Russia's Influence in the Asia-Pacific Region

A Monograph

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This monograph explores Russia's recent activities in the Asia-Pacific region. Within the context of Russia's new Eastern orientation, the research question this monograph examines is, "How is Russia using its military to exert influence in the Pacific?" The areas within Russia's span of control used to explore this question and thus serve as the focal points of this research are Primorskii Krai region of Russia, the Kuril Islands, and Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. The purpose, growth, and manner of employment of Russia's military presence in each of these examples serve as criteria for measuring the exertion of military influence in the Pacific. Predicated on an idealized image of the Soviet Union as a world power narrated by Putin and his support base, these initiatives allow him to retain power by challenging the United States and China. Further, Chinese and US challenges to Russian initiatives, with the exception of armed conflict, will only reinforce Russian resolve to return to a position of greater influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

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Abstract

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This monograph explores Russia’s recent activities in the Asia-Pacific region. Within the context of Russia’s new Eastern orientation, the research question this monograph examines is, “How is Russia using its military to exert influence in the Pacific?” The areas within Russia’s span of control used to explore this question and thus serve as the focal points of this research are the Primorskii Krai region of Russia, the Kuril Islands, and Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. The purpose, growth, and manner of employment of Russia’s military presence in each of these examples serve as criteria for measuring the exertion of military influence in the Pacific. Predicated on an idealized image of the Soviet Union as a world power narrated by Putin and his support base, these initiatives allow him to retain power by challenging the United States and China. Further, Chinese and US challenges to Russian initiatives, with the exception of armed conflict, will only reinforce Russian resolve to return to a position of greater influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

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Acronyms

IDV	Institute of the Far East
NCO	Noncommissioned Officer
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Chapter 1: Introduction

In September 2016, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a "turn to the East" policy while attending the second Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok, Russia. The motivation for this pivot to the East stems from a range of economic, diplomatic, and military challenges. Despite existing agreements with Pacific countries, Russian trade with the East suffers from an ongoing deficit of 146.5 billion dollars when compared with the West.[1] Because of this lopsided economic situation, Russia remains susceptible to economic sanctions when diplomatically challenged by the United States or European countries.[2] Militarily, Russia must address its two-front dilemma with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the West and a rising China, militarizing Japan, and an omnipresent United States in the East by positioning its limited resources throughout its vast country. While the Vladivostok declaration informed the international community of Russia's new national policy direction, Russian military activity, in fact, preceded this announcement by thirteen years.

Within the context of Russia's new Eastern orientation, the research question this monograph examines is, "How is Russia using its military to exert influence in the Pacific?" Russia's interest in the Pacific, its historic pattern of military growth and decline in the region, and how this instrument of national power leads the renewed effort to exert influence are the focus of this inquiry. The areas within Russia's span of control used to explore this question and thus serve as the focal points of this research are the Primorskii Krai region of Russia, the Kuril Islands, and Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. The purpose, growth, and manner of employment of

[1] Matvei Romanov and Irina Romanova, trans. Yevgeny Khazanov, "Russia's Geopolitical "Turn" to the East and Development of Its Far Eastern Territories," *Far Eastern Affairs* 45: no. 2 (2017): 88, accessed October 20, 2017, http://www.eastviewpress.com/Files/FEA%20TOC_No2_2017.pdf

[2] Fyodor Lukyanov, "Putin's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2016, 31.

Russia's military presence in each of these examples serve as criteria for measuring the exertion of military influence in the Pacific.

This monograph examines how Russia uses its military to exert influence in the Pacific in six chapters. Chapter 2 provides the context in which Russia operates. Chapter 3 examines Primorskii Krai, the most populous district of the Far East federal district and principal location of Russia's Far Eastern military industrial complex. Further, this territory to Russia holds the city of Vladivostok, borders China, North Korea and the Sea of Japan, and is home to the Russian Pacific Fleet and 5th Army. Chapter 4 examines the Kuril Islands. The Kurils are a chain fifty-six island archipelago that stretches from northern Japan to the Kamchatka Peninsula, totaling 810 miles.[3] These islands offer Russian forces bases and training areas in proximity to Japan and the United States. Chapter 5 examines Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam and Russia's use of this deep-water port in the Pacific, through the means of assured access, to extend its influence. Chapter 6 concludes this monograph by providing an overall analysis, demonstrating Russia's renewed interest and revitalized projection of power in the Pacific.

The research and analysis provided in this monograph provides decision-makers and planners alike understanding of Russia's resurgence in the Asia-Pacific. By analyzing Primorskii Krai, the Kuril Islands, and Cam Ranh Bay, one can see Russia's attempts at asserting herself through an expanded military presence to bring about a decline of perceived US dominance in the region and counter-balance China's rise. By having this knowledge, one can exploit opportunity on a range of potential issues bound to arise in this fluid and expansive geopolitical environment.

[3] A.F. Klimentko, "On the Role of the Kuril Islands in Ensuring Russia's Security," *Military Thought* 12, no. 3 (2002): 114, accessed October 20, 2017, https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/4492025.

Chapter 2: Context

Answering the research question of this paper requires an understanding of how Russia views itself, its relative position in the international community, and the changes it wishes to make. From the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 to the election of Vladimir Putin in May 2000, Russia struggled to restore its great power status amidst a myriad of national and international challenges. These challenges included a decline in all instruments of national power, civil unrest, and growing competition amongst other Pacific states. Faced with these conditions, Russia sees itself lacking the influence the Soviet Union once had and seeks to restore it through an expansion of its military presence and capabilities in the Pacific.[4]

While many factors played into the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent subordination of the Russian Federation, two critical components included economic insolvency and territorial overreach.[5] The seeds of this crisis began in the 1970s as the Soviet Union could no longer produce its food.[6] Shortages in labor and inefficiencies throughout the agriculture industry brought the Soviet Union from the world's largest grain exporter in the early 1900s to importer by 1985.[7] By relying on its oil revenue to purchase grain from abroad, the Soviet Union placed their economy and food supply at the mercy of the fluctuating prices. When the price of oil dropped, the Soviet Union required substantial injections of hard currency, borrowed from Western countries, to feed itself, which steadily increased until the collapse in 1991. Adding to

[4] Franz-Stefan Gady, "Putin: Russian Force Buildup in Kuril Islands a Response to US Military Actions," *The Diplomat*, June 5, 2017, accessed February 5, 2018, https://thediplomat.com/2017/06/putin-russian-force-buildup-in-kuril-islands-a-response-to-us-military-actions/.

[5] Ramesh Thakur, "Asia-Pacific After the Cold War," in *Reshaping Regional Relations: Asia-Pacific and the Former Soviet Union* ed. Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 4-5.

[6] Yegor Gairdar, trans Antonina W. Bouis, *Collapse of an Empire: Lessons for Modern Russia* (Washington: Brookings Institute Press, 2007), 94.

[7] Ibid.

this problem was the Soviet Union's efforts to maintain military parity with the United States with an economy only a quarter the size. The Soviet Union overcommitted its already limited resources to military expenditures rather than strengthening its economy, making stability, let alone prosperity, untenable.

Exposing the flaws of the Soviet economy was its ideologically-driven global expansion. This policy, co-opted from czarist Russia, extended the Soviet Union from Eastern Europe to the Pacific, and from the Arctic Rim to Central Asia. Further, the desire to extend communism across the world and protect the Russian core brought Soviet influence into Africa, South East Asia, and Central and South America. Whether for the aggrandizement of the Russia Empire or the furtherance of Soviet influence, this grossly defined and unsustainable growth model overextended the Soviet Union's resources. At the extreme reach of the Soviet Union lay its Far East territories, providing a prime example of where this abstract ideology contested with reality.

