

Development of Russian Armed Forces in the Vicinity of Japan

September 2021

Japan Ministry of Defense



Transition of Russian Armed Forces in General

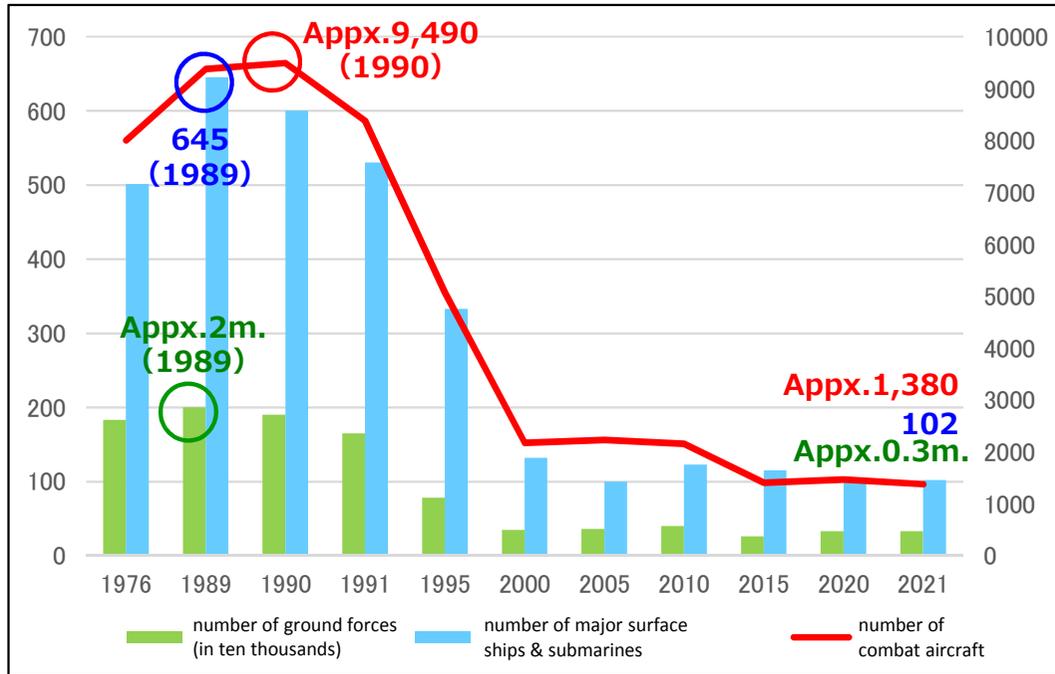
(Source: : Japanese MOD "Defense of Japan", Military Balance, Russian Federal Treasury's Information on Execution of Budgets of the Russian Federation, etc.)

- 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)

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

Armed Forces

(number of combat aircraft)



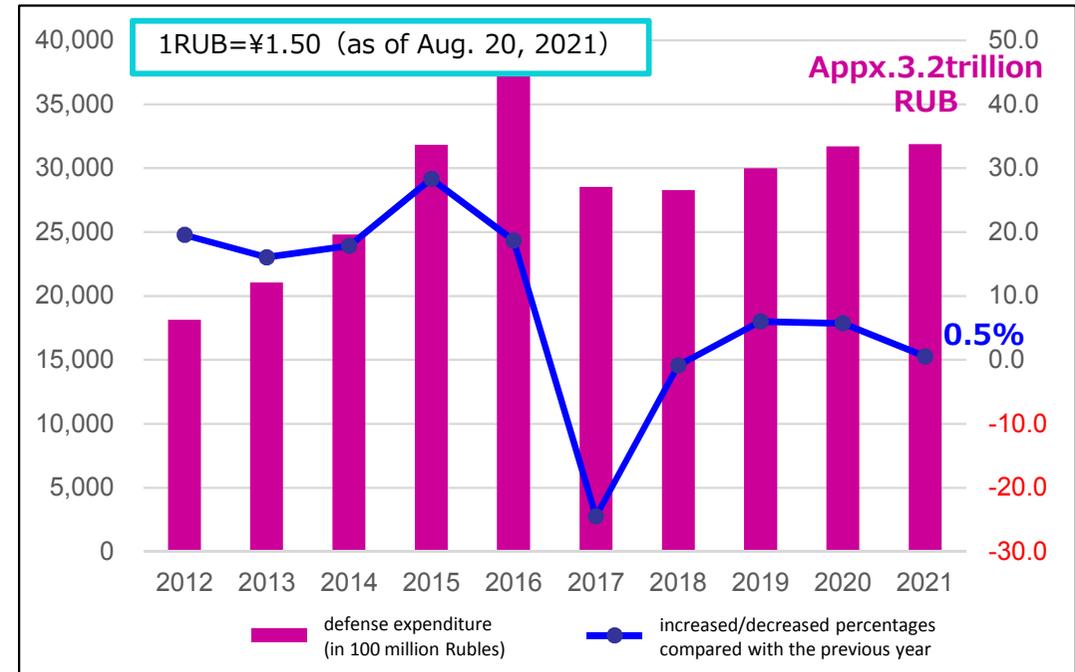
* 1976: Announcement of Japan's Basic Defense Program 1976, 1989: Armed Forces at its peak (as for no. of combat aircraft, 1990 was its peak), 1990: Start of Soviet armed forces' reduction (as for no. of combat aircraft, 1991 was the start), 1995: Announcement of Japan's Basic Defense Program 1995

