Putin Evokes Tolstoy 26 Years After Soviet Troops Pulled Out of Afghanistan

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Putin meeting with members of veterans organizations Sunday, including ex-soldiers who served in Afghanistan.

President Vladimir Putin marked the 26th anniversary of the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan Sunday, vindicating his country's involvement in the Afghan War and praising novelist Leo Tolstoy's moral teachings.

"When years pass and more facts become known, we more clearly understand the reason why Soviet troops were sent to Afghanistan," Putin said Sunday at a meeting with war veterans' organizations, according to the Kremlin's website. "Many mistakes were made but there were real threats that Soviet authorities had tried to thwart by sending soldiers to Afghanistan."

Some 15,000 Soviet troops were killed in Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989. On Gorbachev's initiative, the Soviet parliament in 1989 declared that the war in Afghanistan had been a mistake.

Putin also deplored that Tolstoy's humanist teachings were not being applied universally.

"Unfortunately we see that not everyone has reached the level of Leo Tolstoy, when his famous refusal to fight evil with evil could reap tangible results, especially on the international scene," he said.

Tolstoy, who authored "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina" in the late 19th century, was renowned for his pacifism.

Also at the meeting, Putin voiced his support for a legislative proposal that could see Russian combat veterans receive free university education.

The proposal was made by State Duma deputy Franz Klintsevich, who also serves as the chairman of the Russian Afghan Veterans Union. He said the measure would benefit the soldiers who took part in combat during Russia's two wars in Chechnya in the mid–1990s and early 2000s.

Klintsevich did not provide a timeline nor an estimate of the funding required for the initiative to come to fruition.

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