Development of Russian Armed Forces in the Vicinity of Japan

September 2021
Japan Ministry of Defense
Transition of Russian Armed Forces in General

- 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)

**Transition of Russian Armed Forces in General**

- **Armed Forces**
  - Number of ground forces in ten thousands
  - Number of major surface ships & submarines as indicated

- **Defense Expenditure**
  - (in 100 million Rubles)
  - Increased/decreased percentages compared with the previous year

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**Key Points**

- **1976**: Announcement of Japan’s Basic Defense Program 1976
- **1989**: Armed Forces at its peak (as for no. of combat aircraft, 1990 was its peak), Start of Soviet armed forces’ reduction (as for no. of combat aircraft, 1991 was the start), Announcement of Japan’s Basic Defense Program 1995
- **1990**: Start of Soviet armed forces’ reduction
- **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.

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**Notes**

- 1RUB=¥1.50 (as of Aug. 20, 2021)
- Appx. 3.2 trillion RUB

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**Figures**

- Figures are executed amounts of the year, except for the amount of FY 2021.
- From 2011 to 2016, defense expenditure continued to grow by double digits year-on-year, and its ratio to GDP peaked at 4.4% in FY 2016. For the time being, its ratio to GDP is expected to remain around 3%.
Although AFRF in the Far East is significantly smaller than when it was at its peak, Russia maintains a considerable size of military forces including nuclear capabilities.

New equipment, such as fighters, short-range ballistic missiles, long-range surface-to-air missiles are also deployed in the Far East as well as in the European region.

First vessels carrying “Kalibr” cruise missiles, which are regarded as a component of Russia’s non-nuclear strategic deterrence are deployed in the Far East in 2021.

* “Kalibr” is a ship-launched long-range cruise missile (SS-N-30 (anti-ship version) has a range of 1,500km (surface ship type) or 2,000km (submarine type) while SS-N-27 (land attack version) has a range of 660km. The missile has been used by Russian Naval attack during military operations in Syria. It is said to be capable of both conventional and nuclear warheads.


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AFRF tends to increase military activities including reinforcement of armament in the Northern Territories, Sakhalin and Chukchi Peninsula.

The current presence of the AFRF in the Far East region is significantly smaller than it was at its peak. However, a considerable scale of military forces, including nuclear forces, still remains in the region.

Frequency of scrambles against Russian aircraft keeps a high level, and long-range bombers fly around Japan every year.

Frequency of passing through the straits near Japan by Russian naval vessels tends to rise, among these straits the Soya (La Perouse) is most frequently used.

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)
  - Chinese and Mongolian armed forces participated for the first time.

Russian Aircraft Activities
- Average number of JASDF aircraft scrambled against Russian aircraft per year is approximately 310 times over the past five years.
- Russian Strategic bombers and other aircraft circled around Japanese archipelago about once or twice per year over the past five years.

Russian Naval vessel Activities
- The number of Russian naval ships that passed the Soya and Tsushima straits in 2020 is about 1.7 times larger than that in 2010, having a tendency to increase.
- In Sep 2018, 28 ships passed the Soya strait marking the highest number since the end of the Cold War.

AFRF enhances its capabilities in the Arctic Region (Sopka-2 Radar in Wrangel Is).

AFRF equipment in the Far East
- Tu-95
- Borey-class SSBN
- Su-34
- Su-35S
- SAM “S-400”
- Steregushchiy-class Frigate
- Bering Sea
- Arctic Ocean
- Alaska (USA)
- Chukchi Peninsula
- Anadyr (Fighter Aviation)
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.

**Stationed Unit**
- 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 Mar 2011, Russian General Staff allegedly developed a detailed plan to renew equipment of forces stationed at the “Kuril” islands.
- In Mar 2016, the Russian Defense Ministry announced that it plans to deploy surface-to-ship missiles (SSMs) “Bastion”(SSC-5) and “Bal”(SSC-6) in the “Kuril” islands by the end of the year.
- 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.

**Renewal of Equipment & Facility Development**
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* “Kuril” is a Russian geographical name which refers to Northern Territories and Chishima islands.
The “Kuril” islands [i.e. NT and Chishima Islands] are important for major surface ships deployed at Vladivostok to maintain unfettered access to the Pacific.

As its missile range became longer, the former Soviet Union developed so-called “Bastion(fortress) Strategy” that allowed them to easily defend their SSBNs, and the islands became even more valuable to Russia.

Deployment of SSMs “Bastion”(SSC-5) to the island(Etorofu Island) is intended to keep enemies away from the Sea of Okhotsk, which is a suitable area for new Borei-class and other SSBN (deployed at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky) activities.

**“Bastion(fortress)”: U.S. DoD report “Soviet Military Power 1989,” etc., refer to “bastion” as the ex-Soviet SSBN’s operating a rea 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.

**According to Russian MOD, Pacific Fleet conducted survey to consider deployment of Russian forces at Matua island from 2016 and built an airfield based on former Japanese air base in 2017. In December, 2020, the Russian MOD-owed media reported that AFRF had deployed surface-to-air missile (SAM) system “S-300V4”(SA-23) to the Islands of Etorofu and Kunashi.

* Due to sea-ice, it is usually difficult to pass through the Soya strait and straits around Etorofu and Kunashi islands from January through April.

**Note:** For simplification, the yellow circle is drawn with its center at Seseki Garrison at Etorofu and the light blue circle is drawn with its center at Nikishiro Garrison at Kunashi.