

# Development of Russian Armed Forces in the Vicinity of Japan

March 2024

Japan Ministry of Defense



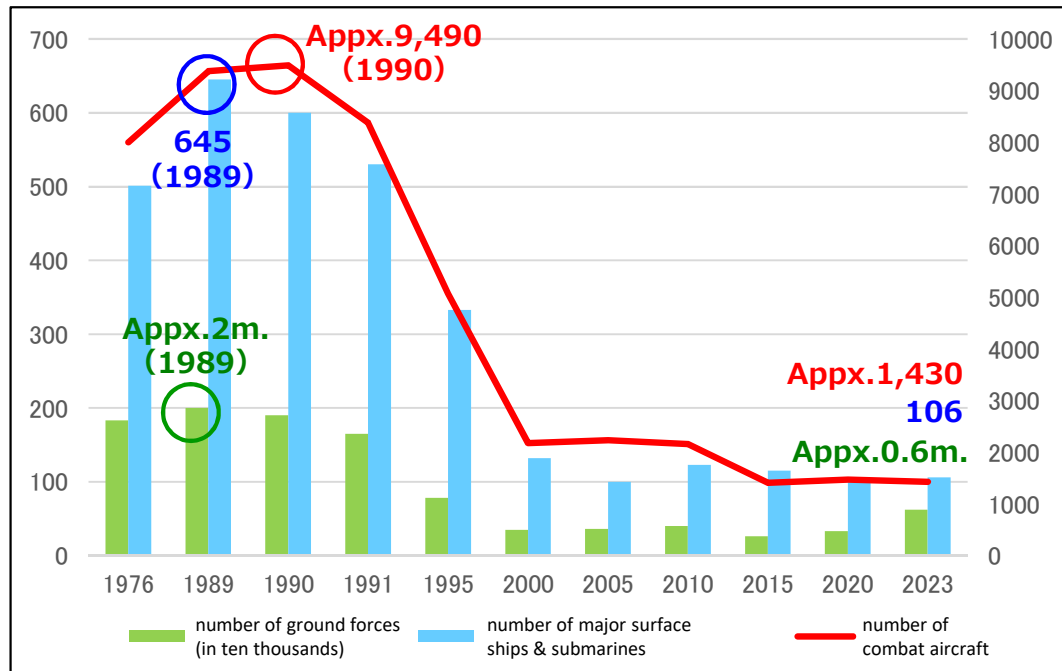
# Transition of Russian Armed Forces in General

(Source : Japanese MOD "Defense of Japan", Military Balance, Russian Federal Treasury's Information on Execution of Budgets of the Russian Federation, etc.)

- Armed Forces of Russian Federation (AFRF) **significantly decreased** since the fall of the Soviet Union (the number fell to roughly 20 percent compared to its peak in the former Soviet era)
  - ⇒ Promotes **military downsizing** such as by shifting from **division-based** to **brigade-based** command structure
- Against the backdrop of rising international oil prices, stagnant Russian economy started to grow since around year 2000 and **defense expenditures increased**
  - ⇒ **Promotes modernization of equipment** (the goal of increasing the ratio of new equipment to 70 % by the end of 2020 has been achieved)

## Armed Forces

(number of ground forces in ten thousands)  
(number of major surface ships & submarines as indicated)

