

The Varied Reintegration of the Afghan War Veterans in Their Home Society

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***Abstract:** This article looks at the adaptation of the Soviet Afghan war veterans to Soviet civilian life in the unsettled 1980s. It discusses their problems as they sought to make the transformation from the war to a “normal” existence as regular Soviet citizens at a time of instability and economic and political crisis. In doing so, it explains how and why they opted for, or were channeled into, different directions, and suggests that in many cases it was not their own individual inclination or choice, but rather a wide gamut of constraints and external forces that propelled them into a given trajectory.*

“We came home anticipating a celebration,” veteran of the Soviet-Afghan War Ruslan Umiev said two years after coming back from Afghanistan. “But,” he went on,

we landed in yet another war—a moral one. It’s not a question of material well-being, although none of us got rich in this war. Nor has anyone told us what it was all about—an aid mission or a miscalculation? We have difficulty finding friends, we have difficulty being understood. ... Who are we—Af-gantsy-soldiers, internationalists, or some guys who messed up the fate of other people as well as their own? We are constantly asked these questions—at work, on the street, at home. We ask ourselves these same questions.¹

This article sets out to look at the different paths taken by the Afghan war veterans as they sought to resolve these issues and reintegrate into their home societies. It will try to explain why their reintegration was as varied as it in fact was, since at first glance, the great

¹ Gennadii Zhavoronkov, “Afganistan: vzgliad iz 1980-go goda,” *Moskovskie novosti*, 23 July 1989, 9.