

A Fragile Movement: Afghan War Veterans and the Soviet Collapse in Tajikistan, 1979–92

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***Abstract:** Afghan War veterans in Tajikistan showed remarkably little cohesion during the political contention that swept the republic between 1990 and 1992. Instead they fragmented along much the same political and sub-ethnic lines as the population as a whole. Successful state cooptation in earlier years had left a legacy of organizational dependence among the afgantsy, who continued to look towards the state for organizational support and political legitimation. When state backing dried up in the early 1990s, the afgantsy were unable to hold ranks but were drawn into the struggles unfolding in the republic. Drawing on interviews with Afghan War veterans and other primary sources, the article traces the development of state-veteran relations in Tajikistan between 1979 and 1992 and argues that state actors were indispensable in providing organizational strength, discursive cohesion, and political legitimacy to a group shaped by socio-cultural diversity.*

“The soldier-internationalists in Tajikistan were and will always be on the side of the government and the state.”² This was declared by Sattor Jalilov, chairman of the Dushanbe section of the Committee

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² Interview with Sattor Jalilov, 17 July 2013, Dushanbe.