The Far East is the largest region of the Russian Federation, covering 2.4 million square miles and 36% of the country's total area.[8] Despite the distance between the Far East and Moscow, it served several important functions for the Soviet Union; including: 1) a defense industry to support Russian military forces, 2) prison camps for enemies of the state, and 3) a trade conduit to the Pacific. In military presence, the Soviet Red Army stationed 300,000 troops across the region and the Navy's Pacific Fleet deployed 150,000 sailors on 800 ships within an area stretching from Madagascar to California.[9] Additionally, the Soviet Air Force maintained 200 strategic bombers along with thousands of fighter aircraft.[10] Supporting this military presence

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[8] Pavel A. Minakir, ed., and Gregory L. Freeze, ed. and trans., *The Russian Far East: An Economic Handbook* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1994), 3.

[9] John J. Stephan, *The Russia Far East: A History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 265.

[10] Judith Thorton and Charles E. Ziegler, "The Russian Far East in Perspective," in *The Russian Far East: A Region at Risk*, eds. Judith Thorton and Charles E. Ziegler (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 5.

was an extensive and highly subsidized military-industrial complex. By the 1980s, the defense industry employed 40% of the region's workforce and 20% of its total output.[11] This number grows, however, when considering the thousands of peripheral occupations required to sustain the defense industry. While the Far East economy also included agriculture, mineral, timber, and fishing, these were nominal due to the continued need for outside resourcing.

With the prominence of military production in the Far East, the growth of towns and cities in this area became intrinsically linked to the Soviet armed forces. Vladivostok, the largest population center in the region, contained nine of these thirty-two military equipment plants, accounting for half of the city's industrial base.[12] This dependence extended beyond the shores of the continent and onto the Kuril Islands where the population either was in or supported the military. Beyond the Pacific islands claimed by the Soviet Union, their military extended this sphere of influence with a continued naval presence in Surabaya, Indonesia and Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam through the balance of the twentieth century.

The collapse of the Soviet Union brought with it a period of economic, political, and military recession for the Far East. While the Far East's decline was not unique, their reliance on subsidies and a steady flow of business to their homogenous economic model made them entirely dependent on the central government.[13] The Far East economy collapsed with the Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's cut to defense spending in 1989 and Russian President Boris Yeltsin's ceasing of subsidies in 1992.[14] Amidst this economic devastation, the population of the region declined from eight million to 7.2 million with almost half of those who remained living

[11] Katherine G. Burns, "Security Implications of Defense Conversion in the Russian Far East, " in *The Russian Far East: A Region at Risk*, eds Judith Thorton and Charles E. Ziegler (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 267.

[12] Ibid., 270.

[13] Pavel A. Minakir and Gregory L. Freeze, *The Russian Far East: An Economic Handbook*, 5.

[14] Ibid., 225.

below the poverty line.[15] Along with the collapse of the Far East economy was the decline in the qualitative and quantitative strength of the Soviet and Russian military.

Over the course of six years following Gorbachev's attempt to revive the Soviet economy, the defense budget plummeted from $246 billion in 1988 to $14 billion in 1994, with a majority going to its nuclear capabilities.[16] The Russian armed forces declined from five million to one million service members, requiring the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan, Germany, Mongolia, and Eastern Europe.[17] For the Far East, its ground forces went from three to zero tank divisions and twenty to ten motor rifle divisions by 1997.[18] The remaining elements amounted to nothing more than a paper tiger as strength and readiness reports did not accurately depict the true combat effectiveness troops, vehicles, and equipment. Equally impactful was the 50% reduction of the Pacific Fleet in 1997 which continued decline into the 2000s, bringing it from two carrier battle groups and 120 submarines to a composite force of only one missile cruiser, five destroyers, and ten nuclear submarines.[19] Compounding this dramatic reduction in the size of the Russian military was the decline in education and training.

As resources continued to diminish through the close of the twentieth century, three out of every four military education institutions closed, leaving a total of fifty-seven by 2005 and a desperate need for qualified and experienced instructors.[20] For specialty training such as aviation,

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[15] Ibid. xxix.

[16] Dimitri Trenin, "The Revival of the Russian Military: How Moscow Reloaded" *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2016, 23.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Chikahito Harada, *Russia and North-east Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 20-21.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Zoltan Barany, *Democratic Breakdown and Decline of the Russian Military* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 57.

pilots flew less than half the minimum training hours which was already at a quarter of what other countries considered mandatory.[21] Further, training exercises, regardless of service or echelon, became irrelevant as defense officials focused less on critical and objective testing.[22]

The decline of military power enabled such countries as the United States to assume greater prominence in the Asia-Pacific as it provided security to the region. Further, the Soviet Union sought to reduce tensions with China by pulling forces out of Mongolia, reducing the size of ground forces along the Russia-China border, and removing their support of Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia.[23] While successful in reducing tensions with China and securing them as one of their largest arms customers, assuming 40% of the total arms exports by 1993, Russia no longer posed a challenge to Chinese and US interests in the Asia-Pacific region.[24]

The turning point for Russia's decline in Pacific influence began with two initiatives launched by President Vladimir Putin, those being the comprehensive military reform program known as the "New Look" and his pivot to the Asia-Pacific region in the "Look East" policy.[25] While the New Look did not address enhancing or reclaiming lost influence, it sought to improve the means to do so, that being the Russian military.

While the "New Look" reforms officially began in October 2008 with the creation of the strategic commands, the ideological foundation originated with Russian Minister of Defense

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 58.

[23] Nikolas Gvosdev and Christopher Marsh, *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors* (Washington: CQ Press, 2014), 136.

[24] Ibid., 128.

[25] Defense Intelligence Agency, *Russia Military Power: Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations*, accessed October 20, 2017, https://www.dia.mil/Military-Power-Publications.

Sergei Ivanov in October 2003.[26] Within his work, *Priority Tasks of the Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation*, Ivanov made the following statement:

> The RF Armed Forces should be able in peacetime and in emergency situations, while retaining the potential for strategic deterrence and carrying out the tasks of maintaining combat readiness, the troops (forces) of constant readiness without carrying out additional mobilization measures to successfully solve tasks simultaneously in two armed conflicts of any type, as well as carry out peacekeeping operations both independently and as part of multinational forces.[27]

Russia sought to create a functional military that could provide a range of viable military options for events short of war. To achieve this the armed forces, like the Armed Forces of the United States, would divide into two components. The first component would be institutional and support the whole through administration, training, and supply, and providing strategic-level planning. The second component would provide the operational force, dividing the Russian sphere of influence into five strategic-level commands that control all of the domain capabilities within their geographic boundary. Another fundamental change to the former Soviet structure was the elimination of 1,000 troop formations of various sizes down to sixty self-sustained, combined-arms brigades to serve as the operational force for the Russian Armed Forces.[28]

This transition from a division-based force came with it a dramatic change its composition. Before the reforms, the officer corps stood at 355,000, with 1,107 being generals, and an ineffective noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps. Under the new system, the total

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[26] Daivis Petraitis, "The Russian Military Reform 2005-2015," *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, 9, no. 1 (2011): 139, accessed October 20, 2017, https://lumen.cgsccarl.com/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/docview/1323403804?accountid=28992.

[27] Ibid., 140.

[28] Alexander Golts, "Conscription: A Basic Question of Civil-Military Relations in Russia," in *The Russian Armed Forces in Transition: Economic, Geopolitical, and Institutional Uncertainties*, eds. Roger N. McDermott, Bertil Nygren, and Carolina Vendil Pallin, 209-221 (New York: Routledge, 2012), 209.

number of officers reduced to 150,000 with 877 generals, an increase in the total number of junior officers, and the professionalization of the NCO corps.[29]

This reform also changed how the Russian armed forces approached manning their units. Before 2003, Russian defense doctrine maintained a conscription system where the government could draft up to 750,000 military-aged men for two years.[30] Under the new model, Russia would rely on a hybrid system of one-year conscripts along with a volunteer or "contract" force. Between the changes to the unit structure and manning, the Russian Ground Forces would have a deployable force of 300,000 out of its 700,000 total numbers.[31]

Along with these changes, this reform initiative also called for increasing and upgrading the combat platforms available for each of the services. The goal of this plan envisioned 70% of all military equipment replaced by 2020 at a rate of 9-11% each year.[32] Directing the focus of each year's investment is the Strategic Armament Program, drafted by the Ministry of Defense, which runs in five-year cycles. Russia dramatically increased its military expenditures, beginning with a 1.4 trillion ruble investment in 2008 which grew to 3.9 trillion in 2016.[33] This dedicated investment set the ambitious goal of modernizing the strategic nuclear forces, providing 1,000 vehicles to the army, 116 new aircraft to the air force, and twelve new surface ships as well as six

[29] Ibid., 144.

