

# The History and Future of the Nordic Resistance Movement

By Peter Smith

In June 2024, a man in Finland with a long history of ideological and racist violence allegedly stabbed a 12-year-old immigrant child and attempted to stab another. The suspect was previously described as a key member of the Finnish branch of Scandinavia's largest National Socialist organization, the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM). Meanwhile, less than 24 hours later, the United States designated NRM as a terrorist entity, the second country to do so after the group was banned by Finland's Supreme Court in 2020. NRM has developed a reputation for its public demonstrations, its striking propaganda, and the violence perpetrated by some of its members. Initially sprouting from the remnants of a decentralized Swedish far-right network, NRM has grown into a pan-Nordic organization with a rigid hierarchy and has expanded with chapters throughout Denmark, Norway, Iceland, and Finland. Authoritarian in its political aspirations and seeking to supplant the democracies of the nations in which they operate, NRM members have been convicted of stabbings, killings, bomb plots, among other violent activities. The U.S. designation has been reportedly quick to impact NRM's online presence, with several of NRM's websites offline at the time of publication. Most of its current public messaging flows from an official Telegram account. While the designation is a disruption to NRM's ability to operate, it is unlikely to dismantle the network that makes up its far-right membership. This article examines the evolution of the group from its early days to its current iteration.

**O**n June 14, 2024, the U.S. Department of State designated the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist.<sup>1</sup> NRM is estimated to be the largest white nationalist organization in Sweden and has chapters extending out across Scandinavia including Norway, Denmark, and Iceland. The Finnish chapter was banned by the country's supreme court in 2020, upholding the ruling of a lower court.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. designation also named three of NRM's leaders. This included a man who has

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contributed to the organization's activities and growth for the past 20 years, its current leader Tor Fredrik Vejdeland. Listed alongside him was Pär Öberg, a member of NRM's governing body, the national council, and head of its parliamentary branch, as well as Leif Robert Eklund, another member of the national council and a prominent NRM organizer within Sweden.<sup>3</sup> In its release, the State Department stated:

*NRM's violent activity is based on its openly racist, anti-immigrant, antisemitic, anti-LGBTQI+ platform. The group's members and leaders have carried out violent attacks against political opponents, protestors, journalists, and other perceived adversaries. NRM members have also taken steps to collect and prepare weapons and explosive materials, including on behalf of the group and in furtherance of its goals. In addition, NRM has organized training in violent tactics, including hand-to-hand combat and knife fighting.<sup>4</sup>*

While NRM is primarily a political organization focused on staging protests and producing propaganda, its members train in martial arts, weapons use, and other activities seen as preparatory for, in its view, the coming clash of the races. To that end, NRM members and associates have been arrested and convicted in a slew of targeted violence and vandalism cases, terrorist plots including bombings, and dozens of criminal weapons charges. Members and leadership alike have been arrested during clashes with counter-protesters and police,<sup>5</sup> and the organization's antisemitism pervades its ideology, leading it to blame Jewish people for everything from demographic change to economic troubles to the Russian-Ukraine war. Avowed National Socialists, its members seek to create an ethnostate that not only excludes non-European descendant minorities but also non-Nordic Europeans as well.

## NRM's History and Ideology

NRM began as a very different organization than what it would become. Initially a decentralized network of Swedish neo-Nazis in the 1990s, dubbed Vitt Ariskt Motstånd (VAM—White Aryan Resistance), it was set up to mirror the American network founded by Robert Jay Mathews, The Order.<sup>6</sup> Initially intended to be a nameless and silent brotherhood of white supremacists, VAM was never meant to function as a homogeneous group with centralized leadership, but rather as a collection of aligned white nationalist gangs, groups, and individuals from Sweden's National Socialist and racist skinhead youth subcultures. The network's ideology and culture were codified in the pages of the magazine Storm, which served as a mouthpiece for the movement. Initially titling the community the "Storm network," the publication billed itself as an "organ for White Aryan Resistance." The pages of Storm delivered rhetoric, news, and culture that was embraced by its readers as the voice of the movement during its publishing run from 1991 to 1993. When affiliates of the network were found to be responsible for a series of assaults and robberies, the media gave VAM its name after

