurgents pitched against a tyrannical federal government. At least 500,000 printings of the novel entered circulation²³ and multiple terrorists cited the novel as an inspiration, including the perpetrator of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombings, Timothy McVeigh, and the perpetrator of the 1999 London Nail Bombing, David Copeland.²⁴ In these attacks, the perpetrators viewed their activities as the first step in inciting a wider race war. The second publication at the core of American white nationalism is “Siege,” a compilation of essays describing a model of “leaderless resistance” that would be emulated by armed contemporary white nationalist groups.²⁵ While circulation of physical copies of these books was rather limited, the growth of the internet lowered the barrier to reproducing and sharing these materials and allowed for their proliferation.²⁶

By the mid 2000s, the white supremacist content seen on Stormfront had begun to radiate towards other online communities, particularly on aforementioned internet image boards like 4chan and 8chan. The complete anonymity of these services, coupled with a culture that rewarded extreme or shocking content, made them a convenient place for member recruitment and information exchange.²⁷ The 2011 Utøya, Norway shooting, which killed 77 people mostly children and young teenagers, was a major turning point for white nationalist movements, in that the perpetrator effectively self-radicalized through exposure to online content.²⁸ This self-radicalization, coupled with the sharing of a manifesto just 90 minutes prior to the attack, would later become a staple of white nationalist violence seen in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

2017 was a critical year for white nationalists in the U.S. and wider far-right. After years of activism and increased public visibility, white nationalists gathered in August 2017 for a rally known as “Unite the Right” in Charlottesville, which was the largest gathering of white nationalists

²¹ Camille Jackson, “The Turner Diaries, Other Racist Novels, Inspire Extremist Violence,” Southern Poverty Law Center, October 14, 2014, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2004/turner-diaries-other-racist-novels-inspire-extremist-violence>.

²² Garen Wintemute, “Inside Gun Shows: What Goes On When Everybody Thinks Nobody's Watching” (Sacramento, CA: UC Davis School of Medicine, 2009), pp. 1-20.

²³ John Sutherland, “Gospels of Hate That Slip through the Net,” The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, April 3, 2000), <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/apr/03/race.mcveigh>.

²⁴ J.M. Berger, “The Turner Legacy: The Storied Origins and Enduring Impact of White Nationalism’s Deadly Bible,” International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, (The Hague, September 2016), <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ICCT-Berger-The-Turner-Legacy-September2016-2.pdf>.

²⁵ J.M. Berger, “The Strategy of Violent White Supremacy Is Evolving,” The Atlantic (Atlantic Media Company, August 7, 2019), <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/08/the-new-strategy-of-violent-white-supremacy/595648/>.

²⁶ J.M. Berger, “The Turner Legacy: The Storied Origins and Enduring Impact of White Nationalism’s Deadly Bible,” International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, (The Hague, September 2016), <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ICCT-Berger-The-Turner-Legacy-September2016-2.pdf>.

²⁷ James Palmer, “How Does Online Racism Spawn Mass Shooters?,” Foreign Policy (Foreign Policy, August 4, 2019), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/04/online-racism-4chan-8chan-shootings-elpaso-dayton-texas-ohio/>.

²⁸ Ryan Lenz, “Christian Crusader,” *Intelligence Report* (Southern Poverty Law Center, August 24, 2011), <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2015/christian-crusader>.

in recent American history. While previous white nationalist rallies were limited in size and often represented an older segment of the population, “Unite the Right” was attended by hundreds of people and by comparatively young participants.²⁹ Over the course of the rally, counter protesters were subject to acts of violence from attendees, which included the assault of counter protester DeAndre Harris by six armed attendees in a parking garage³⁰ and the murder of counter protestor Heather Heyer.³¹ Since “Unite the Right”, white nationalists in the United States have largely avoided mass gatherings and the wider trend of deplatforming and removal from social networks have limited these groups’ ability to organize. This has led to a migration away from public forums and social networks towards services like Telegram³² and Discord³³, which feature capabilities for invite-only spaces and encryption.

White Nationalism in the Russian Federation

In the early 1980s, a society known as Pamyat (Память, Memory) formed in the Soviet Union. The organization was primarily composed of amateur historians and history enthusiasts and was created in memory of the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kulikovo, a battle considered to be a turning point in Russian resistance towards the Mongol occupation.³⁴ Amidst the chaos and instability of the Gorbachev years, Pamyat framed itself as a historical organization dedicated to preserving Russian history and cultural memory. As the group grew in membership and size, the organization expressed increasingly reactionary and anti-Semitic views. Labeling itself as an “Anti-masonic and anti-zionist” organization, Pamyat drew considerable attention to what they considered to be wide conspiracy amongst freemasons and Russia’s Jewish population to manipulate the country’s politics.³⁵ By 1991, the organization had begun publishing its own newspaper³⁶ and operated a radio station³⁷, while smaller factions within the group splintered off into separate organizations and political parties.

In the early 1990s, a variety of ideologies and political parties competed in the political power vacuum of the newly created Russian Federation. In this environment, an ultranationalist trend

²⁹ Angela Nagle, “The Lost Boys,” *The Atlantic* (Atlantic Media Company, December 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/12/brotherhood-of-losers/544158/>.

³⁰ Ian Shapira, “The Parking Garage Beating Lasted 10 Seconds. DeAndre Harris Still Lives with the Damage.,” *The Washington Post* (WP Company, September 16, 2019), https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/the-parking-garage-beating-lasting-10-seconds-deandre-harris-still-lives-with-the-damage/2019/09/16/ca6daa48-cfbf-11e9-87fa-8501a456c003_story.html.

³¹ Minyvonne Burke and Marianna Sotomayor, “James Alex Fields Found Guilty of Killing Heather Heyer during Violent Charlottesville White Nationalist Rally,” *NBCNews.com* (NBCUniversal News Group, December 8, 2018), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/crime-courts/james-alex-fields-found-guilty-killing-heather-heyer-during-violent-n945186>.

³² Siddharth Venkatarmakrishnan, “Far-Right Extremists Flock to Protest Messaging App ...,” *Financial Times* (Financial Times, December 15, 2019), <https://www.ft.com/content/5e05fc9e-1c35-11ea-97df-cc63de1d73f4>.

³³ April Glaser, “White Supremacists Still Have a Safe Space Online. It’s Discord.,” *Slate Magazine* (Slate, October 9, 2018), <https://slate.com/technology/2018/10/discord-safe-space-white-supremacists.html>.

³⁴ Laruelle Marlène, *Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields* (London: Routledge, 2019).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ “Anti-Semitic Pamyat Launches Newspaper,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 24, 1991), <https://www.jta.org/1991/06/24/archive/anti-semitic-pamyat-launches-newspaper>.

³⁷ Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Russia: Recent information on Pamyat*, 1 November 1992, RUS12156, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6aac960.html> [accessed 13 June 2020]

emerged along the fringes of the Russian political spectrum. This nationalism was often focused on restoring Russia to its historic greatness and venerating elements of the pre-Soviet regime, such as strict adherence to Russian Orthodoxy.³⁸ These groups can be categorized as neo-Nazi parties, due to their attitudes towards non-white persons (particularly peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia) and belief in Russian supremacy. The leadership of many of these parties traced themselves to Pamyat, through previous membership or wider ideological affiliation.