** "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 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%.

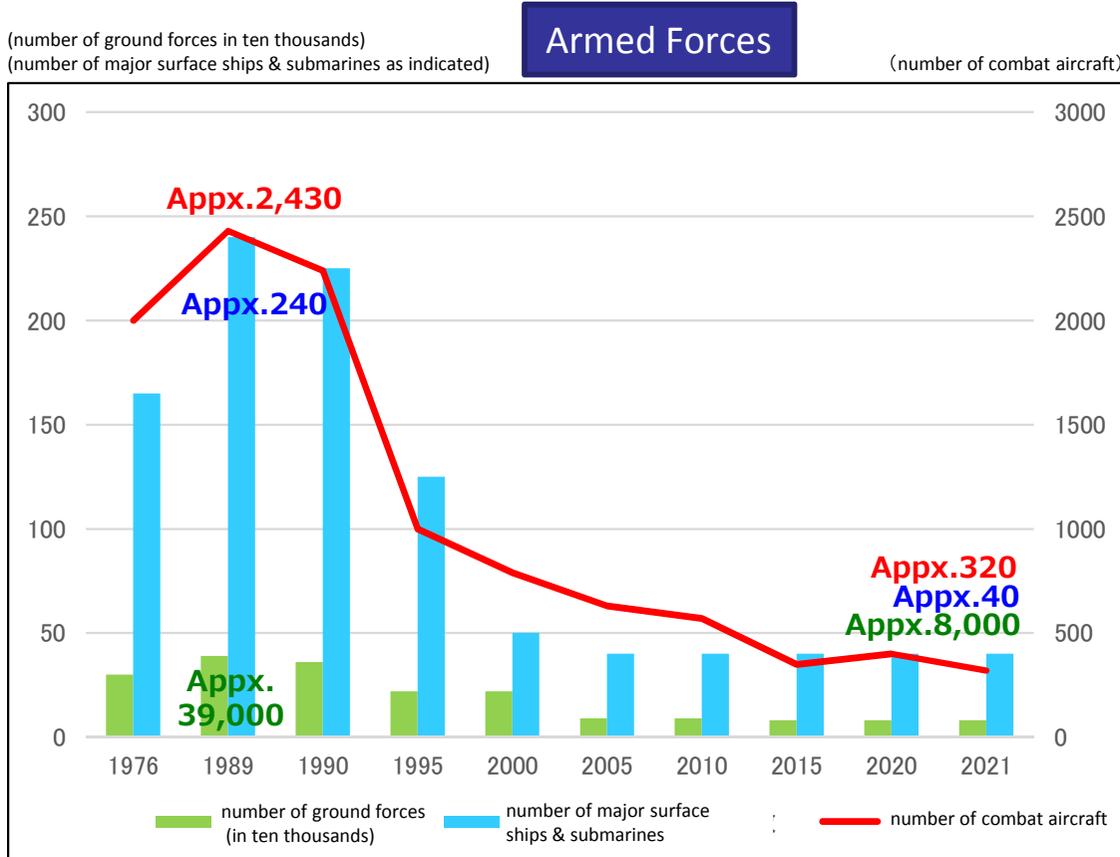


Transition of AFRF in the Far East

(Source: Japanese MOD "Defense of Japan", etc.)

- 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.



Examples of AFRF in the Far East



Borey-class SSBN
New SSBN deployed in the Far East since 2015. Plans to deploy a total of four, and two had already entered service



Stergushchiy-class frigate
New frigate deployed in the Far East since 2017. Plans to deploy a total of six, and three had already entered service. Plans to deploy five more improved version equipped with "Kalibr".



Short-range ballistic missile "Iskander"
New missile deployed in the Far East since 2013



SAM "S-400"
New SAM deployed in the Far East since 2012



Su-35 fighter
New fighter deployed in the Far East since 2014



Su-34 fighter-bomber
New fighter-bomber deployed in the Far East since 2016

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

- 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.