lifting White Aryan Resistance from the text of a demonstration poster. VAM distinguished itself as a departure from the racist skinhead culture, creating a unique brand that borrowed its decentralized organizational model from American neo-Nazi movements, while adding a unique Swedish nationalist flavor. Adopting the German Wolfsangel as its symbol, VAM members had no formal uniform but typically draped themselves in black U.S. military clothing.<sup>7</sup> A flourishing Swedish and international far-right music scene, promoted in the pages of Storm magazine, cemented the sound of the subculture.<sup>8</sup>

The early 1990s also saw a small group of influential figures began to emerge from the scene, including Klas Lund, then in his early 20s, who would play a pivotal role in the creation of the organization that would become the Nordic Resistance Movement. It was his association with VAM and his history of violence that brought media attention to the group. VAM transformed radically during this time, even having contact offices, moving away from its initial *raison d'être* as a clandestine brotherhood to what Expo Magazine called a “radical youth movement with its own dress code and symbols.”<sup>9</sup>

After being released from prison for beating a man to death in the late 1980s, Lund contributed to and served as editor for National Socialist magazines, including Storm.<sup>10</sup> In the spring of 1991, police arrested seven men for robbing a military weapons depot in Väsby, Sweden, among them Lund. Released shortly after the warehouse robbery, he was picked up again after he and another man pulled off a bank heist in Vemdalen. While he served six years in a Swedish prison, outside its walls, Lund’s status among the national neo-Nazi movement grew. Staging a failed escape attempt, his supporters called in bomb threats demanding his release. Nevertheless, in 1993, VAM announced it was disbanding, and Storm’s printers released a final issue.<sup>11</sup>

Lund emerged from prison in 1997 to find VAM had survived via splinter groups that operated with varying degrees of success.<sup>12</sup> Lund quickly joined Nationell Ungdom (NU, National Youth), a neo-Nazi organization based in Stockholm. Feeling there needed to be a more focused and formal approach to National Socialist organizing, he and some of the remnants of VAM formed the Swedish Resistance Movement (SRM) in 1997 and would eventually absorb NU into its membership in 2006.<sup>13</sup> Both SRM and NU began offering paramilitary training to their members, preparing for a coming white revolution.<sup>14</sup> Despite losing favor with other groups within the Swedish far-right at various points during the 2000s, Lund remained in charge of SRM until his departure in 2015 to found another Swedish far-right organization, Nordisk Styrke (Nordic Strength), where he remains active.

With its new leader, Simon Lindberg, SRM reorganized in 2015 officially under the banner of Nordiska Motståndsrörelsen (Nordic Resistance Movement).<sup>15</sup> Discarding its sole focus on Sweden, the new model aimed at creating a political movement that crossed nearby borders to unite white people of Scandinavian descent together. Virulently anti-immigration of any kind, anti-LGBTQ+, and antisemitic, the organization focused on advocacy and preparation, warning that war against their race had already begun and supporters needed to prepare for the swiftly coming clash between white Nordic people and immigrant populations invading the country as part of a global Jewish plot.<sup>16</sup>

Slowly expanding to Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland, the Swedish chapter remains the largest branch of the organization

to date. Recent estimates put NRM’s membership around 150 to 300 active members, with NRM Sweden protests mobilizing crowds of 600 to 700 people in 2018.<sup>17</sup> Public protests remain the organization’s primary focus, drawing media attention from mainstream news sources as well as generating images and footage for a suite of podcasts, articles, videos, and other types of propaganda in multiple languages pushed out through its public social media channels. Besides demonstrations, NRM members continue to train in combat sports, knife fighting, and paramilitary tactics. The organization’s official stance is that there is still value in engaging in political action, with an aim to recruit and indoctrinate as many potential members as possible, but there will be a time for an armed struggle and members should prepare accordingly. A handbook released by NRM maintained that the organization “can only be victorious through physical struggle” and that “in the future, our weapons will be decisive on the battlefield.”<sup>18</sup> It adds though that “at present,” members should continue to act within the confines of the law.