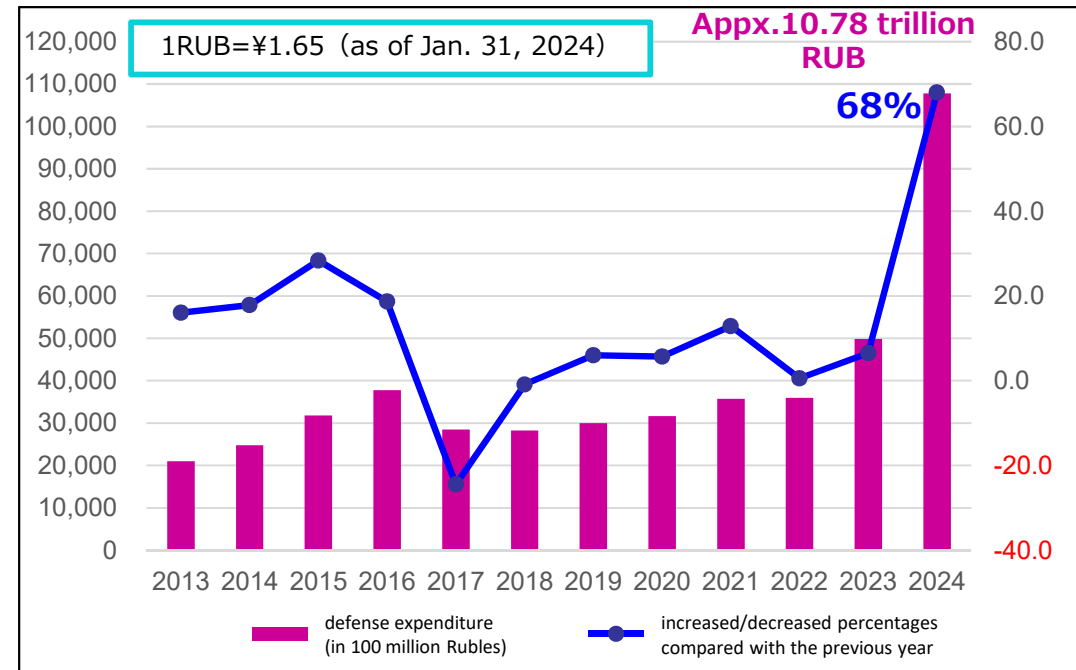


\* 1989: Ground Forces and major surface ships at its peak, 1990: Combat aircraft at its peak.  
(1976: Announcement of Japan's Basic Defense Program 1976, 1995: Announcement of Japan's Basic Defense Program 1995)

\*\* "Number of major surface ships & submarines" means the number of combatant ships with a displacement of frigates or above; "number of combat aircraft" means the number of military aircraft other than transport, refuel, etc.

## Defense Expenditure

(in 100 million Rubles) (increased/decreased percentages compared with the previous year)



\*\*\* Figures are executed amounts of the year, except for the amount of FY 2023 and 2024.

# Development of AFRF in the Far East & Northern Territories (NT)

(Source: Japanese MOD "Defense of Japan", JSO announcements, Russian MOD announcements, media reports, etc.)

- AFRF **tend to increase military activities** including **reinforcement of armament** in the Pacific & Arctic Ocean coast and **joint operations with PLA**
- AFRF deploy **a considerable scale of military forces including nuclear forces** and **replace equipment in the region such as in European Russia**



## AFRF's Exercise & Training

- Large scale exercise "Vostok 2018" was conducted in Sept 2018 (as announced by Russian MOD) **297 thousand troops, 1,000 aircraft, 80 vessels, 36 thousand tanks and other equipment (largest exercise since the Cold War)**
- Large scale exercise "Vostok 2022" was conducted in Sept 2022 (as announced by Russian MOD) **More than 50 thousand troops and 5,000 equipment, including 140 aircraft, and 60 vessels. AFRF and PLA vessels conducted gunnery exercise in the waters off the west coast of Hokkaido.**

## AFRF's Deployment & Equipment

- **Surface-to-ship missiles have been deployed** in Etorofu and Kunashiri is. in 2016, in Matsuwa and Karafuto(Sakhalin) is. in 2021 and in **Paramushiru is. in 2022.**
- **Long-range surface-to-air missiles have been deployed** in Etorofu and Kunashiri is. in 2020 and in Karafuto in 2021.
- **Russian Pacific Fleet has deployed vessels equipped 6 Kalibr cruise** since 2021.
- A Borey-class SSBN arrived in the Far East in 2023, the fourth of this class in the Pacific Fleet.