[30] Marcel de Hass, *Russia's Foreign Security Policy in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 37.

[31] Golts, "Conscription: A Basic Question of Civil-Military Relations in Russia," 209.

[32] Dmitry Gorenburg, *Russia's State Armament's Program 2020: Is the Third Time the Charm for Military Modernization?* accessed October 20, 2017, http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/russias-state-armaments-program-2020-third-time-charm-military-modernization.

[33] International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Chapter Five: Russia and Eurasia," in *The Military Balance*, no. 1 (2017): 191, accessed October 20, 2017, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/04597222.2017.1271211.

submarines to the navy.[34] These investments envisioned a leaner and more versatile military that could engage and influence in the many regions of conflict throughout the world today.

In conjunction with the ongoing military reforms, Putin articulated Russia's renewed orientation on the Pacific in a series of speeches beginning in 2013. The first of which was the 2013 Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly in which Putin made the following statement:

> I will stress again that government and private sector resources should go toward development and achieving strategic objectives. For example, let's look at such objectives as developing Siberia and the Far East. This is our national priority for the entire 21st century . . . I am confident that Russia's reorientation toward the Pacific Ocean and the dynamic development in all our eastern territories will not only open up new economic opportunities and new horizons, but also provide additional instruments for an active foreign policy.[35]

With describing the potential economic opportunities in the Pacific, Putin seeks to improve Russia's current position in the region through means beyond the economic. By interpreting active foreign policy to mean a desire to exert influence, Putin implied the expansion of military capabilities as they would fall under the instruments of national power. This formal declaration, however, came eight years after Russia began focusing on its Far East territories. From 2005 to 2014, the Far East received extensive public and private investments to develop its infrastructure.[36] These investments covered 140 infrastructure projects totaling $17.3 billion.[37]

As the Russian Federation emerged, it could not afford the military it needed to maintain its influence in the Pacific, enabling countries such as China and the United States to increase their share of influence at the expense of a weakened Russia. From this lack of military power,

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[34] Julian Cooper, "Military Procurement in Russia," in *The Russian Armed Forces in Transition: Economic, Geopolitical, and Institutional Uncertainties*, eds. Roger N. McDermott, Bertil Nygren, and Carolina Vendil Pallin, 209-221 (New York, Routledge, 2012), 173.

[35] Russian Federation President, Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, accessed October 20, 2017, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19825.

[36] Matvei Romanov and Irina Romanova, "Russia's Geopolitical "Turn" to the East and Development of Its Far Eastern Territories," 9.

[37] Ibid.

Russia found its national interests tested or subordinated to those of other Pacific countries as the twentieth century closed. Russia saw this as an existential threat to their national security, justifying the policy for renewed investment in their military. Strengthening the Far East is a means to restore Russia's lost influence, contesting the United States and China's through military power. This model, co-opted from its Soviet predecessors, now serves as Russia's twenty-first century solution to restore its prominence in the Pacific.

Chapter 3: Primorskii Krai

When studying Russia within the context of the Asia-Pacific region, Primorskii Krai provides a number geopolitical factors that inform their interests and influence. This territory is 5677 miles by road from Moscow and covers an area of 64,100 square miles, bordering North Korea and China by land and Japan by sea.[38] Its namesake in English translates to "maritime frontier," informing its coastal boundary with the Sea of Japan.[39] Primorskii Krai's demographics include a heterogeneous population of ethnic Russians in the majority with minority populations of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. This area also played a critical role in shaping Russia's history, dating back to its formation in November 1856 under Czar Alexander II.[40] Economically, this district maintains 80% of the Far East's sea trade with its three year-round ports at Vladivostok, Nakhodka, and Vostochnyi, as well as a quarter of industrial production through its military, fishing, and metallurgical industries.[41] By the close of the twentieth century, Primorskii Krai and its capital Vladivostok, founded in 1859, was the second leading territory of the Russian Far East in population and economic development.[42] Despite these economic and demographic considerations, however, the history of Primorskii Krai demonstrates Russia's continued prioritization of military power to sustain a dominant influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

Due to its distance from the support and authority of Moscow and proximity to other Asia-Pacific states, Primorskii Krai's history likens to that of a colony abroad. This area also possessed a unique military characteristic as the majority of its governor-generals were army

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[38] Prismorskii Krai Official Website, accessed 10 October 2017, http://www.Primorskii.ru.

[39] John J. Stephen, *The Russian Far East: A History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 216.

[40] Ibid., 47.

[41] Pavel A. Minakir and Gregory L. Freeze, *The Russian Far East: An Economic Handbook*, 139-140.

[42] Nadezhda Mikheeva, "Social and Economic Differentiation in the Russian Far East," in *Russia's Far East: A Region at Risk*, eds. Judith Thornton and Charles E. Ziegler (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 92.

officers that wielded both civil and military authority.[43] Further militarization of the Russian Far East came after Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War from 1894-1895. Following this crushing defeat of Chinese forces and the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki in April 1895, czarist Russia reoriented its attention toward the Far East as France, Germany, Britain, and Japan established their spheres of influence in proximity to Russia's vulnerable borders. One expression of this new attention was the rerouting of the Trans-Siberian Railway across Manchuria on a direct path to Vladivostok, enabling faster deployment of forces from the west.[44] This adjustment allowed for Vladivostok to garrison 80,000 troops and Pacific Fleet to grow to two squadrons with eighty-eight total combat surface ships.[45]

Following their defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, Russia's attention in the east declined as World War I broke out in Europe in 1914 and revolution took hold in 1917.[46] While the revolution grew into a civil war that drew in such countries as the United States and Japan, the Far East mainly saw Soviet partisan operations as battles concentrated in the west.[47] Primorskii Krai held a significant portion of the 80,000 Soviet partisans within the Far East.[48] Their operations disrupted the Russian White Army's line of communications, preventing receipt of critical supplies which reduced their combat effectiveness against the amateurish Soviet Army.[49] Further, these partisans challenged international intervention as Western European, US, and

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[43] John J. Stephen, *The Russian Far East: A History*, 55.

[44] S.C.M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 8.

[45] George F. Nafziger, *Russian Pacific Fleet, 1904-5* (Leavenworth: Nafziger Documents, 1904), 1-3.

[46] Geoffrey Parker, ed., *The Cambridge History of Warfare* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 265.

[47] David M. Glantz, *The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union: A History* (Portland: Frank Cass, 1992), 27.

[48] Ibid., 26.

[49] Ibid., 27.

Japanese expeditionary forces landed in the Far East in August 1918.[50] Actions against these forces ranged from small ambushes to complex assaults. On such engagement occurred on June 22, 1919 where six hundred Soviet partisans attacked a US infantry company garrisoned in Romanovka, killing or wounding this two-hundred-man element.[51] These activities contributed to the withdrawal of US and Western European forces by April 1920 and the Soviet Union's complete victory in 1922 as Japanese abandoned the continent. Though successful in removing foreign armies, the Soviet Union kept the region in a perpetual defensive posture as Japan continued to occupy Sakhalin Island.