One of the first ultranationalist groups to rise to prominence was the National Republican Party of Russia (Национально-республиканская партия России). Headed by Nikolai Lysenko, the party managed to gain one seat in the Duma in 1993 by electing Lysenko as a non-affiliated candidate.³⁹ According to Lysenko, one of the main goals of the newly independent Russia should be the absorption of nearby Russian-speaking territories – specifically Belarus, Northern Kazakhstan, and Ukraine.⁴⁰ Other adjacent groups such as the Russian National Unity (Русское Национальное Единство), People’s National Party (Народная национальная партия), and Russian National Union (Русский Национальный Союз) espoused similar policy positions as the National Republican Party with regards to Russian supremacy and national identity. These groups incorporated symbolism and heraldry that was evocative of Nazi imagery and similar to an iron cross or swastika. In addition to melding elements of Russian nationalism and Soviet nostalgia with far-right ideology, groups like the Russian National Union deviated from the veneration of Orthodoxy and instead aligned themselves with Pagan worship. Of the many ideological offshoots from the original Pamyat cohort, one of the most bizarre is the National Bolshevik Party (Национал-большевистская партия), known as the ‘Natsboly’ in Russia⁴¹ and occasionally referred to as ‘NazBols’ by English speakers. The National Bolshevik Party simultaneously venerated the leadership and ideologies of Hitler and Stalin, combining symbolism from Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in their visual aesthetic. By the end of the 1990s, the Slavic Union (Славянский Союз) had emerged as yet another collection of white nationalists in the Russian Federation.⁴²

In addition to operating radio stations and printing presses, these early Russian white nationalist groups had shown an ability to mobilize and participate in armed conflict and political activities in the near-abroad. According to Marlene Laruelle, the National Republic Party established a militia known as the “Russian Legion” that fought in the Georgian and Moldovan civil wars.⁴³ Additionally, the leadership of the National Bolshevik Party supported an independence movement in Northern Kazakhstan that culminated in a coup attempt in the Kazakh province of Ust-Kamenogorsk.⁴⁴

While these white nationalist groups had limited political success, they quickly gained the attention of the Russian government and were considered a potential security threat. Splinters of the original Pamyat cohort found themselves under increasing scrutiny from the Russian government and some

³⁸ Laruelle Marlene, *Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields* (London: Routledge, 2019).

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

of their actions were limited by the Ministry of Justice.⁴⁵ Under these conditions, white nationalist communities in Russia began moving away from institutional activities and political parties and transitioned into a group comprised of skinheads, street gangs, and other petty criminal elements.

Throughout the early 2000s, white nationalism in Russia was fragmented and did not pose a major threat to the country's national security. However, these years were characterized by increased activity from white nationalist and ideologically-adjacent groups. This activity was mostly connected to Russia's skinhead culture and other lower "petty" forms of organized racism, such as street violence targeting immigrant communities. At the center was a recurring concept dominated by the idea of "Russia for the Russians," which featured growing disdain toward immigrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus.⁴⁶

Beyond earlier actions taken toward Pamyat, the Russian government did not see white nationalism as a pressing threat. On the contrary, nationalist groups were cooperating with the state on a number of issues. For example, in 2013 nationalist groups participated directly alongside police forces in raids on undocumented migrants in Moscow.⁴⁷ However, given the more pronounced anti-government rhetoric visible among white nationalist groups in Russia and increasing concerns over the potential spread of interethnic hatred, the Russian government began considering these groups a greater potential security threat.⁴⁸ This culminated with the outbreak of fighting in Donetsk and Luhansk in 2014, which saw the start of an armed conflict on the southern flank of the Russian Federation.

The response from the Russian government can be divided into three parts. The first is the criminal prosecution and arrests of the most prominent white nationalist leaders, including: Alexander Potkin, the leader of "The Russians" movement; Maxim Martinkevich, the most famous Russian nationalist; and Dmitriy Demushkin, the head of The Nationalists' Party.⁴⁹ Demitry Demushkin's successor, Ivan Beletskiy and Vyacheslav Maltsev, the head of "Artpodgotovka," had to flee the country following pressure from the government, along with Matlsev's ally, Yuriy Gorskiy⁵⁰.

Secondly, the Russian government has taken steps to block white nationalist content. Many white nationalist media outlets – such as "Sputnik i Pogrom," "Russkaya Fabula," "Russkiy Sector," and "Praviy Vzgl'yad," – have been blocked by Roskomnadzor for "promoting ideas of national and

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Gay, Roger, Explaining Increases in Xenophobia in Post-Communist Russia. August 18, 2009. 22nd Australasian Finance and Banking Conference 2009. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1457387> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1457387>

⁴⁷ Richard Arnold, "Surveys Show Russian Nationalism Is on the Rise. This Explains a Lot about the Country's Foreign and Domestic Politics.," The Washington Post (WP Company, May 30, 2016), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/05/30/surveys-show-russian-nationalism-is-on-the-rise-this-explains-a-lot-about-the-countrys-foreign-and-domestic-politics/?outputType=amp>.

⁴⁸ Andrei Kolesnikov, "Radical Nationalism - the Main Threat to Russia?," Echo Moskvyy, October, 2011. <https://echo.msk.ru/blog/fondgaidar/820657-echo/>.

⁴⁹ Dimitry Sidorov, "Russian people are oppressed". Lenta.ru, July 24, 2017. <https://lenta.ru/articles/2017/07/24/ourboys/>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

religious discord,” and therefore “creating threats to public security and encouraging extremism.”⁵¹ These outlets had websites and physical offices and in the wake of these shutdowns, there have also been an increased number of administrative and criminal sentences for public extremist statements.⁵² However, such punitive actions have drawn criticism, due to the potential for such measures to be abused or misdirected.⁵³

In recognizing the danger of white nationalism and xenophobia in a multiethnic country, the Russian government has taken actions to create a more inclusive ideology and state position that accommodates non-Russian nationalities into the state narrative. While still grounded in the idea of ‘Russian Greatness’, this concept ties “a desire for ethnic greatness to the greatness of the state.”⁵⁴ This can also be seen as a reflection of Russia’s desire to conduct a more active foreign policy. This policy in many ways echoes the sentiments of the Soviet concept of “Friendship of Nations”, particularly through the organizing of global sporting events, as an emphasis on the country’s strength and relevance as a global player.

