

Development of Russian Armed Forces in the Vicinity of Japan

April 2025

Japan Ministry of Defense



Transition of Russian Armed Forces in General

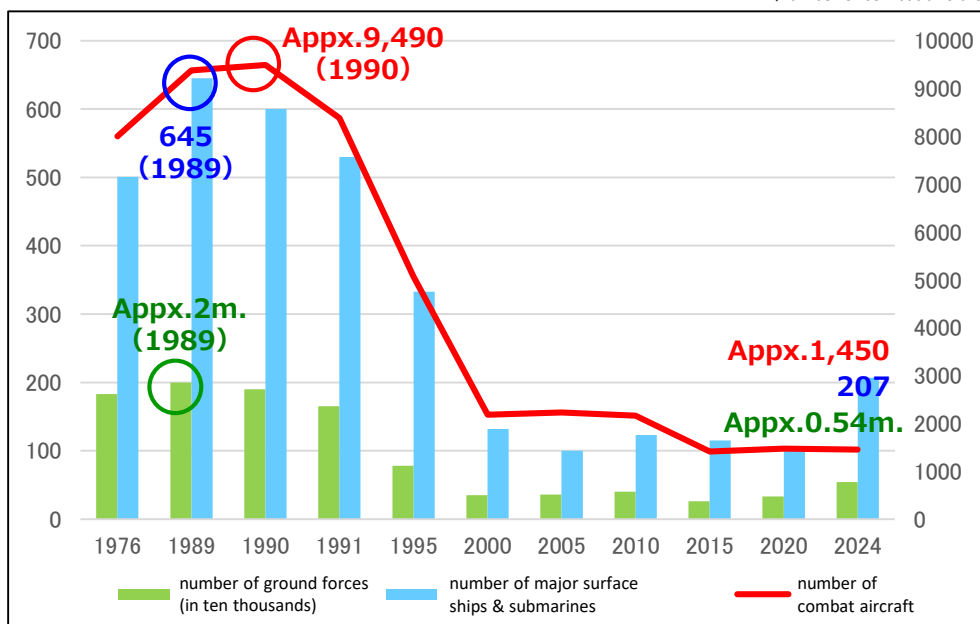
(Source: : Japanese MOD "Defense of Japan", Military Balance, Russian Federal Treasury's Information on Execution of Budgets of the Russian Federation, etc.)

- 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)
 - ⇒ Has promoted military downsizing. However, since the commencement of the aggression against Ukraine, Russia shows some movements to increase the number of personnel as well as to enlarge and reorganize units.
- Against the backdrop of rising international oil prices, stagnant Russian economy started to grow since around year 2000 and defense expenditures increased
 - ⇒ From FY2017, it has remained at a same level, but since the aggression against Ukraine, it has increased significantly.

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

Armed Forces

(number of combat aircraft)



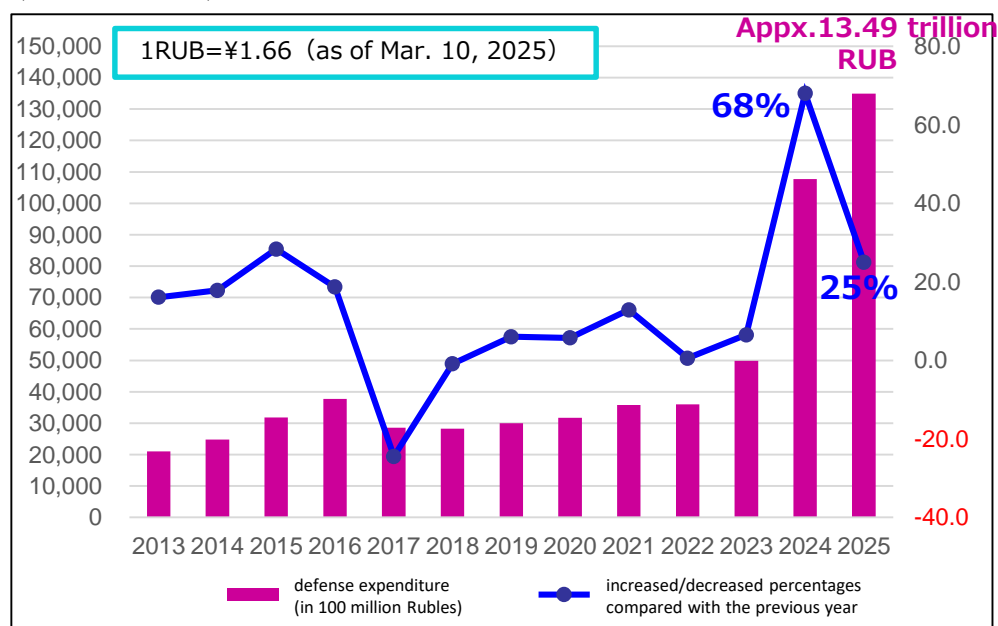
* 1989: Ground Forces and major surface ships at its peak, 1990: Combat aircraft at its peak.
(1976: Announcement of Japan's Basic Defense Program 1976, 1995: Announcement of Japan's Basic Defense Program 1995)