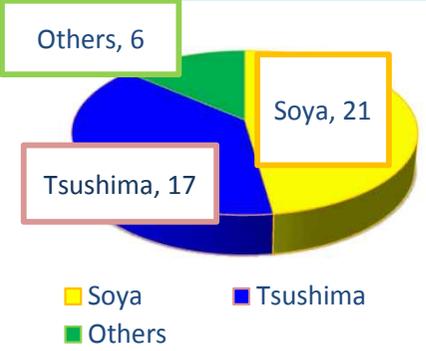
Russian Aircraft Activities

- 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.

Russian naval vessels which passed through the Straits (announced for FY2020)



Russian Federation



AFRF 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.)

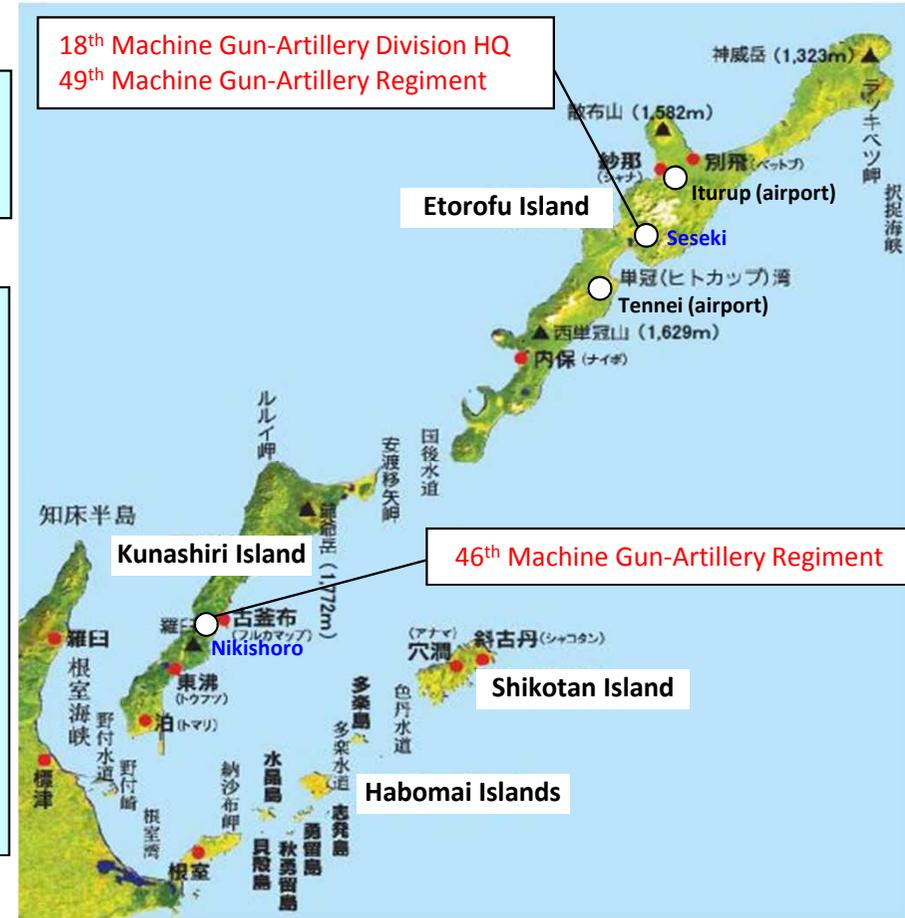
Stationed Unit

- 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.

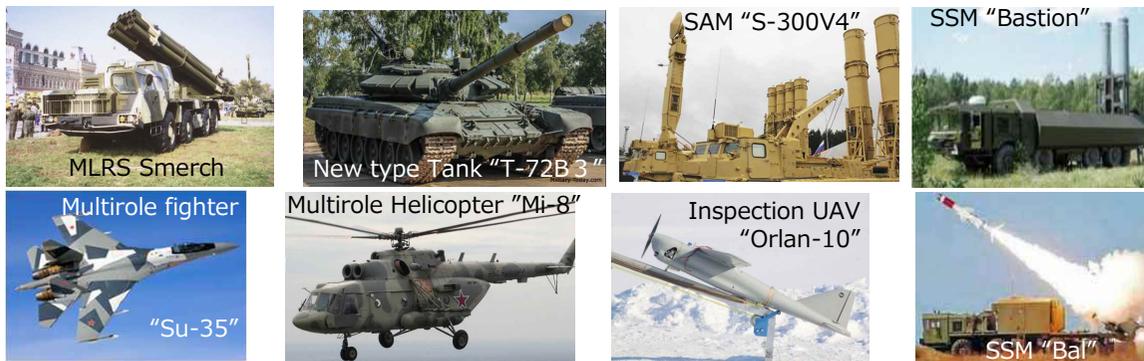
Renewal of Equipment & Facility Development