Evolution of White Nationalist Ideologies and the Encouragement of Violence

Violence is a core tenet of fascism and has been present in American white nationalist and neo-Nazi movements since their inception. However, the increased intensity of white nationalist violence throughout the 2000s is the product of individual actors and an increase of “lone wolf” attacks. White supremacist Louis Beam first coined the term “leaderless resistance” with regards to white nationalism in a 1983 article later published by the same title in a 1992 edition of “The Seditoninst”.⁵⁵ Beam called for the utilization of what today would be labeled as “Lone Wolf Tactics,” in which individual members or small cells should act in isolation to avoid detection by law enforcement while they plan and commit violent acts.⁵⁶ Three years after the essay’s publication, the Oklahoma City bombing followed this isolated approach and killed 168 people. However, J.M. Berger argues that the initial strategy of leaderless resistance within the white nationalist community was hampered by a lack of communication and understanding that other actors both existed and were capable of supporting the cause.⁵⁷ According to Berger, without positive reinforcement, individuals who desire to commit acts of terror may question the utility of acting, since they may not be able to confirm that sympathizers or cohorts exist. The isolation brought about by leaderless resistance can thus compromise the effectiveness of a white nationalist group. Indeed, it has recently been revealed that the self-proclaimed head of an Atomwaffen affiliate in Estonia, “Feuerkrieg Division”, was in fact a 13-year-old boy who would have been unable to join the group by Atomwaffen’s own rules.⁵⁸

⁵¹ “The Prosecutor General’s Office of the Russian Federation has sent a package of six requirements to Roskomnadzor to restrict access to Internet resources of an extremist and terrorist nature”. The official website of the Prosecutor General’s Office, July, 2017. <http://genproc.gov.ru/smi/news/genproc/news-1210034/>

⁵² Alexander Verkhovsky, et al. “Xenophobia, Freedom of Conscience and Anti-Extremism in Russia in 2018: A collection of annual reports by the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis”. SOVA Center, 2019.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Richard Arnold. *Surveys Show*.

⁵⁵ Louis Beam, “Leaderless Resistance,” *The Seditoninst* 12 (February 1992).

⁵⁶ J.M. Berger, *The New Strategy of Violent White Supremacy*.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Mitch Prothero, “Police Say ‘Commander’ of Neo-Nazi Group Linked to Planned Attack on CNN Was Only 13 Years Old,” *Business Insider* (Business Insider, April 15, 2020), <https://www.businessinsider.com/13-year-old-alleged-commander-neo-nazi-feuerkrieg-division-2020-4>.

The communication landscape of 2020 differs significantly since Beam wrote his original essay on leaderless resistance. The anonymity provided by the internet and modern privacy tools have helped revitalize his original concept. Online communities serve as an eager audience that promote and encourage the use of violence to further white nationalist causes. From 8chan to Stormfront and from the manifestos of Anders Breivik to Brenton Tarrant, white nationalists, neo-Nazis, and “ethno-nationalists,” are eager to consume and publish media created by one another to glorify their cause and support the continued radicalization of each other. The end product of this media process is convincing individuals to commit acts of terror to further the cause. As Dylan Storm Roof wrote in his manifesto: “The event that truly awakened me was the Trayvon Martin case... this prompted me to type in the words ‘black on white crime’ into Google, and I have never been the same since that day.”⁵⁹ Dylan was led by his Google search to the website of the Council of Conservative Citizens, a white nationalist group specializing in the creation of racist propaganda and disinformation for recruitment purposes.⁶⁰ Dylan resonated with such white nationalist messaging, which resulted in his subsequent self-radicalization and lone wolf attack, wherein he killed nine people at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina in 2015.⁶¹

“Accelerationism” is another concept that has been revitalized in tandem with leaderless resistance and has been directly incorporated by modern neo-Nazi groups. The concept of “accelerationism” in relation to white nationalism was developed by James Mason, an American neo-Nazi who joined the American Nazi Party as a teenager and whose work in the 1980s in the “Siege” newsletter has since been canonized by these groups. “Accelerationism” is a political tactic used to refer to violence towards the state and public in an effort to agitate the destruction of society as a whole. This is exemplified by an excerpt Mason wrote in *Siege*:

While on this aspect let us give some thought to what the next logical step might be toward opening the way to full, revolutionary conflagration in the United States: from almost random shootings and immediate death or capture of the killers, to select and consecutive assassinations by various Movement people in different parts of the country simultaneously... We’ve already seen the killing of two vile system creeps in San Francisco by Dan White. If I were asked by anyone of my opinion on what to look for (or hope for) next I would tell them a wave of killings, or ‘assassinations,’ of System bureaucrats by roving gun men who have their strategy well mapped-out in advance and well-nigh impossible to stop.⁶²

Contemporary White Nationalist Armed Groups in Russia and the United States

Atomwaffen

⁵⁹ Dylan Roof, “The Last Rhodesian,” Last Rhodesian, June 20, 2015.

⁶⁰ “Council of Conservative Citizens,” Southern Poverty Law Center (Southern Poverty Law Center), accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/council-conservative-citizens>.

⁶¹ Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, “A Most American Terrorist: The Making Of Dylann Roof,” GQ (GQ, August 21, 2017), <https://www.gq.com/story/dylann-roof-making-of-an-american-terrorist>.

⁶² “James Mason,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed March 1, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/james-mason>.

Atomwaffen Division (AWD) is a white nationalist group operating primarily in the United States, with smaller affiliate cells located in Germany, Estonia, and elsewhere in the world.⁶³ The group's name comes from the German translation of the phrase "Atomic Weapons." Atomwaffen gained notoriety for its extensive online presence⁶⁴ and for a homicide case in which one member killed two other members that he was living with. According to Frontline journalist A.C. Thompson, he did so in order to, "keep them from carrying out what he said were their plans for violence."⁶⁵ He later turned himself in to the police and during his interrogation claimed the group had dangerous plans and that the FBI needed to be informed.⁶⁶ Additionally, advanced bomb making materials were discovered within the three members' apartment.⁶⁷ This was part of a wide string of murders connected to the group.⁶⁸ Members of Atomwaffen are primarily organized into compact, compartmentalized cells operating largely independent of one another. The group's structure and tactics mirror techniques seen in American militia movements, specifically their focus on survivalist skills, firearms training, and doomsday prepping.

What sets Atomwaffen Division apart from other white nationalist groups is their ideological nuances towards Christianity and national identity. AWD does not root itself in an ultra-orthodox adherence towards Christianity, but rather identifies more with Satanism, esoteric Nazism, and the occult.⁶⁹ This encompasses part of their wider rejection of current Western culture and Western identity. In comparison to other far-right organizations and movements, Atomwaffen does not ground itself in patriotism. Instead, the organization preaches a deep disdain for the United States government and the Constitution as a whole.⁷⁰

Federal law enforcement has been proactive in disrupting members of Atomwaffen and tracking cells of the movement. This includes the usage of red-flag laws in preemptively arresting Atomwaffen members with large amounts of weapons.⁷¹ Additionally, journalists and researchers have begun mapping the organization's online presence.⁷² Atomwaffen draws its recruits from

⁶³ "Atomwaffen Division," FOIA Research, December 21, 2019, <https://www.foiaresearch.net/organization/atomwaffen-division>.

⁶⁴ Subcomandante X, "Atomwaffen Division Breaks Public Silence With New Recruitment Video, Propaganda," Medium (American Odyssey, August 16, 2019), <https://medium.com/americanodyssey/atomwaffen-division-breaks-public-silence-with-new-recruitment-video-propaganda-3596843f9da7>.

⁶⁵ A.C. Thompson, "An Atomwaffen Member Sketched a Map to Take the Neo-Nazis Down. What Path Officials Took Is a Mystery.," PBS (Public Broadcasting Service, November 20, 2018), <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/an-atomwaffen-member-sketched-a-map-to-take-the-neo-nazis-down-what-path-officials-took-is-a-mystery/>.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Priyanka Boghani, Marcia Robiou, and Catherine Trautwein, "Three Murder Suspects Linked to Atomwaffen: Where Their Cases Stand," PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, June 18, 2019, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/three-murder-suspects-linked-to-atomwaffen-where-their-cases-stand/>.