Often refusing to distance themselves from members suspected of committing violent acts, including three men associated with the organization who carried out a series of targeted bombings in late 2016 and early 2017,<sup>19</sup> NRM is still willing to engage in the democratic political process. The group managed to have a member elected as a write-in candidate to a municipal government council in Sweden in 2014<sup>20</sup> and registered NRM as a political party in Sweden in 2015.<sup>21</sup> A comparison of the group’s rhetoric and messaging both pre- and post-entry into the democratic process found that little had been done to temper its overall message of Nordic racial superiority and its goals remained to establish an authoritarian state.<sup>22</sup> Leaflets distributed by NRM in 2018 named and pictured four Jewish people with connections to international finance. Calling the men “parasites” who “rule” the lives of the Swedish people, it asked the reader to “take back power from the globalists.”<sup>23</sup>

### Connections to the International Far-Right

NRM dedicates considerable resources to its networking with other far-right organizations and networks in Europe and North America. This is partly due to NRM’s English-language media, including the Nordic Frontier podcast, and striking imagery captured during the numerous rallies and public events the organization holds to garner attention. Members of NRM traveled to the United Kingdom for a speaking event organized by Patriotic Alternative in October 2022, a far-right organization founded by long-time British white nationalist Mark Collett.<sup>24</sup> Nordic Frontier host Andreas Johansson (Andreas Holmvall) presented at the Lancashire, United Kingdom, event on behalf of the organization.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, Johansson has had members of the far-right from Australia, Canada, Hungary, South Africa, the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere as guests on his podcast.<sup>26</sup>

Alternatively, members of foreign far-right organizations have traveled to meet and network with NRM. Members of the American white nationalist organization Patriot Front met with members of NRM while visiting Sweden.<sup>27</sup> The meeting took place during a trip by Patriot Front members across Europe to meet various other far-right organizations.

NRM’s more direct connections to the international far-right encompass a complicated landscape, as unlike some other prominent white nationalist organizations, NRM specifically



*Members of the Nordic Resistance Movement march during a celebration of Finnish independence in Helsinki, Finland, on December 6, 2017. (Markku Ulander/AFP via Getty Images)*

endorses Russia's war against Ukraine, viewing the conflict as a product of NATO's alleged expansionist aims, a product of Jewish influence on global politics. The connections to Russia extend beyond propaganda support for the war: NRM has hosted the leadership of the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) in Sweden,<sup>28</sup> a conglomerate of nationalist, imperial, and far-right groups that offer members military training at a facility in St. Petersburg. Two of the three men charged with the bombings of refugee centers and leftist bookstores in Sweden near the end of the 2010s received training from RIM.<sup>29</sup> Reported to have learned to build explosives through RIM's "Partisan" course, the men were former members of NRM.<sup>30</sup> RIM was designated a terrorist group by the United States in 2020.<sup>31</sup>

RIM and NRM connections go back to at least 2012 when RIM's founder and leader, Stanislav Anatolyevich Vorobyev, awarded two NRM writers for their "objective and correct description" of the politics of Russia in Swedish media.<sup>32</sup> Vorobyev also spoke in Sweden during a 2015 summit organized by NRM.<sup>33</sup> Though the exact amount has been an issue of some contention, Vorobyev claimed to have donated money to NRM and thanked the organization during a speech for its part in the war against Ukraine's "Jewish oligarchs."<sup>34</sup> NRM also was present during the "International Conservative Forum," a far-right conference in St. Petersburg that was organized by the Russian Rodina (Motherland) party.<sup>35</sup> This trip included a visit to a RIM facility in the same city.<sup>36</sup>

Since the announcement of NRM's designation, it now also shares a place with RIM as the only two white nationalist organizations on the State Department's terror registry.