** "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

(increased/decreased percentages compared with the previous year)

(in 100 million Rubles)



*** Figures are executed amounts of the year, except for the amount of FY 2023-2025.

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 "Ocean 2024" was conducted in Sept 2024 (as announced by Russian MOD) **More than 90 thousand troops, over 400 vessels, 125 aircraft and vessels and aircrafts of PLA (largest naval exercise over the past 30 years).**
- **Strategic Deterrence Forces exercise** was conducted Oct 2024 (as announced by Russian MOD) **ICBM** was launched from the Plesetsk testing cosmodrone, targeting the Kura training ground in **Kamchatka**. **SLBM** were launched from the Barents Sea and **the Sea of Okhotsk** (targets are not clear).

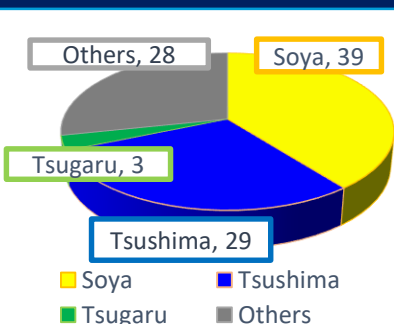
Russian Aircraft Activities

- Average number of **JASDF aircraft scrambled against Russian aircraft per year is approximately 223 times** over the past five years.
- **AFRF and PLA bombers conduct joint flight** from the Sea of Japan to the East China Sea, the Pacific Ocean, the Chukchi sea and the Bering sea since 2019.
- **A Russian military aircraft violated Japanese airspace three times in Sept.**

Russian Naval vessel Activities

- AFRF and PLA conducted joint sea patrol since 2021.
- The Russian Navy conducted a sudden inspection of the Pacific Fleet involving over 160 ships and 25,000 personnel in April 2023.
- Vessels and aircrafts of AFRF joined China's military exercise "Northern/Interaction 2024" in Sept.
- Naval vessels of the Pacific Fleet visited totally five countries in Southeast and so on and conducted first joint exercises with each naval force of Indonesia and Thailand between Oct. and Dec. 2024.

Russian naval vessels which passed through the Straits (announced for FY2024)



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.
- **A Borey-class SSBN (the fifth of this class in the Pacific Fleet) and Yasen M-class SSGN (the second of this class there) arrived in the Far East in Sept 2024. Improved Kilo-class SSK (the forth of this class there) in Dec 2024.**

AFRF new equipment in the Far East



AFRF Unit in the Northern Territories (NT)

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

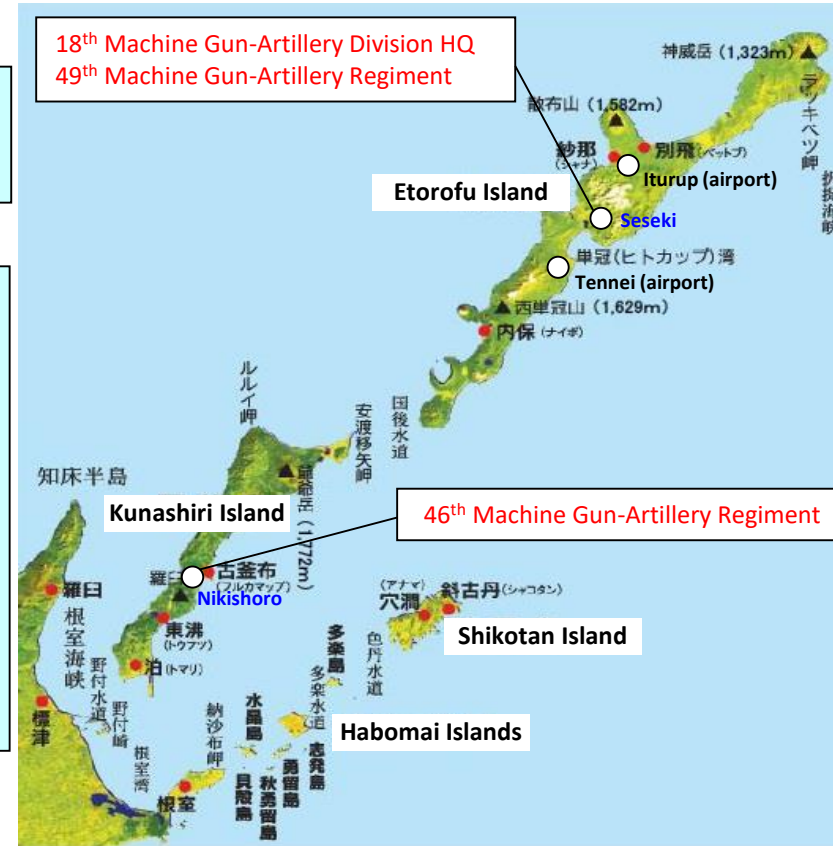
Stationed Unit

- Units of **18th 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



MLRS Smerch



Tank "T-80BV"