⁶⁹ "Atomwaffen Division (AWD)," Anti-Defamation League, accessed March 1, 2020, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/atomwaffen-division-awd>.

⁷⁰ A.C. Thompson, Ali Winston, and Jake Hanrahan, "Inside Atomwaffen As It Celebrates a Member for Allegedly Killing a Gay Jewish College Student," ProPublica, March 9, 2019, <https://www.propublica.org/article/atomwaffen-division-inside-white-hate-group>.

⁷¹ Mike Baker, "Police Seize Guns From Man Thought to Be Neo-Nazi Leader," The New York Times, The New York Times, October 18, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/17/us/atomwaffen-kaleb-cole.html>.

⁷² Team Ross et al., "Transnational White Terror: Exposing Atomwaffen And The Iron March Networks," *bellingcat*, January 17, 2020, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2019/12/19/transnational-white-terror-exposing-atomwaffen-and-the-iron-march-networks/>.

alienated young men and makes heavy usage of the aforementioned invite-only platforms Discord and Telegram. The organization has also targeted members of the U.S. military in its recruitment efforts.⁷³ Atomwaffen has found itself ideologically aligned with broader armed white nationalist groups, including a group known as Azov Battalion. While Atomwaffen's nihilist, accelerationist worldview may clash with the ultra-nationalist sentiments seen in other white nationalist communities, they are unified by common causes like anti-Semitism and a focus on racially motivated violence.

The Base

The Base is a relatively recent white supremacist/ethnonationalist group to have emerged in public view. In recent months, seven members were arrested by the FBI for charges including conspiracy to commit murder, possession of illegal fire arms, illegal immigration, and participation in a criminal gang.⁷⁴ Of those who were arrested in January 2020, two were veterans, one of the U.S. Army and the other of the Canadian Armed Forces. The latter was a combat engineer with extensive explosives training.⁷⁵ The group's name, "The Base," is possibly a direct reference to the English translation of Al'Qaeda. The group's leader, known by his handle "Norman Spear" or "Roman Wolf," is also believed to reside in Russia with his Russian wife.^{76,77}

This group's activities are in line with other accelerationist white nationalist groups, as The Base also views its actions as the first step toward a wider race war. Multiple outside parties have successfully infiltrated The Base, including the FBI, the Winnipeg Free Press, and an anonymous individual identifying themselves as an anti-fascist. Specifically, the FBI's infiltration has led to the most recent wave of arrests, after the group discussed murdering a husband and wife pair of supposed anti-fascists living near a Base member, as well as planning an attack on demonstrators at a 2nd Amendment rights rally.⁷⁸ The goal of the planned rally attack was to create mass chaos among attendees and the press in order to incite further discord and division in the United States, with the ultimate goal of sparking civil war.⁷⁹ The Canadian Armed Forces veteran had been in hiding in the U.S. for a year prior to his arrest, having fled Canada after the Royal Canadian Mounted Police raided his house related to his participation in The Base. This individual had been

⁷³ Christopher Mathias, "Exclusive: Army Investigating Soldier's Alleged Leadership In Neo-Nazi Terror Group," HuffPost, HuffPost, May 3, 2019, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/atomwaffen-division-army-soldier-investigation-corwyn-storm-carver_n_5ccb5350e4b0e4d7572fde38.

⁷⁴ Bill Chappell, Merrit Kennedy, and Vanessa Romo, "3 Alleged Members Of Hate Group 'The Base' Arrested In Georgia, Another In Wisconsin," NPR (NPR, January 17, 2020), <https://www.npr.org/2020/01/17/797399834/3-alleged-members-of-hate-group-the-base-arrested-in-georgia>.

⁷⁵ "Three Alleged Members of the Violent Extremist Group 'The Base' Facing Federal Firearms and Alien-Related Charges," The United States Department of Justice, The United States Attorney's Office District of Maryland, January 16, 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-md/pr/three-alleged-members-violent-extremist-group-base-facing-federal-firearms-and-alien>.

⁷⁶ Jason Wilson, "Revealed: the True Identity of the Leader of an American Neo-Nazi Terror Group," The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, January 24, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/23/revealed-the-true-identity-of-the-leader-of-americas-neo-nazi-terror-group>.

⁷⁷ Daniel De Simone and Andrei Soshnikov & Ali Winston, "Neo-Nazi Rinaldo Nazzaro Running US Militant Group The Base from Russia," BBC News (BBC, January 24, 2020), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-51236915>.

⁷⁸ Michael Kunzelman and Mike Balsamo, "US Veteran Among Alleged White Supremacists Arrested Before Gun Rally," Military.com, January 17, 2020, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/01/17/us-veteran-among-alleged-white-supremacists-arrested-gun-rally.html>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

in contact with a Winnipeg Free Press reporter who worked undercover to infiltrate the group after noticing recruitment flyers appearing around Winnipeg, Canada. This led to the identification of the Canadian servicemember who engaged in discussions about derailing trains, the types of explosives he would use, and his desire for mass violence.⁸⁰

The Guardian's identification of Rinaldo Nazzaro, aka "Norman Spear", was also due to the work of an anonymous anti-fascist individual who infiltrated the group. The Guardian was able to trace Nazzaro by cross-checking the information provided to them by the anti-fascist infiltrator with financial records surrounding properties purchased by fake businesses that were tied back to the group. Specifically, land purchased in Washington state was used for an armed "hate camp," which instructed the group in firearms tactics, among other forms of armed combat training. Nazzaro was also identified in "a series of short instructional presentations on the tactics and strategy of guerrilla warfare...[where] he is identified as 'Defense Studies expert and former CIA field intelligence officer Norman Spear.'"⁸¹ While there is no evidence to support his claim of having been a CIA field agent, he is also accused of being both an FBI plant by some members of The Base, as well as a possible Russian intelligence agent by others.⁸²

The Base also draws heavily upon the attacks committed by Anders Breivik of the Utøya, Norway shooting, Brenton Tarrant of the Christchurch, New Zealand shooting, Timothy McVeigh the Oklahoma City bomber, and Charles Manson a homicidal cult leader, who they venerate with the title of "saints," according to the reporter who infiltrated the group. According to the same reporter, the group also often discusses the importance of a large body count, drawing on these "saints" as successful examples to emulate.⁸³

Wotan Jugend and Azov Battalion

Wotan Jugend is a Russian metal band that grew into a major nexus for Russian-language white nationalist content. In addition to publishing music with hateful lyrics and glorifying Hitler, the group acted as a major promoter and organizer of the neo-Nazi music festival "Asgardsrei", originally hosted in Russia now held in Ukraine.⁸⁴ Wotan Jugend is not the only promoter and organizer of neo-Nazi metal festivals. The "Hot Shower Festival" (a reference to the chemical showers of Auschwitz and a play on the phrase "white power") is held annually in Milan and represents one of the largest gatherings of neo-Nazi and white nationalist metal bands in Europe.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Ryan Thorpe, "Inside a Neo-Nazi Group Attempting to Gain a Foothold in Winnipeg and across the Country," [winnipegfreepress.com](https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/homegrown-hate-547510902.html), Winnipeg Free Press, August 22, 2019, <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/homegrown-hate-547510902.html>.