## Russian Aircraft Activities

- Average number of **JASDF aircraft scrambled against Russian aircraft per year is approximately 257 times** over the past five years.
- **AFRF and PLA bombers conduct joint flight** from the Sea of Japan to the East China Sea and the Pacific Ocean since 2019.
- Tu-95 bombers flew over the Sea of Japan on Oct. 2023 and on Jan. 2024.

## Russian Naval vessel Activities

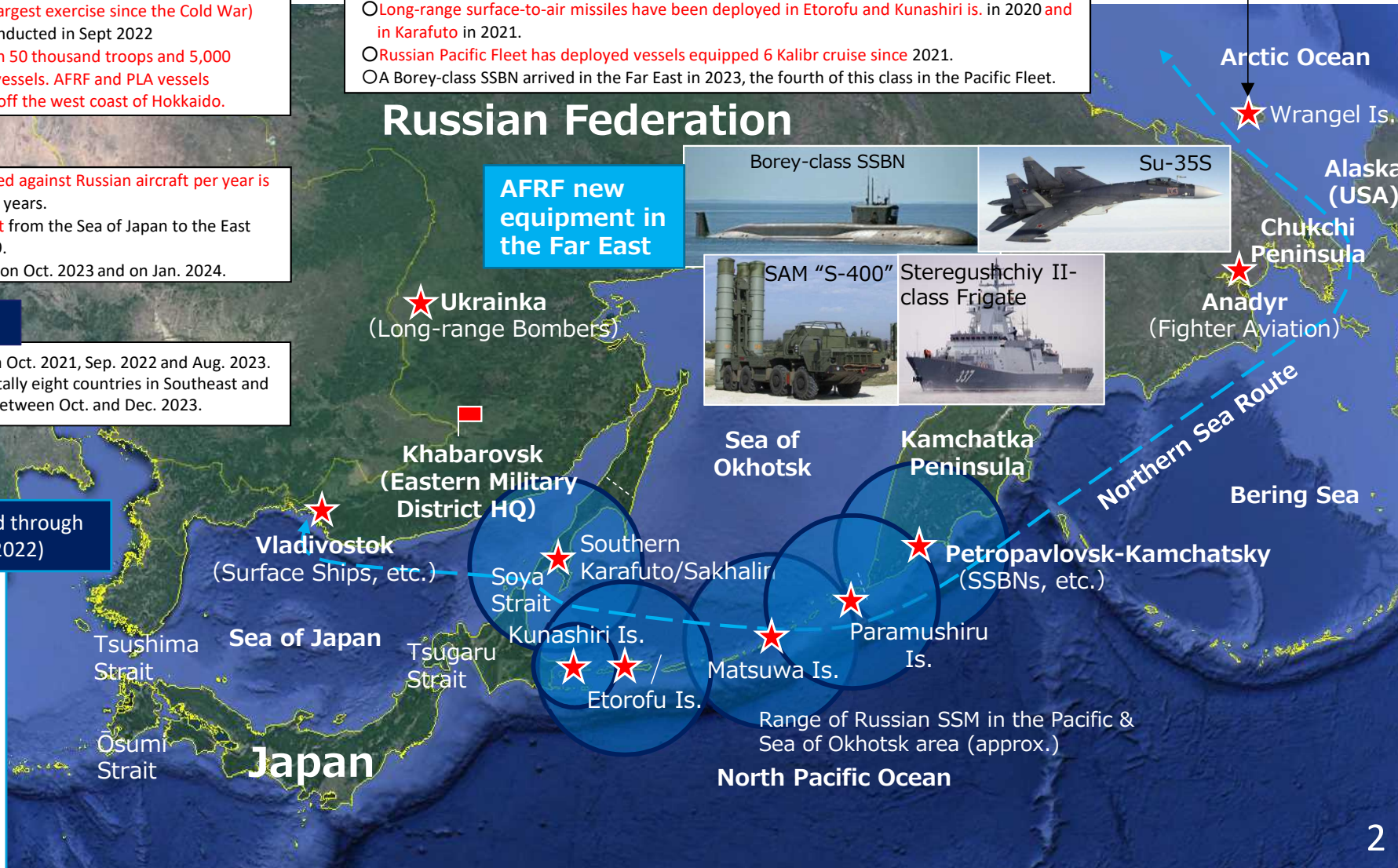
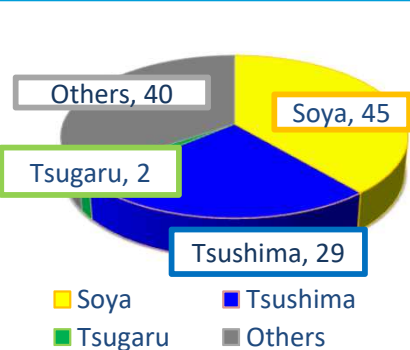
- AFRF and PLA conducted joint sea patrol in Oct. 2021, Sep. 2022 and Aug. 2023.
- Naval vessels of the Pacific Fleet visited totally eight countries in Southeast and South Asia and conducted joint exercises between Oct. and Dec. 2023.