- 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 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.**

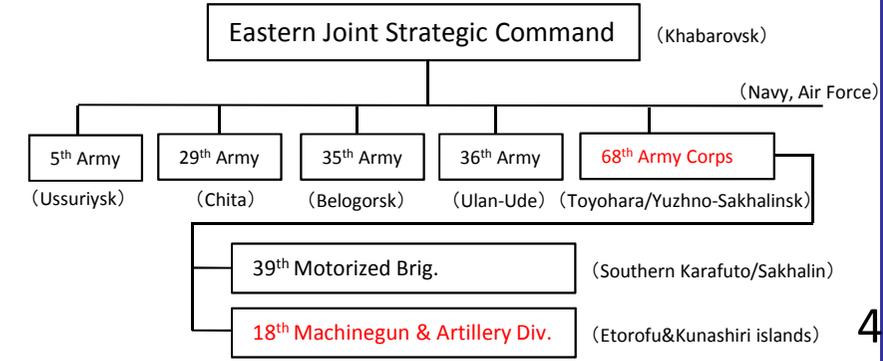
* "Kuril" is a Russian geographical name which refers to Northern Territories and Chishima islands .



Main equipment of AFRF in Etorofu and Kunashiri Islands



18th 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.)

Comments from diplomatic magazines and media

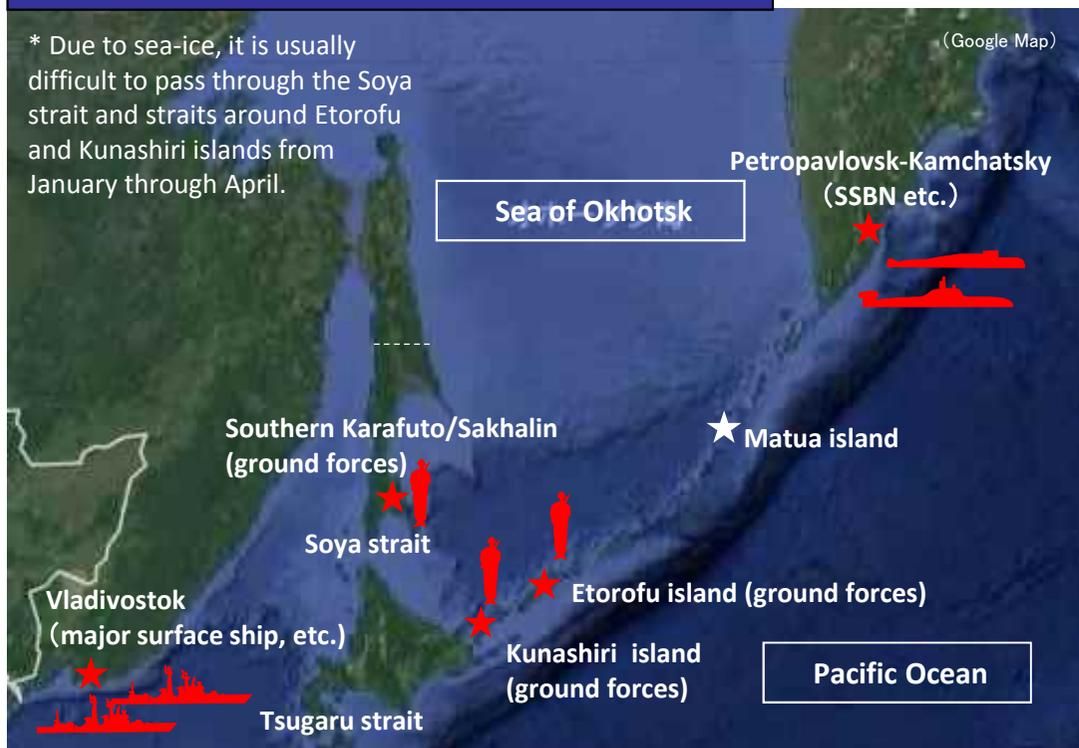
- The “Kuril” islands [*i.e.* NT and Chishima Islands] are important for major surface ships deployed at Vladivostok to maintain unfettered access to the Pacific.
- As its missile range became longer, the former Soviet Union developed so-called “Bastion(fortress) Strategy” that allowed them to easily 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 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.

**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 Kunashiri.

Deployment of Russian military forces around Japan

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



Ranges of SSMs/SAMs (for illustrative purposes)