⁸¹ Jason Wilson, "Revealed - the True Identity of the Leader of America's Neo-Nazi Terror Group." The Guardian. January 23 2020

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Thorpe, "Inside a Neo-Nazi Group." Winnipeg Free Press. August 16 2019.

⁸⁴ "The 'Hardcore' Russian Neo-Nazi Group That Calls Ukraine Home," [bellingcat](https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/09/04/the-hardcore-russian-neo-nazi-group-that-calls-ukraine-home/) (bellingcat, September 4, 2019), <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/09/04/the-hardcore-russian-neo-nazi-group-that-calls-ukraine-home/>.

⁸⁵ Rainer, Christian. "Mal richtig abhitlern": In Mailand traf sich die neonazistische Black-Metal-Szene". Profil. April 25 2019. Retrieved from: https://www.profil.at/shortlist/kultur/mailand-neonazistische-black-metal-szene-10764462?fbclid=IwAR3nNg5FDPvdWF83Py6XbPQ3HZruBd1ytmkxJII3o4_7-ljhnk0-YUsICOQ
English translation available at: <http://thedarkskiesaboveus.blogspot.com/2019/05/we-can-pay-tribute-to-hitler-properly.html>

The festival is highly secretive and is often used as a means of fundraising for militant neo-Nazi groups, including the “Hammerskins”, a group of Italian skinheads⁸⁶. However, what separates Wotan Jugend from other white nationalist elements of the metal scene is the scale of their operations and their relationship with the Russian government amidst the conflict in Ukraine.

Wotan Jugend supported the 2013-2014 Ukrainian Revolution, despite being based in Russia.⁸⁷ Their vocal support led to an increase in pressure from the Russian government, including a series of hacking attacks directed at the group that are believed to be the work of the FSB.⁸⁸ After relocating from Russia to Ukraine, Wotan Jugend developed a close relationship with Azov Battalion, an armed white nationalist group which was active in the War in Donbass. Azov Battalion traces its origins to a small self-defense unit formed in the city of Kharkiv, located near Luhansk and Donetsk and primarily occupied by Russian speakers. Football ultras⁸⁹ known as “Sect 82” occupied a municipal building in Kharkov.⁹⁰ Referring to themselves as a “self-defense unit” (a colloquial term for armed militias that may not have been under the direct control of the Ukrainian government but were nonetheless active during the initial stages of the Donbass war), the group organized itself into a structure known as the “Eastern Corp” and later formally changed its name to “Azov Battalion.” While the group was initially without a pronounced ideology, a man by the name of Oleg Odnorozhenko crafted a pronounced white nationalist worldview for the organization. In an interview with The Times journalist Ben Hoyle, Oleg describes his view of Europe and the West: “We consider the present tendency of Europe leads to the destruction of civilization, with no control of immigration, the destruction of the family, of religious identity and of everything that made Europe Europe.”⁹¹ Hoyle would go on to explain not only Odnorozhenko’s role in forming the groups ideology, but also the usage of SS runes and other Nazi symbols throughout the group.

Today, the interests of Wotan Jugend and Azov Battalion largely align with one another. Since Wotan Jugend’s relocation to Ukraine, the organization has continued to propagate white nationalist content to a Russian-speaking audience outside of the reach of the Russian government. Wotan Jugend’s telegram channel frequently shares footage of white nationalist shootings, as well as content that has been translated into Russian.⁹²

Russian Imperial Movement

The Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) is an ultranationalist organization led by Stanislav Vorobyev that is believed to operate in Russia and Eastern Ukraine. According to its official website, the main goal of the Movement is to “Restore the Russian monarchy as a form of

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Jan Holzer, Martin Laryš and Miroslav Mareš. 2019. *Militant Right-Wing Extremism In Putin’s Russia*. Routledge.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ “Ultras” is a term used to refer to certain groups of violent football fans.

⁹⁰ Sergatzkova, Katerina “«Ми намагаємося прийти до влади через вибори, хоча маємо всякі можливості» — як «Азов» стає партією”. *Hromadske, Ua*. Retrieved from <https://hromadske.ua/posts/my-namahaiemosia-pryity-do-vlady-cherez-vybory-khoch-maiemo-vsiaki-mozhlyvosti-iak-azov-staie-partiieu>.

⁹¹ Ben Hoyle, “Neo Nazis Give Kiev a Last Line of Defence in the East,” *The Times* (The Times, September 5, 2014), <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/neo-nazis-give-kiev-a-last-line-of-defence-in-the-east-0csqncjv3hd>.

⁹² Bellingcat, “*The Russians and Ukrainians*.”

government that best corresponds with Russian national historical, political, and religious traditions.”⁹³ According to the Souffan Center's report on transnational white terrorism, RIM evades persecution from the Russian government by framing itself as an organization based on promoting traditional values.⁹⁴ The organization operates a series of military courses called “Partisan” which includes firearms and survival training. In 2014-2015, approximately 300 people went through this military training, after which they were equipped and sent to Donbass to fight on behalf of the LNR/DNR and Russian separatists. For these purposes, a special battalion, known as “The Imperial Legion,” was formed in Donbass under the auspices and wider leadership of the Russian Imperial Movement. The training camps were formerly called “Imperial Legion,” but changed their name to “Partisan” when “Imperial Legion” was given to the Donbass Battalion. In many ways, RIM’s activities mirror those of the Russian National Union (RNU),⁹⁵ a Russian white nationalist group that splintered from the first Pamyat cohort and was an active fighting force in the early stages of the Donbass War. Swedish intelligence agencies that investigated a bomb attack in Gothenburg in 2017 claimed that the perpetrators had received military training from RIM. According to the closed report, in August 2016 Viktor Melin and Anton Tulin visited Russia, where they “were trained at a military camp near St. Petersburg by the Russian Imperial Movement and took part in the combat actions in Ukraine.”⁹⁶

In 2017, Matthew Heimbach, head of the Traditionalist Workers’ Party and lead organizer of the Unite the Right rally, met with a RIM member who visited the U.S. As a representative from RIM later explained, the organization would “Continue to establish contacts with right-wing, traditionalist and conservative organizations around the world to create a ‘Right-wing International.’”⁹⁷

Although the organization did meet some problems with law enforcement (“Praviy vzglyad,” the main website of the Imperial Movement, was blocked “for spreading information of an extremist and terrorist nature”), RIM remains a prominent white nationalist organization in Russia that has managed to survive persecution by the government. In 2020, the group was formally designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the United States.⁹⁸ According to available information, RIM remains active in the DNR and LNR.

⁹³ “Russian Imperial Movement: Our Manifesto,” The Spear (Russian Imperial Movement, March 18, 2018), <https://spear-national.org/russian-imperial-movement-our-manifesto>.

⁹⁴ “WHITE SUPREMACY EXTREMISM: The Transnational Rise of the Violent White Supremacist Movement” (The Soufan Center, September 2019), <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>.

⁹⁵ Marlene Laruelle, “Novorossiia: A Launching Pad for Russian Nationalists,” PonarsEurasia - Policy Memos (PonarsEurasia, December 21, 2015), <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/novorossiia-launching-pad-russian-nationalists>.

