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Putin Wants to Give Russians Fighting in Syria Veteran Status

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The war veteran status gives access to several additional rights, affecting medical and tax benefits and pensions.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has proposed granting Russian citizens involved in the fighting in Syria the status of war veterans, according to a statement published Friday on the Kremlin's website.

Putin ordered Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev to "review the question" of amending the law on veterans to include Russians fighting in Syria by Dec. 20, the statement said. Currently, the category only includes soldiers stationed in Russia and Afghanistan.

The order follows a request to amend the law by human rights ombudswoman Ella Pamfilova at a meeting with Putin a day after Russia announced the beginning of a series of air strikes in Syria on the Islamic State — an Islamist group banned in Russia.

"Every soldier involved in the air strikes on the Islamic State should be given the status of participant in an armed conflict. Without having to prove exhaustively that he was there [in

Syria,]" Pamfilova was cited as saying at a meeting with Putin by the Interfax news agency.

Pamfilova cited South Ossetia as an example to avoid, saying military involved in the conflict there were only granted the status a year after fighting ended.

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