

“Our Pain and Our Glory”: Social Strategies of Legitimization and Functionalization of the Soviet–Afghan War in the Russian Federation*

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Abstract: *The article analyzes first, the development of the relationship between state institutions and veterans’ associations from the end of the Soviet–Afghan War to the present; and second, the interactions between the veterans themselves and their organizations during this time. The paper argues that the relationship between state institutions and the organizations as well as the self-images amongst the veterans’ movement have radically changed over this period. In the 1990s, the associations acted mostly in opposition to state institutions and presented themselves as victims of state abuse to remind the politicians that they had a moral responsibility for them. However, since the 2000s political actors managed to swing the veterans’ organizations from political opposition over to the government camp, the two parties now share common heroic interpretations of the Soviet–Afghan War. The transformation of the veterans’ self-image from victims of state abuse to heroic narratives can also be observed on the individual level of the veterans. Oral history interviews give insights into how the organizations have developed from a genuine community of entitlement into a community of values, based on militarized patterns of thought. Thus, the veterans’ organizations nowadays can be seen as both a medium for and a pillar of the militaristic and patriotic political ideology and tendencies in Russia.*

On 15 January 2015, the original date set for the sentencing of the prominent anti-Putin activist Aleksei Navalny for fraud and money

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