⁹⁶ Irina Gordienko, “Imperial zilch: The Russian footprint in the case of the “Swedish bombers” leads to an ultra-right project that curtailed along with the Donbass campaign.” Novaya Gazeta, July 7, 2017. <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/07/12/73087-imperskiy-pshik>

⁹⁷ Casey Michel Twitter, “Russian, American White Nationalists Raise Their Flags in Washington,” ThinkProgress (ThinkProgress, September 22, 2017), <https://thinkprogress.org/russian-american-nationalists-washington-5bd15fd18eaf/>

⁹⁸ Anna Meier, “Analysis | The U.S. Labeled a White Supremacist Group as ‘Terrorists’ for the First Time. It's Less Significant than You Think.,” The Washington Post (WP Company, April 30, 2020), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/04/30/us-labeled-white-supremacist-group-terrorists-first-time-its-less-significant-than-you-think>.

Examples of Collaboration Between White Nationalist Groups in the United States and Russia

While white nationalist movements emerged in the Russian Federation and United States under separate historical contexts, groups in both countries have increasingly come in contact with one another and are beginning to converge in their wider strategic objectives. In many ways, this contact represents a recurring trend of knowledge exchange and coordination among often geographically disparate groups. One of the earliest examples of high-level exchange between white nationalist communities in Russia and the United States was David Duke's visit to Moscow in the 1990s. As head of the Ku Klux Klan, David Duke could be considered the center of organized white nationalist political activity in the U.S. at the time. His visit to Russia featured guest lectures and meetings not only with white nationalists, but also with sympathetic members of government. Duke later moved to Russia in 1999 and lived there for five years, while he attempted to court Russia's anti-Semitic community. While there, he published the book "The Jewish Question Through the Eyes of an American," an anti-Semitic work and his first to be translated into Russian. The preface of the translated edition was written by one of former President Yeltsin's ministers and was on sale at a bookstall within the Duma.⁹⁹ Duke would exalt that "Russia is a White nation! Of the many capital cities of Europe, it is accurate to say that Moscow is the Whitest of them all."¹⁰⁰ This sentiment would later be emulated by Richard Spencer and Matthew Heimbach.¹⁰¹ As mentioned before, Heimbach would personally keep in contact with members of RIM and act as a conduit between American and Russian white nationalist movements.

On 15 March 2019, the Christchurch shooter's 74-page manifesto titled "The Great Replacement" was uploaded to 4chan and 8chan, in addition to live streaming his attack on Facebook. In his manifesto, Brenton Tarrant identifies himself as an "ethnonationalist" and "fascist" and lays out the justification for his actions, based upon the "white genocide" theory. His work consists primarily of calls to action and rallying cries for sympathizers to follow his lead.¹⁰² This manifesto and videos of his livestream would later proliferate through Telegram and other networks to become widely available for any interested party. Additionally, as "The Great Replacement" spread and reached a wider audience, it was translated into 15 languages, including Russian and Ukrainian by fellow white supremacists.¹⁰³ By March 20, 2019 a Russian-language copy was spotted on the Telegram channel belonging to Wotan Jugend, in addition to a copy of the original shooter's stream. By August 2019, physical copies of the manifesto were being sold in Ukraine for the equivalent of \$4 by an administrator of a white supremacist Telegram account that has over 1,000 followers.¹⁰⁴ On August 3, 2019 and inspired by Tarrant's manifesto, Patrick Wood Crusius

⁹⁹ John Daniszewski, "Ex-Klansman David Duke Sets Sights on Russian Anti-Semites," Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles Times, January 6, 2001), <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2001-jan-06-mn-9088-story.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Tom Porter, "Charlottesville's Alt-Right Leaders Have a Passion for Vladimir Putin," Newsweek (Newsweek, August 16, 2017), <https://www.newsweek.com/leaders-charlottesvilles-alt-right-protest-all-have-ties-russian-fascist-651384>

¹⁰² Brenton Tarrant, "The Great Replacement."

¹⁰³ Bellingcat, "The Russians and Ukrainians."

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

attacked a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, killing 22 people and injuring 26 others.¹⁰⁵ Like Tarrant, Crusius released his own manifesto, though only four pages, which opens with the line “In general, I support the Christchurch shooter and his manifesto.”¹⁰⁶ The same Ukrainian administrator also shared a Ukrainian translation of this manifesto just two days after the attack.¹⁰⁷

The authorship of manifestos by shooters and their subsequent distribution is a relatively novel trend that began in 2011. Anders Breivik, the Utøya, Norway shooter, released the manifesto “2083: A European Declaration of Independence” to coincide with his attack. It was the first of its kind and was translated into a variety of European languages outside of its original text. In the opening of the book, on page 6 of 1518, Breivik implores its readers to translate the work into “German, French, and Spanish” and that “It should be distributed to torrents, websites, Facebook groups and other political groups where there are high concentrations of cultural conservatives/nationalists/patriots.”¹⁰⁸ Since then, the release of manifestos has become a standard for white nationalist shooters who feel they can garner greater support for their cause by laying out their ideology for dissemination. Tarrant highlighted the importance of this in a fake Q&A section in his work in response to the question “Did you intend to survive the attack?” by answering “Survival was a better alternative to death in order to further spread my ideals by media coverage...”¹⁰⁹

The proliferation of manifestos serves as recruitment propaganda across international borders and languages. American white nationalist groups are reported to use iFunny, a service developed by a Russian company, as a means to recruit new followers.¹¹⁰ The website was created for users to share funny images, but the site’s poor moderation made it a target for white nationalists looking to expand their audience and recruitment efforts. For example, The Base has used iFunny to recruit a younger audience through posting propaganda videos and directly writing to potential recruits.¹¹¹ Special QR-codes as well as email addresses accompany the posts of the recruiters, so that those who are interested can initiate the vetting process themselves.¹¹² Additionally, Atomwaffen has also been actively using iFunny since 2015. These trends align with wider usage of Youtube and other entertainment-based platforms as means of recruitment.¹¹³ Additionally, white nationalists have migrated away from platforms like Facebook toward Russian social media platform VKontakte. Like iFunny, Vkontakte has more relaxed standards for content moderation compared to services like Facebook.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁵ Vanessa Romo, “El Paso Walmart Shooting Suspect Pleads Not Guilty,” NPR (NPR, October 10, 2019), <https://www.npr.org/2019/10/10/769013051/el-paso-walmart-shooting-suspect-pleads-not-guilty>.

¹⁰⁶ Patrick Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

¹⁰⁷ Bellingcat, “*The Russians and Ukrainians.*”

¹⁰⁸ Anders Breivik, “2083: A European Declaration of Independence.”

¹⁰⁹ Tarrant, “*The Great Replacement,*” pg 13.

¹¹⁰ Mack Lamoureux and Zachary Kamel, “Neo-Nazi Terror Groups Are Using IFunny to Recruit,” Vice (Vice News, November 14, 2019), https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/vb5kx3/neo-nazi-terror-groups-are-using-ifunny-to-recruit.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ The Soufan Center, “*White Supremacy Extremism.*”

¹¹⁴ Masood Farivar, “US White Nationalists Barred by Facebook Find Haven on Russia Site ,” Voice of America (Voice of America, April 10, 2019), <https://www.voanews.com/usa/us-white-nationalists-barred-facebook-find-haven-russia-site>.