Primorskii Krai and the balance of the Far East remained tense until Japan returned to the continent to invade Manchuria in 1931, leading to a series of border engagements between Japan and the Soviet Union beginning in 1932. Following the Soviet victories at Khalkin-Gol in 1939, relations with Japan remained tense, but neutral due to their neutrality pact signed April 1941. While the Soviet Union and Japan continued viewed each other as enemies, neither could afford opening another front as Japan was at war with the United States and elements of the Soviet Union leadership saw war with Germany as inevitable. Only after Germany's defeat and a series of conferences to determine the post-war settlement amongst the Allies did the Soviet Union agree to attack Japan in August of 1945. Prior to the invasion, the Soviet Union mobilized 1.6 million troops, five thousand aircraft, and four thousand tanks into three fronts throughout the Far East.[52] Primorskii Krai served as the staging area for the First Far-East Front which attacked on August 9, 1945 the offensive by serving as the staging grounds for one of the three fronts to invade Japanese-occupied Manchuria.[53] In conjunction with the successes enjoyed by the other

[50] John J. Stephen, *The Russian Far East*, 129.

[51] Ibid., 137.

[52] Ibid., 241.

[53] Ibid.

fronts, the Soviet Union quickly defeated the Kwantung Army by August 16, 1945, securing its influence in China, Korea, and the Asia-Pacific region.[54]

Despite the Allied victory in World War II and Soviet withdrawal from Manchuria in May 1946, Primorskii Krai remained heavily fortified. Remnants of the Soviet Army and Navy totaled 400,000 troops, 40,000 sailors, and 50,000 secret police and remained in place through the 1950s.[55] As relations with the United States broke down following World War II, the Soviet Union took steps to secure its borders and reduce US influence in the Asia-Pacific region. In August 1948, the Soviet Union expelled all Americans from Vladivostok and the other cities in Primorskii Krai. Additionally, the Soviet Union signed security treaties with extensive military aid packages to the communist governments of China and North Korea between 1948 and 1950.[56]

In North Korea specifically, as part of the mutual withdrawal of US and Soviet forces from the peninsula in 1948, the 25th Soviet Army left all of its weapons and equipment as it withdrew to Primorskii Krai.[57] The Soviet Union also trained a majority of the North Korean Air Force's pilots and technicians as well as fielding 239 combat, training, and transport aircraft between 1949 and 1950.[58] This comprehensive support facilitated the invasion of the US-sponsored Republic of Korea by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea under Kim Il-Sung in June 1950.[59]

While the Soviet Union did not formally participate in the Korean War, supporting the Korean People's Army in a conflict contained on the peninsula served their interests. By

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[54] David M. Glantz, *August Storm: Soviet Tactical and Operational Combat in Manchuria, 1945* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute, 1983), 138.

[55] John J. Stephen, *The Russian Far East: A History*, 243.

[56] Ibid., 251.

[57] Sergi N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 133.

[58] Igor Seidov, ed. and trans. Stuart Britton, *Red Devils over the Yalu, A Chronical of Soviet Aerial Operations in the Korean War 1950-1953* (West Midlands: Helion & Company, 2014), 22. E-Book.

[59] Sergi N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War*, 149.

supporting their satellite state with military advisors, money, and equipment, the Soviet Union stood to increase their buffer extending from Primorskii Krai and assert leverage against Japan. Further, unification of the Korean peninsula under a communist government would test US resolve in the Asia-Pacific region, forcing them either to cede influence or commit forces from Europe to contest.[60] Despite the Soviet Union's desire to avoid direct conflict with the United States and risk igniting another world war, however, Soviet and US aircraft sparred over the skies of Primorskii Krai beginning in October 1950.[61] Such engagements included two US Air Force fighters strafing the Sukhaia Rechka airfield twenty miles from Vladivostok and the Soviet Air Force shooting down B-29s over the Tumen River and a B-50 over Peter the Great Bay.[62] These incidents, combined with Chinese pressure to provide air support to their ground forces, brought the Soviet Union's Air Force into the Korean War. Above their existing training and equipping mission in China, the Soviet Air Force was to protect the bridges crossing the Yalu river and main supply lines flowing into North Korea.[63] Under this expanded role, however, the Soviet Air Force operated under considerable restraints. Soviet pilots could not support Chinese or North Korean ground operations, flew in aircraft with North Korean markings, and had to speak Chinese while communicating over the radio. Though restricted to a defensive role, the Soviet mission along the Chinese-Korean border played a vital role in sustaining Chinese and North Korean ground operations.[64] As the Korean War concluded in 1953, none of the outcomes sought by the Soviet Union occurred. The peninsula remained divided and the United States demonstrated its

[60] Ibid., 139.

[61] Xiaoming Zhang, *Red Wings over the Yalu: China, the Soviet Union, and the Air War in Korea* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 85.

[62] John J. Stephen, *The Russian Far East: A History*, 251.

[63] Xiaoming Zhang, *Red Wings over the Yalu: China, the Soviet Union, and the Air War in Korea*, 73.

[64] Ibid., 139, 142.

commitment in the Asia-Pacific region. Unfortunately for the Soviet Union, a negative outcome of the war was the breakdown of relations with China.

Highlighting the growing tension between the Soviet Union and China following the close of the Korean War, China declared its former ally in a state of counter-revolution in 1964. This announcement followed the Soviet Union's lack of support to China during the Sino-Indian War of 1962 and their attempts to dialogue with the United States.[65] This tension led to a buildup of forces and armed conflict along Soviet-Chinese border.[66] Regarding ground forces, the army grew from twenty to fifty-three divisions by 1970, totaling half a million men across the Far East.[67] These units routinely received modern military equipment such as the T-72 tank, armored personnel carriers, and artillery ahead of other theaters within the Soviet Army.[68] For naval capability, the Pacific Fleet became the largest naval force under the Soviet Navy with a total of 800 ships with the inclusion of nuclear ballistic missile submarines.[69] Lastly, the Soviet Air Force in the Far East enjoyed the same modernization program as the Army with receipt of new bombers and fighter aircraft.[70] Based on the disproportionate size of the Far East's military capability relative to others, the Soviet Union established the Far East Theater command in 1978, the first created during peacetime to control all military forces from Siberia to the Kuril Islands.[71]

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[65] Nikolas Gvosdev and Christopher Marsh, *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors*, 126-127.

[66] Ibid., 127.

[67] Harry Gelman, "The Soviet Far East Military Buildup: Motives and Prospectts," in *The Soviet Far East Military Buildup: Nuclear Dilemmas and Asian Security*, eds. Richard H. Solomon and Masataka Kosaka (Dover: Auburn House Publishing, 1986), 47.

[68] Yao Wenbin, "Soviet Military Deployments in the Asia-Pacific region: Implications for China's Security," in *The Soviet Far East Military Buildup: Nuclear Dilemma and Asian Security*, eds. Richard H. Solomon and Masataka Kosaka (Dover: Auburn House Publishing, 1986), 102.

[69] Ibid., 101.

[70] Ibid., 102.

[71] Richard H. Solomon and Masataka Kosaka, "Nuclear Dilemmas and Asian Security: Problems of Coalition Defense in the Nuclear Era," in *The Soviet Far East Military Buildup: Nuclear Dilemma and Asian Security*, eds. Richard H. Solomon and Masataka Kosaka (Dover: Auburn House Publishing, 1986), 5.

Primorskii Krai saw the lion's share of this military buildup as each of the services expanded or improved their positions throughout the district. Vladivostok became the headquarters for the Pacific Fleet, the 5th Red Banner Army grew and extended across the border with China and North Korea, and the Soviet Air Force constructed or improved airfields to support the fighter-bomber division and two separate attack and reconnaissance regiments of the 1st Air Army.[72] Supporting this force was the equally extensive military-industrial complex in Vladivostok that received both substantial financial subsidies from Moscow and unending orders for ships, fixed-wing aircraft, avionics, and helicopters.[73]

The Soviet Union maintained this unsustainable military growth from 1965 till their collapse in 1991 as it competed for dominant influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Signs of decline began in 1986 when President Mikhail Gorbachev's made dramatic cuts to the defense budget as well as seeking rapprochement with the United States and China. Additionally, the Soviet Union reduced its presence throughout the Far East and the Asia-Pacific region. Between 1970 and 1993, the Far East went from sixty to forty-two divisions and over those that remained, few received could report being fully manned.[74] The Pacific Fleet became a fleet in being with their ships anchored at Vladivostok or other naval bases in the area unmanned and without fuel.[75] Primorskii Krai saw a dramatic reduction in both military presence and its economic livelihood. Not only did orders for new military equipment cease, but Moscow also severed its umbilical

[72] International Institute for Strategic Studies, "The United States and the Soviet Union," in *The Military Balance*, no. 1 (1981): 191, accessed October 20, 2017, https://doi.org/10.1080/04597228108459912.

