

# The Russian military is building a mini-Reichstag at its amusement park so that kids have ‘a real building to storm’

By Andrew Roth

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MOSCOW — What happens when you combine a military targeting the next generation of soldiers and the sacred memory of World War II in Russia?

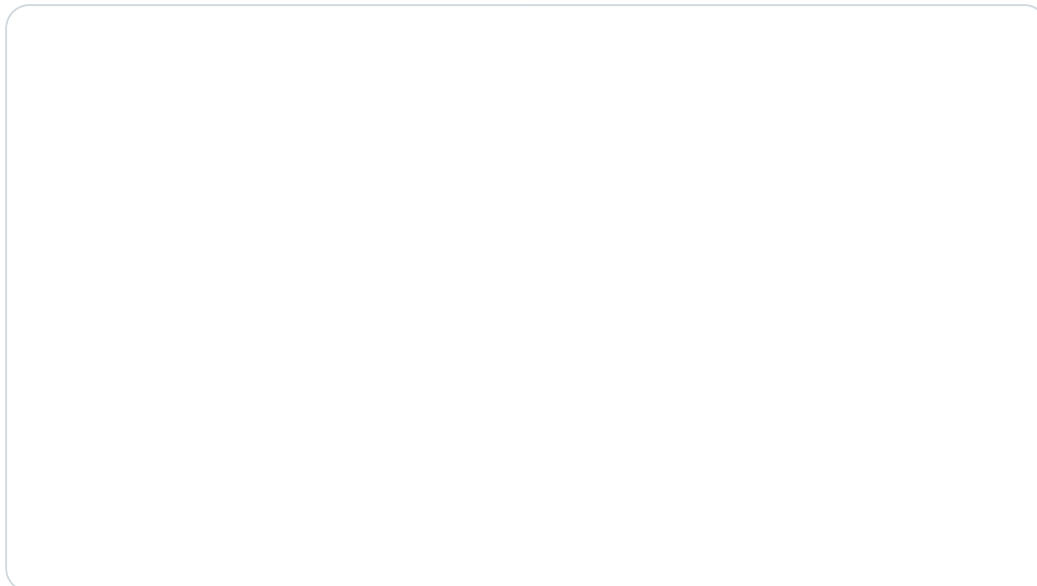
“We're building a Reichstag in Patriot Park,” Sergei Shoigu, Russia's defense minister, announced during a parliamentary address Wednesday. “Not to full size, but so our 'youth army soldiers' can storm not just any building, but a concrete place.”



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DefMin building a Reichstag playground for the Youth Army (real thing) so that they, too, can experience the thrill of storming the building