An NRM member, Ronny Bårdsen, also lived with Yan Igorevich Petrovskiy in Norway until his arrest by Norwegian authorities in 2016.<sup>37</sup> Petrovskiy is a senior member of the Russian paramilitary organization Rusich.<sup>38</sup> A Soviet national at birth, Petrovskiy grew up in Norway. He was eventually deported from the country after Oslo ruled that he was a national security threat. He was also designated by the U.S. Treasury in 2022 for his role in aiding the Russian war in Ukraine.<sup>39</sup>

While one of its core beliefs is that the Nordic race in particular is superior to all others, NRM does hold rallies in support of its ideological allies in other countries. Approximately 80 members of the Swedish Resistance Movement (the predecessor of NRM) marched through the streets of Stockholm in support of the Greek neo-Nazi group Golden Dawn in September 2013 after 20 of the latter group's members had been arrested for belonging to a criminal organization.<sup>40</sup> More recently, in April 2023, NRM held protests in support of the American white nationalist and founder of the white-only Active Club network Robert Rundo.<sup>41</sup> Rundo had been arrested in Romania on an outstanding warrant for rioting charges in California. Pictures posted to NRM's official Telegram channel show at least five men demonstrating outside the Romanian embassy in Stockholm, Sweden.<sup>42</sup>

NRM was dubbed a “supported group” by the “skull mask network,” an accelerationist and neo-fascist community of individuals that grew out of the Iron March web forum, which was active from 2011 to 2017,<sup>43</sup> and includes groups like the Atomwaffen Division, National Action, and Antipodean Resistance.<sup>44</sup> At least one NRM member was a moderator on Iron March and an early supporter of the Atomwaffen Division.<sup>45</sup>

### Attacks and Violence

NRM members and former members have been at the center of violent assaults, robberies, and killings since the organization's outset. While the group rhetorically embraces the idea of coming violence, most terrorist activity, such as bombings and attack plots, are often not linked back directly to the group, but rather the actions of individual members or associates. NRM embraces principles of aggressive self-defense, often praising its members after clashes for protecting themselves if not outright distorting events where NRM members have been the instigators. Violence against political enemies has been common since even before NRM's official founding, as two men—both connected to National Youth—killed trade unionist Björn Söderberg in 1999 after he tipped off a newspaper that a fellow union official was active in the far-right.<sup>46</sup> A third man faced weapons charges related to the killing.<sup>47</sup>

NRM-Finland members' propensity toward violence resulted in the group being banned by the Finnish government in 2017, a decision that was upheld by the country's supreme court in 2020.<sup>48</sup> Many of NRM-Finland's former members remain active in far-right political advocacy, including a man alleged to be behind the June 2024 stabbing of a 12-year-old immigrant and the attempted stabbing of another youth of the same age.<sup>49</sup> Sebastian Lämsä is currently awaiting trial but has admitted to the attack while denying that race played a factor.<sup>50</sup> Reportedly a “key member” of NRM before it was banned,<sup>51</sup> the 33-year-old Lämsä was also arrested in 2021 after authorities seized explosives that he allegedly ordered through the mail.<sup>52</sup>

Two NRM activists from Denmark, including the leader of a regional “nest”—the name for local chapters—vandalized 84 graves in a Jewish cemetery in 2019.<sup>53</sup> Far from a random act, the incident coincided with the anniversary of the 1938 “Night of Broken Glass” (Kristallnacht) by German Nazi paramilitaries. It was revealed in court that the perpetrators planned and prepared for the targeting beforehand.<sup>54</sup>

In a separate incident in 2019, Oslo police fired multiple bullets into a moving vehicle after a man who had distributed NRM propaganda<sup>55</sup> stole an ambulance at gunpoint and led authorities on a 15-minute chase through the city's streets.<sup>56</sup> After attempting to ram a police car and striking several pedestrians with the vehicle, the man crashed the ambulance and was arrested. Police found a large quantity of drugs, a shotgun, and an Uzi submachine gun in the vehicle.<sup>57</sup>

The year prior, Swedish authorities uncovered a plot to kill two journalists after searching the computer of an NRM member.<sup>58</sup> Their investigation revealed that the man had files containing the addresses and other personal information of both targets. Searches also uncovered a firearm and silencer in the man's possession.<sup>59</sup>