[73] Katherine G. Burns, "Security Implications of Defense Conversation in the Russian Far East," in *Russia's Far East: A Region at Risk*, eds. Judith Thornton and Charles E. Ziegler (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 267, 271.

[74] Gerald Segal, "Russia as an Asia-Pacific Power," in *Reshaping Regional Relations: Asia-Pacific and the Former Soviet Union*, eds. Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 70-71.

[75] Ibid.

cord with the Far East as it focused on Europe for the balance of the twentieth century.[76] Primorskii Krai, along with other districts within the Far East went into economic decline as jobs disappeared and people moved west.

With the election of President Vladimir Putin in 2000, the Far East received renewed attention. Beyond the call for economic revitalization, Putin instituted military reforms to halt the decline and restore Russia's former influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Part of the domestic political calculus in launching this restoration of the Russia military was the anti-Chinese sentiment in the Far East, particularly in such districts as Primorskii Krai. This concern over China's agenda manifested into many organizations that lobbied for anti-Chinese measures; one such organization was the Institute of the Far East (IDV). Echoing the sentiment of other anti-Chinese groups, the IDV made the following statement:

> The danger of masses of Chinese arriving and settling in the area is particularly great, because the "infiltrants" are convinced that the lands where they are putting down new roots are no foreign country but China's historic territory lost a mere 150 years ago . . . More is the pity that, in today's China, which is supposed to be our friend, they continue to work with persistent zeal to prop up the claim with fresh "scientific proof."[77]

Regardless the validity of the IDV's accusations, local sentiment played a role in restoring the once-dominant military presence in the Russian Far East. At the time of the reforms, Primorskii Krai still held the 5th Army with its headquarters Ussuriysk, the Pacific Fleet at Vladivostok, Nakhodka, and Vostochnyi, as well as elements of the 1st Air Army. Each of these forces underwent organizational changes, modernization, and improvements to their readiness.

Under the structural reforms mentioned previously, 5th Army transitioned to the combined-arms format, consolidating its bloated organization into four motor rifle brigades, a

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[76] Graeme Gill, "The Agenda for Reform in Russia, in *Reshaping Regional Relations: Asia-Pacific and the Former Soviet Union*, eds. Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 43.

[77] Alexander Lukin, *The Bear Watches the Dragon: Russia's Perceptions of China and the Evolution of Russian-Chinese Relations Since the Eighteenth Century* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 238-239.

missile brigade, rocket artillery brigade, artillery brigade, air defense brigade, and a chemical defense regiment.[78] The 1st Air Army along with the air defense organizations within the Far East reorganized into the 11th Air and Air Defense Army.

The modernization of the military in Primorskii Krai began to take hold as early as September 2007 when Colonel Aleksey Kurnosov, Deputy Commander of the Far Eastern Military District, announced a 670 million-ruble expenditure on expanded official housing.[79] Of this sum, Ussuriysk would receive 1.7 million rubles to construct an eighty- unit apartment complex.[80]

Lastly, 5th Army also received funding to participate in exercises such as Stability 2008, Peace Mission 2009, East-2014, and Indra-2016 and part of Russia's improvement to its military readiness. While these exercises served as elaborate readiness drills, each possessed unique characteristics. Stability-2008's scenario involved a series of terrorist attacks and natural disasters.[81] Peace Mission 2009 was a combined exercise with elements of the People's Liberation Army in which both countries attacked a series of terrorist organizations in various Chinese training areas.[82] East (Vostok)-2014 was a joint Russian exercise in which elements of the army, navy, and air force defended the coastline of Primorskii Krai and conducted amphibious

[78] Defense Intelligence Agency, *Russia Military Power: Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations*, 50.

[79] Krasnaya Zvezda, "Russia: New Housing for Far East Military District Servicemen," *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, August 21, 2007, accessed November 11, 2017, https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_0_0_43/content/Display/CEP20070821548028?returnFrame=true.

[80] Ibid.

[81] "Medvedev Approves Plan for Stability-2008 Drill," *Xinhua News Agency - CEIS*, September 20, 2008, accessed November 11, 2017, https://lumen.cgsccarl.com/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/docview/452018550?accountid=28992.

[82] Russia-China Peace Mission 2009 Exercise Enters its Active Phase," *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, July 23, 2009, accessed November 11, 2017, https://lumen.cgsccarl.com/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/docview/460445246?accountid=28992.

operations on the Kuril and Sakhalin islands.[83] Indra-2016 was another combined exercise only with elements of the Indian Army performing counterterrorism operations over eleven days in semi-mountainous and jungle terrain.[84]

The common characteristics of these exercises center on the number of troops, equipment, and capabilities used in each exercise. While each maintained a counterterrorism element to it, all of the exercises involved joint fires and combined-arms maneuver. In the Peace Mission-2009 exercise, for example, Russian forces utilized artillery and tactical air support to destroy an entrenched enemy force. Each of these exercises involved a regiment or more of troops, exercising capabilities such as air defense, electronic warfare, and airborne operations. Lastly, these exercises all involved forces stationed in Primorskii Krai.

Since its founding, Primorskii Krai continues to resemble a frontier military garrison rather than a thriving commercial hub for the Russian Far East. Economic growth outside of the defense industry remains stagnant or in decline due to corruption, lack of enforcement from Moscow, and stalled foreign investment. Though the defense industry in Primorskii Krai fills orders from India, China, and Vietnam, it also sources part of Russia's military modernization. With the investments in military technology, training, and personnel continuing to progress as the civilian sector lags behind, one cannot help but view Primorskii Krai as a staging area for offensive operations to improve Russia's influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

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[83] "Russia's Vostok-2014 War Games Kick Off in Eastern Military District," *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, September 19, 2014, accessed November 11, 2017, https://lumen.cgsccarl.com/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/docview/1563070703?accountid=28992.

[84] "India-Russia Joint Military Exercise Indra-2016 Begins in Vladivostok," *Asian News International*, September 23, 2016, accessed November 11, 2017, https://lumen.cgsccarl.com/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/docview/1822480592?accountid=28992.

Chapter 4: Kuril Islands

The Kuril Islands, just as Primorskii Krai, play a critical role in Russia's ability to project influence in the Pacific. This fifty-six-island archipelago extends 700 miles from Hokkaido, Japan to the Kamchatka Peninsula of Russia, dividing the Sea of Okhotsk from the Pacific Ocean.[85] Russian became aware of the Kurils and Japan in the seventeenth century through wayward Japanese castaways and Dutch expedition maps.[86] As Russia officially and unofficially dispatched expeditions to the Kurils, the primary goal was to extract wealth and other resources from the local inhabitants and establish trade with Japan.

Despite visions of an empire encompassing the Kurils, the military and commercial expeditions of the eighteenth century failed to establish colonies or formal ties with Japan.[87] Failure to achieve either of these aims came as a result of Russia's focus on threats coming from Western Europe and Japanese success in isolating and suffocating Russian colonies before they could establish themselves. Though Russia responded to Japan's actions with raids on Sakhalin, Iturup, and Urup between 1807 and 1813, the raids occurred under the direction of the Russian-American Company and without sanction from the government.[88] These brief exchanges were an aberration to the otherwise static frontier between Russia and Japan until the early 1850s.