## Russian Federation

### AFRF new equipment in the Far East



Russian naval vessels which passed through the Straits (announced for FY2022)



# AFRF Unit in the Northern Territories (NT)

(Source: Japanese MOD "Defense of Japan", Russian MOD announcements, IHS Jane's, media reports, etc.)

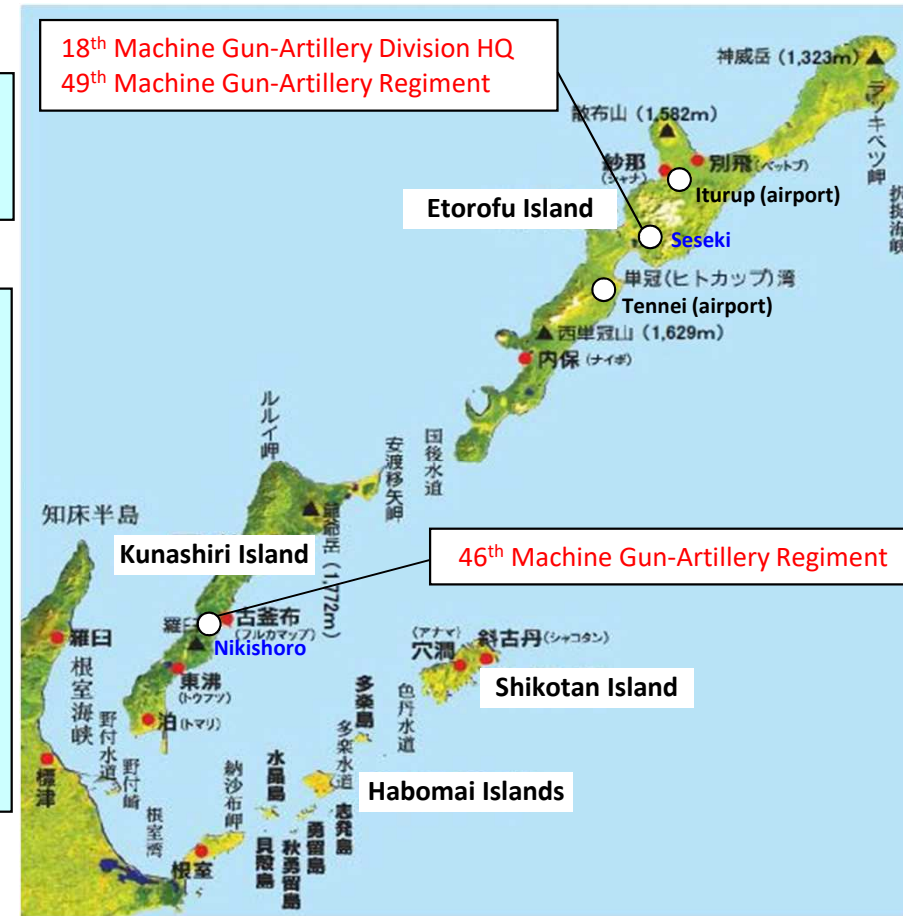
## Stationed Unit

- Units of **18<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun-Artillery Division** are stationed at **Etorofu and Kunashiri islands** (the number of deployed troops is appx. **3,500**) to defend against landing forces.

## Renewal of Equipment & Facility Development

- Tanks, self-propelled artillery, MLRS, SAM, helicopters, etc. are deployed at the NT.
- In Feb 2011, the then president Medvedev **instructed** the then Defense Minister Serdyukov **to take necessary steps to modernize the equipment in the "Kuril" islands\***.