SAM "S-300V4"



SSM "Bastion"



Multirole fighter "Su-35"



Multirole Helicopter "Mi-8"

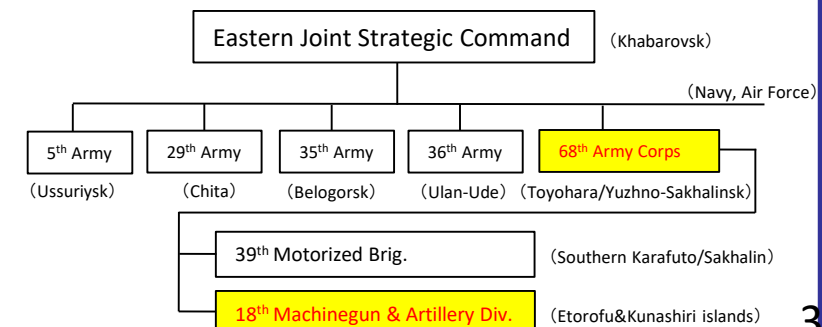


Inspection UAV "Orlan-10"



SSM "Bal"

18th Machinegun & Artillery Div. within the AFRF



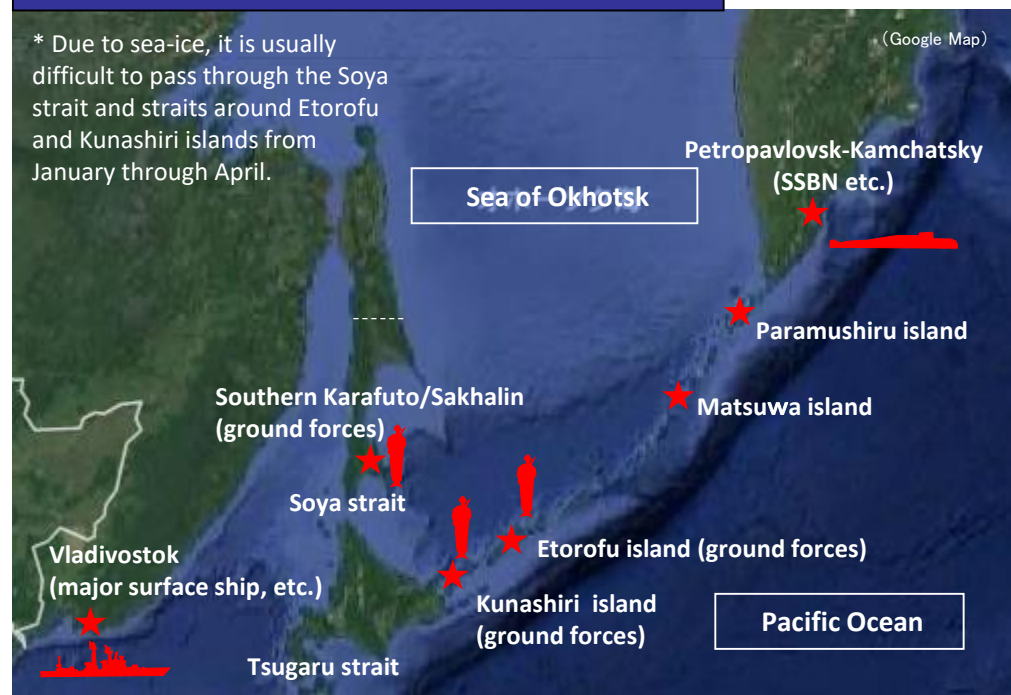
Military significance of Northern Territories (NT) and Chishima Islands from Russian viewpoint

(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	✓ (2021)	✓ (2016)	✓ (2016)	✓ (2021)	✓ (2022)	✓
SAM	✓	✓ (2020)	✓ (2020)	—	—	✓
Land Force	✓	✓	✓	—	—	✓
Surface Vessels	—	—	—	—	—	✓
Fighter Aircraft	— (Mil. Airfield)	—	✓ (2018)	— (Mil. airfield)	—	✓ (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.