As British, French and American military and commercial activity took shape in the Pacific during the 1820s, Russia looked at the Kurils with renewed interest. While the influence

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[85] Description of Kuril Islands. The named islands from north to south are, Shumshu, Atlasov, Paramushir, Antsiferova, Makanrushi, Onekotan, Kharimjotan, Ekarma, Shiashkotan, Chirinkotan, Raykoke, Matua, Rasshua, Ushishir, Ketoy, Simushir, Broutona, Chirpoy, Brat Chirpoyev, Urup, Iturup (Etorofu), Shikotan, Kunashir, and the Habomai Islands. Hiroshi Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008). E-Book. F. David Armstrong, "The Soviet Union and the United States," in *The Soviet Union in East Asia: Predicaments of Power*, ed. Gerald Segal (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), 32.

[86] Hiroshi Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 6.

[87] John J. Stephan, *The Kuril Islands: Russo-Japanese Frontier in the Pacific* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 64.

[88] Ibid., 73.

of Western powers played a critical role in Russia's reorientation, their aims remained focused on resource exploitation and the establishment of trade with Japan. Additionally, Russia felt compelled to establish their border with Japan as the Crimean War extended into the Asian Pacific. With allied Anglo-French squadrons patrolling the Seas of Okhotsk and Japan, Russia signed the Treaty of Shimoda in 1855. This agreement, the first to define the Russian-Japanese frontier, drew the international border between Iturup and Urup with the majority of the archipelago falling under Russian control.[89] Though this treaty remained in effect for twenty years, the issues not addressed in the Treaty of Shimoda, specifically the ownership of Sakhalin Island, forced Russia and Japan to renegotiate.

Unlike the agreed division of the Kurils, Russia and Japan agreed that Sakhalin, a large island east of continental Russia and north of Japan's Hokkaido Island, would fall under joint administration till both countries could come to a permanent agreement.[90] Negotiations to resolve Sakhalin's ownership continued unsuccessfully from 1862 to 1874 with both countries claiming ancestral connections. Japan ultimately broke this impasse when it offered Sakhalin in exchange for continued fishing rights around the islands and control over all the Kurils.

While a significant concession, Japan feared that the continued impasse over Sakhalin would result in war with Russia. With their attention focused on Korea and China, Japan saw this war as unwinnable. Russia readily accepted the offer, seeing more potential for resource exploitation and settlement on Sakhalin, and signed the Treaty of St. Petersburg on May 7, 1875.[91] Japanese ownership of the Kurils remained the status quo for the next seventy years, despite the Russo-Japanese War, World War I, and the Russian Revolution. While Russian

[89] Hiroshi Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, 27.

[90] John J. Stephan, *The Kuril Islands: Russo-Japanese Frontier in the Pacific*, 88.

[91] Ibid.

interest in these islands waxed and waned from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries, their military significance came to light during World War II.

Though the Soviet Union and Japan signed a neutrality pact in April 1941, this agreement only came after Japan's defeat at Khalkin-Gol and Nazi Germany signing a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union in 1939.[92] These events forced Japan to seek rapprochement with the Soviet Union and reorient their ambitions toward the South Pacific. Despite this declared neutrality, however, tensions remained high as the Soviet Union continued to undermine Japanese efforts in China. Further, the Soviet Union began to receive military aid from the United States in October 1941 as it fought Japan's ally, Nazi Germany.

Through the confluence of US Lend-Lease supplies coming through this port and the Japanese garrisoning of the Kurils, the Soviet Union saw the advantage Japan held. While the Japanese could not afford a war with the Soviet Union while fighting the United States in the Pacific, establishing a blockade on the straits between the Kurils would have prevented critical supplies the Soviet Union needed against Nazi Germany. Regarding military aid, the Soviet Union received 409,526 jeeps, 12,161 armored vehicles, 7,000 tanks, and 18,200 aircraft through the Lend-Lease Act between 1941 and 1945.[93] For the Trans-Pacific Route, of which 8,244,000 tons of critical supplies flowed through, Japan only briefly molested freighters passing the Kurils on their way to Vladivostok, ceasing after August 1943.[94] While a blockade was a violation of the neutrality pact, implementing one would have presented a crisis for the Soviet Union in their war against Nazi Germany.

Seeing the value of the Kurils within the context of World War II, the Soviet Union included them as part of their demands when in negotiations with the United States and Great

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[92] Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World At Arms: A Global History of World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 35,81.

[93] Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (Washington: Center of Military History, 1968), 501.

[94] John J. Stephan, *The Kuril Islands: Russo-Japanese Frontier in the Pacific*, 147.

Britain at Tehran, Cairo, Yalta, and Potsdam.[95] Though control of the islands remained undefined, Russia informed Japan it would not renew their neutrality pact in April 1945. Russia subsequently declared war with a surprise attack on Manchuria on August 8th and the Kuril Islands on the 17th.[96]

From mid-August to September 4, 1945, the Soviet Union occupied all of the Kurils, only meeting significant resistance on Shumshu.[97] Following their rapid occupation, Soviet troops forcibly removed 17,000 Japanese civilians and 10,000 troops, repatriating them to Hokkaido.[98] Additionally, the Soviets placed the 24,000 surviving members of Japan's 91st Division into either work brigades that remained on the islands or into prison camps on the continent.[99] Following their occupation, the Soviet Union declared their rightful ownership over the Kurils by refusing sign the San Francisco Treaty of 1951 in favor of a bilateral agreement with Japan in 1956.[100]

Despite the Soviet Union's fervent claim to the Kurils, they have placed little to no emphasis on developing them over the past seventy-three years. Falling under the administrative control of the Sakhalin Oblast, the population of Sakhalin and the entire Kuril chain has never exceeded 800,000, with the former holding the majority of the population. Further, this population has been in sharp decline since the fall of the Soviet Union.[101] For the Kurils, the total

[95] Ibid., 153., F. David Armstrong, "The Soviet Union and the United States," 31-32, 34.

[96] Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World At Arms: A Global History of World War II*, 889.

[97] John J. Stephan, *The Kuril Islands: Russo-Japanese Frontier in the Pacific*, 160-161.

[98] Ibid., 166.

[99] Ibid.

[100] F. David Armstrong, "The Soviet Union and the United States," 38-39.

[101] A. Surinov, E. Baranov, T. Bezborodova, N. Bugakova, M. Gelvanovsky, L. Gokhberg, S. Egorenko, V. Elizarov, V. Zhitkov, Yu. Ivanov, A. Kevesh, A. Kosarev, K. Laykam, I. Masakova, V. Nesterov, G. Oksenoyt, O. Rybak, B. Ryabushkin, M. Sabelnikova, A. Tatarinov, K. Tuzov, A. Khoroshilov, *Russian Russia in Figures* (Moscow: Federal State Statistics Service, 2017), 57. E-Book.

population of 30,000 falls on only eight of the islands.[102] Of these eight, Japan claims ownership of four.

Complimenting this decline in population is the continued lack of industrial development or natural resource exploitation. Of the industries on the islands, fishing continues to account for 45% of the economy.[103] For natural resources, industries to exploit natural gas, oil, gold, and rhenium, a critical component in the production of super alloys, remain nonexistent or years away from development.[104] Attempts to improve the economic resiliency of this region have taken on an international dimension in recent years as Russia and Japan initiated talks for a joint economic activity plan in the areas of fishing, tourism, and ecology on the Kurils. This initiative is among several attempts by Japan to restore their former territory. Despite these efforts to regain control of the Northern Territories, however, Japan's continued dispute over these islands remains a non-issue for Russia.[105] The most recent milestone for Japan was the Tokyo Declaration on Russo-Japanese Relations signed in 1993 which included the return of all four of the islands after the signing of a peace treaty. Talks over this treaty, however, have yet to begin.