In July 2017, three NRM members were also found to be behind a series of bombings against a center for asylum seekers and a left-wing bookstore. While no one was killed, a worker at the center

was severely injured.<sup>60</sup> A third unexploded device was found outside a migrant encampment.<sup>61</sup> Two of these men were the individuals mentioned earlier who had traveled to St. Petersburg to receive training from RIM.<sup>62</sup>

The act that ultimately led to NRM's banning in Finland stemmed from an incident at a 2016 NRM demonstration at Helsinki's Central Railway Station. When a Finnish man, Jimi Karttunen, objected and confronted the demonstrators, an NRM member knocked him to the ground, injuring his head on the concrete. Though he was subsequently discharged from the hospital, Karttunen died six days later from a brain hemorrhage. During the trial, the victim's history of drug use<sup>63</sup> was used to partially explain his death, and NRM member Jesse Torniainen would serve two years for aggravated assault rather than manslaughter.<sup>64</sup>

In 2013, Sebastian Lämsä—the same man who allegedly stabbed a child in a Finnish shopping center in 2024—and two others attempted to rush a Jyväskylä, Finland, event for the release of a book on the far-right. Though they failed to make it through the door, Lämsä stabbed a security guard before fleeing with the others.<sup>65</sup> That same year in Sweden, NRM members planned and carried out an attack against a 200-person demonstration protesting the rising far-right in their neighborhood.<sup>66</sup>

### Impacts of the Designation

The designation of the Nordic Resistance Movement by the U.S. government could have potentially serious consequences for the group. As mentioned, several of NRM's websites are offline as of early August. While Finland is the only other country to date to take steps to ban the organization, Swedish authorities described NRM in 2018 as the “largest threat to Sweden's internal security.”<sup>67</sup> A terrorist designation from yet another fellow NATO country could create momentum for further national and international action against the group and its membership. NRM's leadership has remained defiant, publishing an article on June 15 claiming that “all attempts to stop us will fail” and blaming “Jewish activist and Foreign Minister Anthony [sic] Blinken” for the decision.<sup>68</sup>

A transnational organization in practice, NRM has not expressed an interest in expanding chapters outside of the Nordic block. Barring significant changes to this organizational policy, the most significant impact undoubtedly will be on the financial support NRM receives from abroad. The U.S. designation specifically prevents Americans from doing business with or financially supporting NRM, but it already has had an impact on the group's leadership in Sweden. Tor Fredrik Vejdeland and Pär Öberg, both named in the U.S. designation, claimed on NRM's website and Telegram channel to have had their bank accounts frozen as a result of the terror listing.

The exact figures on financial support from abroad to NRM are not known, but the group was previously accepting monetary donations.<sup>a</sup> NRM was an early adopter of cryptocurrency as a means to fundraise, and while this could be a means to circumvent the

a While figures on the amount of funding NRM receives from abroad are not publicly available, and much of the group, including leadership, relies heavily on social funding to survive, NRM did receive a total of USD \$92,000 in cryptocurrency donations over nine years, eventually selling these holdings for \$200,000, according to Chainalysis. “OFAC Sanctions Individuals Linked to the Nordic Resistance Movement, which Accepted Crypto Donations to Fund Terrorist Activities,” Chainalysis, June 14, 2024.

restrictions imposed by the U.S. terrorist designation, the Denmark branch in particular removed the links to its crypto wallets from its website shortly after the State Department made its announcement. On July 1, 2024, a post to NRM's English-language website asked for cash donations to be mailed in "well-concealed envelopes" to a Swedish post office box. Donors who wished to give large amounts were told to contact the organization directly and arrange to deliver the money in person.

Several of the group's websites are no longer accessible at the time of publication. In response, NRM used its official Telegram

channel to blame the "forces" that seized its bank accounts and were "working on racially replacing us in our homelands."<sup>69</sup> While a serious blow to its propaganda efforts and ability to fund its operations, it remains unlikely that the terrorist designation will eradicate the political or ideological aspirations of the group or its membership entirely. Even if national bans within the Nordic block were effectively to end NRM as an organization and political entity, the Finland ban has shown that members will remain networked and active within the nation's far-right, though at a diminished capacity. **CTC**

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