- In Nov 2016, it came to light **surface-to-ship missiles (SSMs) "Bastion" (SSC-5) and "Bal" (SSC-6)** began to be deployed to the Etorofu and Kunashiri Islands respectively.
- It was reported that **Etorofu island's new civilian airport became dual use with the military** in Jan 2018 and that **three fighters (Su-35S) were deployed** at the airport in August of the same year.
- In Dec 2020, media related to the Russian Ministry of Defense has reported **the deployment of SAM "S-300V4" to Etorofu and Kunashiri islands**.
- ✂ The "S-300V4" on both islands have been confirmed to be removed since the aggression against Ukraine. It's pointed out they are likely to be transferred to Ukraine.

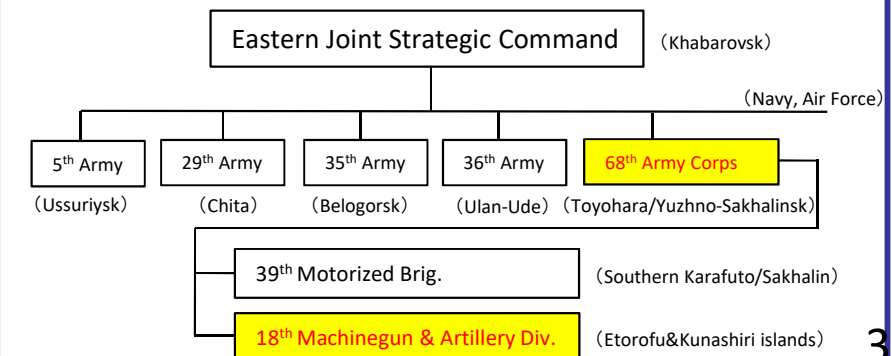
\* "Kuril" is a Russian geographical name which refers to Northern Territories and Chishima islands.