With Russia's inability to develop this region even with stimulus during the Soviet era, one must conclude alternative justifications for their continued hold on these islands. One such alternative is the inherent military value this island chain affords Russia as realized during World War II. Despite their sparse population and underdeveloped industrial base, Russia continues to expand its military presence throughout the archipelago.

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[102] Ibid., 103-104.

[103] Pavel A. Minakir and Gregory L. Freeze, *The Russian Far East: An Economic Handbook*, 171-172.

[104] Nikolay Korzhov, "The Kurils: A Difficult Life on the Disputed Islands," *Al Jazeera English*, December 15, 2016, accessed October 20, 2017, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/12/kurils-difficult-life-disputed-islands-161215105806870.html.

[105] The Siberian Times Reporter, "Putin vows not to "Trade" Kuril Islands, and puts accent on Economic Development," *The Siberian Times*, September 2, 2016, accessed October 20, 2017, http://siberiantimes.com/business/opinion/news/n0722-putin-vows-not-to-trade-kuril-islands-and-puts-accent-on-economic-development/.

The military significance of these islands lay in their position relative to other Asia-Pacific countries and continental Russia. Being 550 miles off Russia's coast, the Kurils provide a line of defense for the continent and unrestricted access to the Pacific Ocean. Without this island chain, Russia would have conditional access to the Pacific. If facing armed conflict in the region, Russia's entire Pacific Fleet could be reduced to a fleet in being, isolated in either the Sea of Japan or Okhotsk and subject to airstrikes from an antagonist's air force. In 1954, Nikita Khrushchev, then Premier of the Soviet Union, reinforced this awareness drawn from World War II as he toured the Pacific Fleet facilities in the Far East. Following a demonstration at Port Arthur, Khrushchev ordered the Pacific Fleet to anchor off the Kurils to ensure their survival with quick access to open waters rather than the isolation of their current position or that of Vladivostok.[106]

Through Khrushchev's direction, the Far East expanded or improved its military presence on Sakhalin, Iturup, Matua, Urup, Kunashir, and Simushir. This effort included the construction of naval bases, airstrips, as well as facilities for ground forces. The rationale for such a costly investment of military force was to curtail Chinese military expansion as well as deter the combined efforts of Japan and the United States in the Pacific.[107] This buildup of conventional forces on the islands continued throughout the Soviet era, but saw sharp decline following the collapse of the Soviet Union. As mentioned previously, the Pacific Fleet went through extensive decline toward the close of the twentieth century. The first major reduction began in 1989 with President Mikhail Gorbachev's order to disband twelve army divisions and eleven air force regiments and relocate sixteen warships from the Pacific Fleet.[108] As this decline in physical

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[106] Strobe Talbott, ed. and trans, *Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), 23.

[107] Henry S. Rowen, "Distant Relations: Links Between Asian and European Security," in *The Soviet Far East Military Buildup: Nuclear Dilemmas and Asian Security*, eds. Richard H. Solomon and Masataka Kosaka (Dover: Auburn House Publishing, 1986), 226-227.

[108] International Institute for Strategic Studies, "The Soviet Union," *The Military Balance*, no. 1 (1997): 29, accessed November 11, 2017, https://doi.org/10.1080/0459722908460007.

presence occurred, so too did readiness as exercises and maintenance lapsed. Of the many lows suffered by the Pacific Fleet, one was the deaths of four cadets from malnutrition and illness in 1993.[109]

Despite this decline, however, Russia never abandoned the Kurils. Of few divisions that remained within the Far East Military District, one remained dispersed across the island chain. Additionally, the Pacific Fleet maintained a naval base on the Kurils for its strategic nuclear submarine capability as its surface fleet went into decline.[110] Though a hollow force, this enabled Russia to merely increase its forces when funding became available rather than attempt to regain ceded territory.

When funding came, Russia's military revitalization of the Eastern Military District included the Kurils.[111] In April 2014, Colonel-General Sergei Surovikin, commander of the Eastern Military District, stated the plan to build 150 defense facilities across the island chain with further expansion by 2020.[112] This announcement came amidst the $600 billion increase in defense spending for the Eastern Military District.[113] These facilities include locations for Russia's Borey-class strategic missile submarines. Further, Russia intends to place these bases in two of the contested islands with Japan and within a few hundred kilometers of US territory. Beyond the expansion of physical infrastructure across the island chain, the Eastern Military

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[109] International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Russia," *The Military Balance*, no. 1 (1993): 79, accessed November 11, 2017, https://doi.org/10.1080/0459722930846005497.

[110] International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Russia," *The Military Balance*, no. 1 (1994): 117, accessed November 11, 2017, https://doi.org/10.1080/04597229408460067. Derek da Cunha, "Soviet Naval Capabilities in the Pacific in the 1990s," *The Soviets in the Pacific*, ed. Ross Babbage (Elmsford: Pergamon Press, 1989), 47.

[111] The Eastern Military District formed from the former Far East and Siberian Military Districts in September, 2010. Davis Petraitis, "The Russian Military Reform 2005-2015," 151.

[112] "Russia Increases its Military Presence in Far East," *Xinhua News Agency - CEIS*, Apr 18, 2014, accessed November 11, 2017, https://lumen.cgsccarl.com/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1517906510?accountid=28992.

[113] Brian. Padden, *Russia's Asian Pivot seen in Kuril Military Expansion* (Lanham: Federal Information & News Dispatch, Inc, 2015) accessed November 11, 2017, https://lumen.cgsccarl.com/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1727448261?accountid=28992.

District conducted over 130 scale exercises between 2013 and 2014, to include East (Vostok)-2014, which centered on amphibious and anti-air operations on the Kurils.[114]

The military value Russia places on the Kurils is apparent. Further, this singular value supersedes all other considerations. While economic development and population growth has occurred over the past seventy-three years, it has been modest at best. The development projects proposed either by Russia or other Asia-Pacific countries either fails to occur or comes far short of their stated goals. Further, the Russian government continues to place little to no emphasis on drawing people to the islands, resulting in shifts from stagnation or decline in the total population as the harsh climate provide little incentive to stay. In diplomacy, Russia continues to stall on any plans to return the islands Japan calls the Northern Territories by offering token gestures of joint industry development projects. The only initiatives Russia continues to follow through on fall under military development, they include placement of naval stations, air defense capabilities and ground forces, and the conduct of joint exercises. These factors combined demonstrate the single value Russia places on the Kurils, that of projecting influence into the Pacific through its military capability.

[114] Ibid.

Chapter 5: Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam

While the Kurils and Primorskii Krai demonstrate Russia's military expansion to extend its defensive space, their actions in Cam Ranh Bay do not. Positioned along the coast of Vietnam, Cam Ranh Bay boasts of being the best deep-water port in Southeast Asia.[115] This port serves as a critical point for world's sea lines of communication, offering access to the Straits of Malacca, the South China and Java Sea, and the Pacific and Indian Ocean. In nautical miles, a flight from Cam Ranh Bay to the Straits of Malacca takes two hours.[116] Within the context of economic and military value, tenants of Cam Ranh Bay can exert extensive influence throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Unlike the previous examples, Russia never claimed Cam Ranh Bay as a colony or annexed territory, but rather a forward-deployed base created by treaty. Through this arrangement and continued interest, Russia sees Cam Ranh Bay as a component to their projection of influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

Cam Ranh Bay's strategic influence began in the late nineteenth century when France established a naval base to extend its influence into Indochina and Southeast Asia.[117] Russia saw the significance of this port came during the Russo-Japanese War as Admiral Zinovi Rozhdestvenski's Baltic Fleet stopped here for coaling and provisioning on its way support the Pacific Fleet.[118] During World War II, Japan seized control of this base from France and used it

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[115] "Dock and Cover; Vietnamese Naval Diplomacy," *The Economist*, Apr 22, 2017, accessed October 20, 2017, https://lumen.cgsccarl.com/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/docview/1906993320?accountid=28992.

