Veterans of the Soviet–Afghan War and the Ukrainian Nation-Building Project: from Perestroika to the Maidan and the War in the Donbas[1]

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to consider the process of transformation of the organized Afghan veterans' movement in independent Ukraine and the emergence of its new national historical narrative, with special focus on the Maidan (or "Eurorevolution") of 2013–2014 and the subsequent war in the Donbas. The case of the Ukrainian veterans of the Soviet–Afghan War is an interesting example of how a group with a common experience of Soviet army service and a specific memorial culture rooted in ideas of "military brotherhood" and "masculine values of courage and dignity", as well as in Soviet nostalgia and paternalism, can be transformed into an actor of civil society. In independent Ukraine, the Afghanistan veterans presented their experiences in both national and post-Soviet nostalgic discourses. The Maidan and war in Donbas seem to have put an end to the supra-national community of the Afghanistan veterans in post-Soviet space as the veterans in Russia and Ukraine have joined opposite sides of the conflict. In the current situation of war, Ukrainian veterans' organizations and public opinion are working together for the creation of a narrative of a continuous, centuries-long national struggle for freedom and independence. Afghan veterans have occupied the position of the descendants of the "Great Patriotic War" victors, and of the "fathers" of the new veterans of the ATO in the Donbas—not only

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