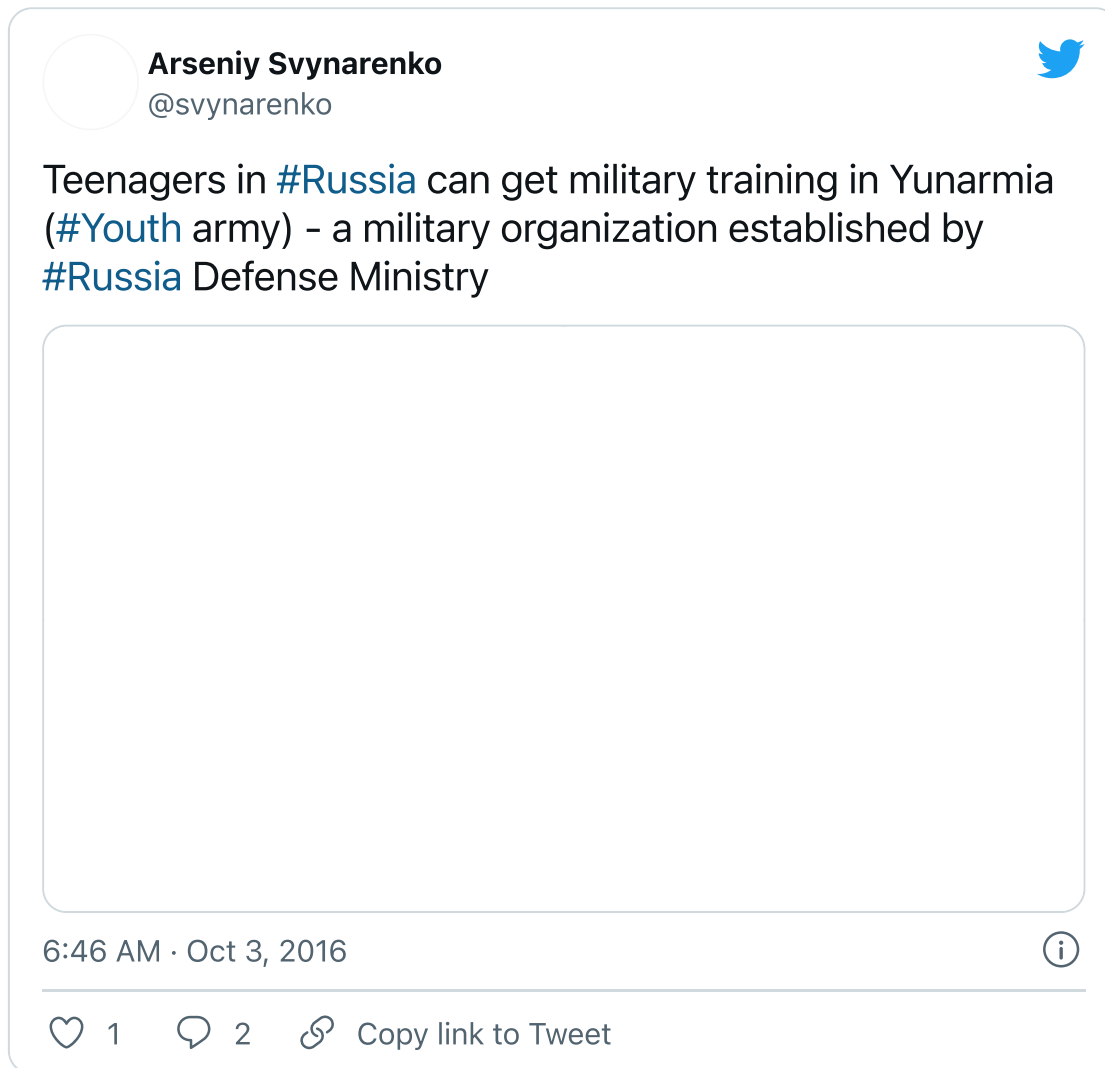


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A quick rundown of terms. **Patriot Park** is the Russian army's amusement park (sometimes called “military Disneyland”), which opened last year near Moscow. The “**youth army**” is a network of youth groups across Russia created by the military to instill patriotism in children and teach them military skills, like how to assemble and disassemble an automatic rifle. And the **Reichstag** is the neo-Baroque building in Berlin that housed parliament under the German empire and the Weimar Republic. And it has been the seat of the German parliament since 1999.



Why will Russian children be storming a replica of the building that houses the current German parliament?

The capture of the building is one of the best-remembered episodes of World War II here, a symbolic prize during the 1945 Battle of Berlin that marked the defeat of Nazi Germany, just a few years after the Soviet Union seemed on the brink of collapse. Historians have noted the whitewashing of atrocities that took place during the Soviet advance into Germany. But in Russia, the memory of the war is sacrosanct, and Victory Day is marked by massive military parades and a new march called the Immortal Regiment, where Russians carry portraits of relatives who fought and died in the war. Russian President Vladimir Putin takes part in both.

Most Russians will recognize the iconic photograph taken by Yevgeny Khaldei, raising the flag over the Reichstag, a staged shot that nevertheless became an instant classic when it was published in the Soviet weekly Ogonyok.

One of the #TIME100Photos : Raising a Flag over the #Reichstag. 1945. Photo by Yevgeny #Khaldei

The \$343 billion modernization of the Russian military has been accompanied by a massive public relations campaign to remake its image. That rebranding brought you the International Military Games, sometimes called the “War Olympics,” with events like the tank biathlon, aviadarts (most accurate aerial bombardment) and “masters of

artillery fire.” The army has opened clothing stores (that gave 10 percent discounts in honor of Donald Trump's inauguration) and launched its own television station, Zvezda (Star), that broadcasts patriotic programming.

And Patriot Park is part of that rebranding, a way to instill patriotism in a new generation of Russian teenagers who will be called up in the draft in the coming years. The Reichstag is only part of planned updates for the amusement park. According to Shoigu, the army is planning to build a model of a front line, complete with trenches and bunkers. There will be a “partisan village,” where children can take classes in sabotage or attend the “partisan banya,” or bathhouse. And there are suggestions of a simulation of a “day in the life” aboard a submarine.

As to the size of the replica Reichstag, we will just have to wait and see.

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