As previously documented, American white nationalists like David Duke and Matthew Heimback have considered Russia an aspirational model of governance. Amidst this wider political alignment, a growing trend has emerged of in-person travel by white nationalists between Russia and the United States for the purposes of networking and training, as well as the sharing of information related to weapons and explosives.¹¹⁵ Indictments from the FBI related to an assault charge in Southern California have uncovered cases of individual members of the Rise Above Movement (RAM) travelling to Ukraine to meet with associates of Azov Battalion. While these meetings seem to be limited to MMA sessions, they nonetheless represent a willingness and ability for white nationalist groups to network and meet in person, and are an escalation above the typical conferences or speaking events that feature foreign guests. The MMA company White Rex is led by a Russian man who has espoused support for neo-Nazi ideals and also operates a line of clothing targeting white supremacists that features Nordic symbols. This company is also one of the largest hosts of MMA fights in Russia and serves as a potential recruitment platform.¹¹⁶ While participating in MMA fights in Europe, members of RAM acquired the license to distribute White Rex apparel, which provides them with a means of funding their activities. RAM is an especially violent group focused on sparking fights with anti-fascist counter protesters at political rallies in the United States and members have participated in the Unite the Right rally.

An incident involving the recruitment of an active duty U.S. Army soldier by white nationalist groups hints at the growing ambitions and goals of these communities. On 23 September 2019, Jarrett William Smith was arrested by the FBI on charges of “Distributing Information Relating to Explosives, Destructive Devices, and Weapons of Mass Destruction.”¹¹⁷ Smith was engaged in providing information on how to build Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) to an associate of Azov Battalion. Smith was in contact with the group through a Kansas-based intermediary, Craig Lang, who had previously traveled to Ukraine and fought alongside Pravi Sector. Smith was added to a Facebook chat with Lang and several others, including an FBI informant. In this chat he discussed his IED making abilities, his desire to attack an American news agency with a car bomb, and wish to kill then Democratic Primary Candidate Beto O’Rourke among other Democratic political party members.¹¹⁸

All these trends listed above are in line with what some have termed an “Alt-Right Internationale,”¹¹⁹ referring to the growing interconnection of far-right parties across international borders. What makes the Russian-American axis of this model so peculiar is how, despite national political tensions, white nationalists in both countries have shown willingness to cooperate with one another.

Previous Examples of American-Russian Cooperation in Fighting Terror

¹¹⁵ Mike Levine, “FBI Arrests Army Soldier Who Allegedly Discussed Plans to Bomb Major American News Network,” ABC News (ABC News Network, September 23, 2019), <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/fbi-arrests-army-soldier-allegedly-discussed-plans-bomb/story?id=65802902>.

¹¹⁶ Bryan Schatz, “The Terrifying Rise of Alt-Right Fight Clubs,” Mother Jones (Mother Jones, February 1, 2018), <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2018/02/the-terrifying-rise-of-alt-right-fight-clubs/>.

¹¹⁷ United States vs Jarrett William Smith, 19-mj-5105-ADM, (G.D. Kan, 2019).

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Patrik Hermansson. "The International Alt-Right - Fascism for the 21st Century?". Routledge Press, February 13th, 2020

Both Russia and the United States have adopted counterterror strategies as a part of their wider national security portfolios. This has included approaching domestic threats, such as the insurgency in Chechnya and activities of militia groups in the United States, as well as counterterror operations abroad in theaters like Syria and the wider Levant. While both states have expressed the necessity to combat terrorism, their interests rarely align with one another. For this reason, American-Russian cooperation in countering terrorism has frequently been referenced as a potential means of collaboration, yet rarely is this cooperation explicitly detailed.

Given military security concerns and incompatibilities in doctrine, cooperation has been primarily focused on intelligence sharing aimed at warning either party of imminent terrorist activity. This has included direct bilateral sharing of information, as well as the usage of international bodies like the United Nations. For example, in U.N. Security Council resolutions 2253 (2015) and 2368 (2017), the U.S. and Russia agreed to an international framework to identify and freeze the financial assets of individuals and groups associated with the Islamic State and Al'Qaeda. Historically, this has also been exemplified by UN Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001), passed after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, which calls "on States to work together urgently to prevent and suppress terrorist acts, including through increased cooperation and full implementation of the relevant international conventions relating to terrorism."

The peak of American-Russian counterterror cooperation occurred after the 9/11 attacks. The Russian Federation supported the United States' intervention in Afghanistan, known as "Operation Enduring Freedom", and considered fighting terrorism to be an area of mutual interest.¹²⁰ During Operation Enduring Freedom, Russia and the U.S. sought wider strategic alignment between one another and cooperated on a variety of areas, including sharing relevant information on actors in the Middle East and coordinating U.S. military logistics.¹²¹ Following the 2010 U.S.-Russia Reset, the establishment of the Northern Distribution Network allowed American forces in the Middle East to supply themselves through Russian airspace, adding a valuable second dimension to NATO's supply chain capabilities.¹²²

In addition to using state-level legal frameworks, there have been examples of information sharing occurring at a comparatively lower lever. This includes the direct disclosure by both Russian and American intelligence agencies of an imminent terror threat. A recent example of this was the United States warning of a terror attack in the Saint Petersburg metro, information which was supplied directly to the Russian government by an American intelligence agency.¹²³ Additionally, members of the FSB warned American authorities about the danger posed by the Tsarnaev Brothers prior to the Boston Marathon bombing. In these cases, information is often shared through backchannels and other non-conventional avenues of disclosure, including direct personal

¹²⁰ Jennifer L. Petykowski, "Russia's Interests in the Global War on Terrorism: Implications for a Continuing US-Russian Partnership," *Russia's Interests in the Global War on Terrorism: Implications for a Continuing US-Russian Partnership* (Naval Postgraduate School, 2004), <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=450663>.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² "Northern Distribution Network (NDN)," Center for Strategic and International Studies (Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 20, 2015), <https://www.csis.org/programs/transnational-threats-project/past-projects/northern-distribution-network-ndn>.

¹²³ Andrew E. Kramer, "Putin Thanks Trump for Helping Russia Thwart Terrorist Attack," *The New York Times* (The New York Times, December 29, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/29/world/europe/putin-trump-terrorism.html>.

communication between government officials. According to former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, this type of intelligence sharing is “...something that goes on below the radar and is not all that visible.”¹²⁴ While this has proven useful in addressing imminent threats, it does raise questions regarding ethics and a lack of oversight.

Even without direct cooperation, Russia and the United States have coordinated their counterterror activities in such a way that neither party directly harms the other. A key example of this can be seen in Syria, where both Russia and the U.S. have communicated on a military-to-military level to ensure flight deconfliction to avoid shooting down one another’s aircraft.¹²⁵ When faced with the possibility of direct conflict as members of the Wagner Group (a mercenary organization loosely tied to the Russian government¹²⁶) advanced towards a U.S. Army Forward Operating Base, the United States was in contact with the Russian government and ascertained that there were no official members of the Russian military present before opening fire.¹²⁷ While this was considered to be the most intense instance of combat between American and Russian military forces since the Cold War, the effort to receive authorization beforehand hints at a willingness by the United States to avoid escalation and to reduce the potential for miscalculation.

