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Kremlin Programs Promoting War Veterans Aim to Avoid Potential Putin Rivals – Vyorstka

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Russian programs that place Ukraine war veterans in official roles deliberately favor low-profile participants to prevent the emergence of potential rivals to President Vladimir Putin, the exiled news outlet Vyorstka reported Wednesday, citing sources familiar with the programs.

Several state-backed programs work to elevate the hundreds of thousands of Ukraine war veterans, whom Putin has hailed as Russia's "new elite," into government positions.

Sources told Vyorstka that the Kremlin's approach prioritizes veterans who are "ordinary and unambitious," reducing the risk they could someday turn their wartime achievements into political capital and pose a challenge to Putin's regime.

"We even test them for serious political ambitions and loyalty," a source who works at the

Time of Heroes program, which trains veterans for civil service, told Vyorstka. “Of course, they shouldn’t have any criminal record or dangerous tendencies, so that no one can say that we’re promoting the wrong kind of people. But in general, they are calm Russian men.”

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But veterans often lack the skills and manners required for bureaucratic work and sometimes engage in alcohol abuse and brawls, Vyorstka reported.

“Vasya from the trenches doesn’t have a clue. For him, politics is just a way to avoid going back to that hell. He doesn’t understand laws, regulations or the role of the media,” said a Time of Heroes employee.

One Time of Heroes participant confused the powers of deputies, governors and the president during a public meeting, then left through a back exit, one of Vyorstka’s sources recalled.

Veterans are often assigned mentors to prevent incidents if recruits overstep boundaries, become intoxicated or get into conflicts, Vyorstka reported.

“These guys were sitting in the trenches yesterday, and today they’re being told, ‘You're a politician now’,” one political consultant working with the Leaders of Russia program said.

Program participants are given lectures on business style and image, as well as public speaking training, in order to better liaise with civilians in political roles.

At a presentation exercise, one participant reportedly listed his frontline achievements and the names of fallen comrades as well as graphic details about the circumstances of their deaths.

“An important point that is explained [to participants] is that the harsh military manner of speaking is perceived as aggression in civilian contexts," a Time of Heroes employee said.

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