## Main equipment of AFRF in Etorofu and Kunashiri Islands



## 18<sup>th</sup> Machingun & Artillery Div. within the AFRF



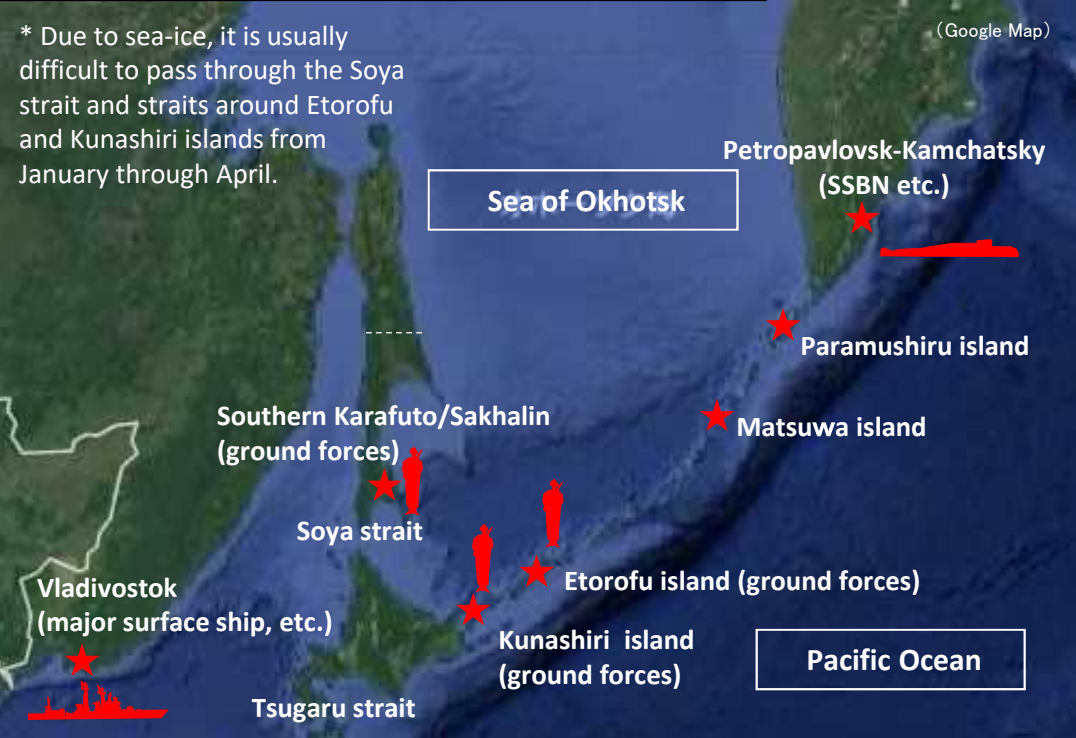
# Military significance of Northern Territories (NT) and Chishima Islands from Russian viewpoint

(Source: The National Interest, Russian media, Soviet Military Power 1989, Google Map, etc.)

- **NT and Chishima Islands are critical to AFRF:**
  - To protect its own SSBNs operating in the Sea of Okhotsk
  - To secure the access of major surface combatant deployed in Vladivostok to the Pacific Ocean
  
- **Russia will likely deepen further its reliance on its nuclear forces** in order to make up for losses the conventional forces suffered **after the aggression against Ukraine**. Also it is expected AFRF will continue to deploy new SSBNs and enhance its military capabilities in NT and Chishima Islands to protect them based on so-called **“Bastion Strategy”**.

\*“Bastion(fortress)”: U.S. DoD report “Soviet Military Power 1989,” etc., refer to “bastion” as the ex-Soviet SSBN’s operating area close to its territory protected by using shore, naval, and air assets in conjunction with topographical features. The Russian Northern fleet and Pacific fleet are believed to set “bastion” around the Barents Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk respectively.

## Deployment of Russian military forces around Japan



## Types of AFRF equipment deployed around Sea of Okhotsk

|                  | Karafuto/Sakhalin    | Kunashiri   | Etorofu     | Matsuwa              | Paramushiru | Kamchatka      |
|------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------|
| SSM              | ✓<br>(2021)          | ✓<br>(2016) | ✓<br>(2016) | ✓<br>(2021)          | ✓<br>(2022) | ✓              |
| SAM              | ✓                    | ✓<br>(2020) | ✓<br>(2020) | —                    | —           | ✓              |
| Land Force       | ✓                    | ✓           | ✓           | —                    | —           | ✓              |
| Surface Vessels  | —                    | —           | —           | —                    | —           | ✓              |
| Fighter Aircraft | —<br>(Mil. Airfield) | —           | ✓<br>(2018) | —<br>(Mil. airfield) | —           | ✓<br>(and ASW) |

1 Year of deployment or comments are in brackets  
 2 Kalibr-equipped Steregushchiy II class frigate “Gremyashchiy” was deployed in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky in 2022.