The United States and Russia, however, differ in their core approaches to fighting terrorism. The Russian government utilizes methods they call “preventative outreach” (referred to in the U.S. as Information Operations (IO)), to dissuade would-be terrorists or sympathizers from supporting movements and preventing the spread of cells across the country. This is in addition to previous shutdowns and blockings of terror-related websites by Russian authorities.¹²⁸ In comparison, the U.S. often does not shut down websites because of First Amendment protections and overall does not engage in aggressive IO campaigns targeting its own citizens. The American approach to countering white nationalist threats has been extensive monitoring, the use of covert law enforcement personnel, and arresting group members once proof of a specific crime or intent to commit an imminent act of violence has been gathered.

Additionally, the atmosphere of mutual trust seen in the wake of 9/11 was not long-lasting. Wider geopolitical trends soon placed Russian and American interests opposed to one another. One of the first divisions between American and Russian counterterror interests relates to the Second Chechen War. Moscow accused the U.S. of encouraging terrorists to fight against the central

¹²⁴ Olivia Beavers, “Former Intel Chief: Putin Is Handling Trump like 'an Asset,’” *The Hill* (The Hill, December 19, 2017), <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/365539-former-intel-chief-putin-is-handling-trump-like-an-asset#.WjkljKlwYew.twitter>.

¹²⁵ Andrew S. Weiss and Nicole Ng, “Collision Avoidance: The Lessons of U.S. and Russian Operations in Syria,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 20, 2019), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/03/20/collision-avoidance-lessons-of-u.s.-and-russian-operations-in-syria-pub-78571>.

¹²⁶ Alexander Rabin, “Diplomacy and Dividends: Who Really Controls the Wagner Group?,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (Foreign Policy Research Institute), accessed June 13, 2020, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/10/diplomacy-and-dividends-who-really-controls-the-wagner-group/>.

¹²⁷ Valentine Barishnikov. “Names and families of the casualties from ‘PMC Wagner’” [In Russian]. Retrieved from: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29038004.html>

¹²⁸ I. G. Sirotkin, “STATEMENT by Colonel General I. G. SIROTKIN Deputy Director, Russia’s Federal Security Service (FSB), Head of Central Office, National Antiterrorism Committee (NAC),” *UN High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States*, New York, 28 June 2018 (United Nations, June 28, 2018), <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism.ctitf/files/S1-Russia.pdf>.

government in addition to secretly providing rebels with resources and arms.¹²⁹ While the United States was critical of Russia's approach to Chechnya, there is no proof of American support for Chechen rebels. Although initially supportive of the intervention in Afghanistan, Moscow was very critical of the decision by the United States to invade Iraq in 2003.¹³⁰ This divide would be seen later in Russia's opposition to NATO's mission in Libya (after initial support from Dmitry Medvedev)¹³¹ and with the United States' opposition to the Assad regime, a close ally of Moscow, during the Syrian Civil War.¹³²

Policy Suggestions for Bilateral Cooperation in Counterterrorism Measures

For Russia and the United States, cooperation in fighting white nationalism represents a ripe opportunity for collaboration, as it is divorced from intractable geopolitical issues associated with discussions on Middle East policy. This threat is growing in capacity, as a result of internet communication, and has been historically absent from counterterrorism discussions and policy formation. While both countries have taken initial steps in addressing this challenge, there is still considerable opportunity for wider cooperation.

In addressing the threat of armed white nationalist groups, it is crucial that policymakers in both countries move beyond backchannels and informal means of information sharing and instead approach this challenge with an emphasis on both concrete policies, as well as oversight and proper review. This can take the form of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that explicitly articulates the importance of addressing this topic and parameters of this cooperation. While legislative working groups may not be viable at this time, this may be done through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and State Department or through each countries' relevant defense authorities. The flight deconfliction over Syria was established through just such an MOU, proving the viability of this method of agreement.

We believe that it is also crucial that Russia and the United States address the growing online presence of white nationalist communities in both countries and that steps are taken to track, and if possible minimize, an emerging armed threat. This can include the continued monitoring of such groups, as well as the continued investigation into their emerging international ties. While we concede that Russia and the U.S. differ drastically in their diplomatic and democratic approaches toward combating terrorism and in their interpretation of individual rights, we hope that both parties are able to align themselves with one another on this topic.

It is also crucial that stricter guidelines are provided towards the movement of weapons into the territories under the control of the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic.

¹²⁹ Sarah Rainsford, "Russia's Putin: US Agents Gave Direct Help to Chechens," BBC News (BBC, April 27, 2015), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32487081>.

¹³⁰ Thomas Ambrosio, "The Russo-American Dispute over the Invasion of Iraq: International Status and the Role of Positional Goods," *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no. 8 (December 2005): pp. 1189-1210, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130500351357>.

¹³¹ Clifford J. Levy and Thom Shanker, "In Rare Split, Two Leaders in Russia Differ on Libya," *The New York Times* (The New York Times, March 22, 2011), <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/22/world/europe/22russia.html>.

¹³² Imran Rahman-Jones, "Why Does Russia Support Syria and President Assad?," BBC Newsbeat (BBC, April 11, 2017), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/39554171/why-does-russia-support-syria-and-president-assad>.

While we recognize that Moscow and Washington differ on their stances towards both republics' claims to independence, the potential access to a "frozen conflict" zone creates opportunities for weapons trafficking and paramilitary training. A similar trend is visible in the frozen conflict zone of Transnistria, which has become a major source of weapons for terror groups in Europe.¹³³

Finally, we believe that this topic provides ample opportunity for collaboration between research groups and non-governmental entities. Recent years have revealed the immense power that social media companies hold and questions have actively been raised about their responsibility and ethics. For social media companies, this can include stricter application of codes of conduct, as well as collaborative research into techniques like the "redirect method", wherein a person's search for a contentious topic such as "How to join ISIS" may redirect them to a deradicalization website instead.¹³⁴ For public and private research institutions, continued study of the dynamics of document translation and distribution may provide policymakers and law enforcement officials with a greater understanding of the scale and scope of this transnational challenge.

Lastly, continued research is required into the effects of delisting websites from internet service providers or disrupting established forums of communication. It is not yet clear if such actions succeed in reducing overall online activity and the incidence rate of new individuals coming into contact with violent ideologies. For instance, after losing its original domain provider and going offline for a period of time, 8kun migrated to the Russian hosting service that it is currently reliant on. While the United States may not be able to tell the hosting company to cease providing these services, the Russian government may be able to do so, by utilizing its previously described legal authority. Similarly, Russia could cooperate with the United States in extraditing figures like Rinaldo Nazario ("Norman Spear") of The Base in order to help reduce the potential threat of this organization growing its presence within either country, or beyond. These cases highlight the interconnected nature of international white nationalism and modern communication technologies, as well as the difficulties the United States or Russian Federation may have in addressing them. Working together to address these shared concerns can serve as an avenue of cooperation and dialogue between both countries during this contentious time in bilateral political relations and provide protection to targeted populations, including immigrant communities and LGBT individuals in both countries.

¹³³ Daniela Peterka-Benton. "Arms Trafficking in Transnistria: A European Security Threat?". *Journal of Applied Security Research*, volume 7, Issue 1. 2012.

¹³⁴ Andy Greenberg, "Google's Clever Plan to Stop Aspiring ISIS Recruits," *Wired* (Conde Nast, July 9, 2016), <https://www.wired.com/2016/09/googles-clever-plan-stop-aspiring-isis-recruits/>.

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