

Back from Afghanistan: Experiences of Soviet Afghan War Veterans in Transnational Perspective

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This special issue is aimed at discussing how states and societies have addressed the consequences of the Soviet–Afghan War (1979–89), not only during the Soviet period but also in the aftermath of 1991.¹ The primary intention is to analyze the different strategies used for (re)integrating veterans of an asymmetric war into society in a radically changing international context, which covers a period beginning with the break-up of the USSR and ending with current developments in the successor states, including the ongoing war in

¹ For these topics and the Soviet–Afghan War in general see also: Paul Robinson and Jay Dixon, *Aiding Afghanistan: A History of Soviet Assistance to a Developing Country* (London: Hurst & Co, 2013); Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan 1979–98* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Artemy Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan, 1980–1992* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Homayun Sidky, “War, Changing Patterns of Warfare, State Collapse, and Transnational Violence in Afghanistan: 1978–2001”, *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 4 (2007): 849–88; Gregory Feifer, *The Great Gamble: The Soviet War in Afghanistan* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009); Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress (eds), *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Antonio Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan, 1978–1992* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000); Douglas A. Borer, *Superpowers Defeated: Vietnam and Afghanistan Compared* (London: Cass, 1999); Mark Galeotti, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Union’s Last War* (London: Frank Cass, 1995); Aleksandr A. Liakhovskii, *Tragediia i doblest’ Afgana* (Moskva: GPI, 1995); Manfred Sapper, *Die Auswirkungen des Afghanistan-Krieges auf die Sowjetgesellschaft: Eine Studie zum Legitimitätsverlust des Militärischen in der Perestrojka* (Münster, Hamburg: Lit., 1994); Henry S. Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1983); and the forthcoming volume: Tanja Penter and Esther Meier (eds), *Sovietnam: Die UdSSR in Afghanistan 1979–1989* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, in press).

Eastern Ukraine.² Beyond a normative concept of successful (re)integration, contributors address the many contradictions between the soldiers' self-perceptions, their post-war experiences, and the changes faced by the veterans in the new post-war and post-Soviet social settings.³ Certain specific features of the Soviet–Afghan conflict, such as its asymmetric nature, and the unwillingness of Soviet officials to address the violent character of the Soviet invasion, have had a long-term impact on the veterans of the war. Furthermore, this impact has later resurfaced in different ways in the newly emerging post-Soviet societies.⁴ By bringing together new original

² For reintegration strategies of Soviet Afghan veterans into Soviet society see also Karen Petrone, "Coming Home Soviet Style: The Reintegration of Afghan Veterans into Soviet Everyday Life", in *Everyday Life in Russia Past and Present*, eds. Choi Chatterjee, David L. Ransel, Mary Cavender, and Karen Petrone (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 350–67; J. Riordan, "Disabled Afghans: Fighters for a Better Deal", in *Social Change and Social Issues in the Former USSR*, ed. Walter Joyce (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 136–57. In this context, it would also be worth analyzing the handling of the war experiences by the Afghan people—an undertaking that is however outside the field of expertise of the contributors to this issue.

³ For this field of research in other contexts, see also Beatrice De Graaf and George Dimitriu and Jens Ringsmose (eds), *Strategic Narratives, Public Opinion and War: Winning Domestic Support for the Afghan War* (London: Routledge, 2015); Benjamin Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations: Republican War Veterans and Weimar Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Anne Demers, "When Veterans Return: The Role of Community in Reintegration", *Journal of Loss and Trauma: International Perspectives on Stress & Coping* 16, no. 2 (2011): 160–79; Karen J. Burnell, Peter G. Coleman, and Nigel Hunt, "Coping with Traumatic Memories: Second World War Veterans' Experiences of Social Support in Relation to the Narrative Coherence of War Memories", *Ageing and Society* 30, no. 1 (2010): 57–78; Neil Jeffrey Diamant, *Emblem of Glory: Veterans, Military Families, and the Politics of Patriotism in China, 1949–2007* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009); David A. Gerber, "Disabled Veterans, the State, and the Experience of Disability in Western Societies, 1914–1950", *Journal of Social History* 26, no. 4 (2003): 899–916.

⁴ We are grateful to the participants of the "Back from Afghanistan" workshop held at European Humanities University in Vilnius on 12–13 February 2015 with the support of the German Academic Exchange Service DAAD. A short report can be found here: M. Mirschel, "Tagungsbericht: Back from Afghanistan. Workshop on the experiences of veterans from the war in Afghanistan in Tajikistan, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Lithuania and Germany, 12.02.2015 – 13.02.2015 Vilnius", *H-Soz-Kult*, 5 September 2015, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/index.asp?id=6144&view=pdf&pn=tagungsberichte&type=tagungsberichte>. We particularly wish to thank Tomas Balkelis, Aliaksej Bratochkin, Fabio