[116] Sheldon W. Simon, "U.S. Security Interests in Southeast Asia," in *U.S. Foreign Policy and Asian-Pacific Security: A Transregional Approach*, eds. William T. Tow and William R. Feeney (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982), 121.

[117] Ian Storey and Carlyle A. Thayer, "Cam Ranh Bay: Past Imperfect, Future Conditional," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 23, no. 3 (December 2001): 453, accessed October 20, 2017, https://lumen.cgsccarl.com/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/docview/205234529?accountid=28992.

[118] Ibid.

to project power throughout Southeast Asia. Additionally, the United States used Cam Ranh Bay as a logistical hub and staging area from 1965 to 1971 during the Vietnam War. The Republic of Vietnam briefly controlled the port until its capture by North Vietnamese forces on April 3, 1975.[119]

Soviet and Vietnamese relations began in January 1950 and grew during the Vietnam War as the communist government in North Vietnam received military aid to combat US and South Vietnamese forces.[120] As the Vietnam War escalated between 1965 and 1975, the Soviet Union became Vietnam's largest military supplier. This aid ranged from advisors and technicians to surface to air missiles, aircraft, and artillery.[121] Additionally, the Soviet Union cancelled all of North Vietnam's outstanding debts in 1975 following its victory over the United States and the South Vietnamese government.[122]

The arrangement between the Soviet Union and Vietnam over the use of Cam Ranh Bay stemmed from a complex set of needs each party could provide the other. Though successful in expelling the United States and extending communism within its borders, Vietnam was a third world country with internal and external challenges that required outside support. Further, Vietnam wanted to act on its ambitions to invade Cambodia and become the dominant power in Indochina. Between the lack of resources to sustain its economy and China's mounting pressure to deny an invasion of Cambodia, Vietnam needed the Soviet Union for extensive economic and military aid and to deter threats from China.

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[119] Ibid.

[120] Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer, *Soviet Relations with India and Vietnam* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 67.

[121] Ibid., 116-177.

[122] Ibid., 60.

Cam Ranh Bay served a number of the Soviet Union's ambitions and challenges. Regarding China, relations fractured in 1960 and worsened in 1969 with clashes along their 4,650-mile border.[123] Amidst this conflict, China opened negotiations with Japan and the United States to seek rapprochement and deter Soviet aggression. With a military presence at Cam Ranh Bay, the Soviet Union could exert influence on China through a strategic encirclement. In countering the US presence in the Asia-Pacific region, Cam Ranh Bay served Soviet Union's "Blue Belt of Defense" strategy as a strategic base from which to expand its military capabilities and link itself to its allies.[124] Lastly, Cam Ranh Bay's proximity to the South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca gave the Soviet Union the ability to threaten the sea lines of communication between the Middle East and Northeast Asia, increasing their influence within the Asia-Pacific region. Under these complex sets of challenges and ambitions, the Soviet Union and Vietnam signed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in November 1978.[125]

Both Vietnam and the Soviet Union benefited from this agreement. Vietnam received $1.5 billion in economic aid as well as significant oil, food, and textile imports from the Soviet Union each year. They also enjoyed a migrant worker program that brought additional money from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe back to Vietnam. For military aid, Vietnam received $3.25 billion in training, equipment, and technical support from 1965 to 1974. This aid grew to $4.9 billion between 1980 and 1985.[126] Most importantly, Vietnam now had the backing of a

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[123] Richard H. Solomon and Masataka Kosaka, "Nuclear Dilemmas and Asian Security: Problems of Coalition Defense in the Nuclear Era," in *The Soviet Far East Military Buildup: Nuclear Dilemmas and Asian Security* eds. Richard H. Solomon and Masataka Kosaka (Dover: Auburn House Publishing, 1986), 5.

[124] Osamu Miyoshi, "Soviet Collective Security Pacts," in *Asia in Soviet Global Strategy*, eds. Ray S. Cline, James A. Miller, and Roger E. Kanet (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 28-29.

[125] Ian Storey and Carlyle A. Thayer, "Cam Ranh Bay: Past Imperfect, Future Conditional," 454.

[126] Charles E. Ziegler, "Russia and the Emerging Asian-Pacific Economic Order," in *Reshaping Regional Relations: Asia-Pacific and the Former Soviet Union*, eds. Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 89.

superpower as it occupied Cambodia in 1978 and supported a communist insurgency in Thailand.[127] This combined military and economic aid enabled Vietnam to continue this offensive campaign throughout Indochina until the Soviet decline in 1989. The Soviet Union received exclusive access to the Cam Ranh Bay and with it, the ability to extend its influence throughout the Asia-Pacific region. While the 1978 treaty did not explicitly mention Cam Ranh Bay, the Soviets received twenty-five-year access to this port through a secret bilateral protocol. Under this agreement, Soviets quickly set out to build up its capabilities, with the first Soviet flotilla arriving the same year.[128]

From 1970 to 1989, the Soviet Union dramatically improved its capabilities in Cam Ranh Bay. The Soviets increased the physical infrastructure with five additional piers, two dry docks, nuclear submarine shelters, storage facilities, barracks, power stations, and runways.[129] The Soviets also installed signals intelligence and electronic warfare facilities. For naval assets, a steady increase in the permanent basing of ships occurred from 1979 to 1983, with the initial count of five surface ships growing to over twenty-eight with submarines and support vessels.[130] These surface ships included guided-missile cruisers, frigates, and minesweepers.[131] In air capabilities, the Soviets stationed a squadron of their MiG-23 fighters, ten medium bombers with a range of 1,500 miles, as well as anti-submarine and reconnaissance aircraft.[132] Supporting this base was a compliment of Soviet military personnel that peaked at 5,000 at the height of the Cold

[127] Richard H. Solomon and Masataka Kosaka, "Nuclear Dilemmas and Asian Security: Problems of Coalition Defense in the Nuclear Era," 11.

[128] Ian Storey and Carlyle A. Thayer, "Cam Ranh Bay: Past Imperfect, Future Conditional," 455.

[129] Ibid.

[130] Carlyle A. Thayer, "Indochina, 1982-1985: Peace Yields to War," 208-209.

[131] Robert E. Harkavy, *Bases Abroad: The Global Foreign Military Presence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 53.

[132] Ian Storey and Carlyle A. Thayer, "Cam Ranh Bay: Past Imperfect, Future Conditional," 456.

War.[133] With global commitments of the Soviet Union throughout the 1970s and 1980s considered, Cam Ranh Bay was the largest base outside of the Warsaw Treaty Organization in Europe.[134]

The Soviet Union used this extraordinary military power at Cam Ranh Bay in a number of ways. Intelligence and reconnaissance assets tracked all ships moving through the South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca as well as US Navy forces in the Philippines. As a waypoint for the Pacific Fleet, Cam Ranh Bay supported naval operations extending into the Indian Ocean. The Soviet Union also conducted numerous exercises in the South China Sea from Cam Ranh Bay throughout the 1970s and 80s. One of the more complex exercises the Soviet Union conducted was in April 1984 which involved a naval task group of eight ships with an aircraft carrier conducting an amphibious landing along the coast of Vietnam.[135] Despite this presence and activity in the Asia-Pacific region, the Soviet Union never disrupted commercial traffic, but their posture demonstrated they could. While costly, this projection of military power ensured Soviet influence in the Asia-Pacific region through the 1990s.

The beginning of the Soviet Union's decline in Cam Ranh Bay began following the ascension of Mikhail Gorbachev to General Secretary in March 1985.[136] In the face of an economic crisis in the 1970s, efforts to reduce the costs, but maintain its influence in the Asia-Pacific region began with the normalizing of relations with China and the United States. Rapprochement with China required the Soviet Union to concede on the following items obstacles: 1) withdrawing its forces from the disputed border and Mongolia, 2) withdrawing from

[133] Ibid.

[134] Robert E. Harkavy, *Bases Abroad: The Global Foreign Military Presence*, 52.

[135] John T. Berbrich, "Growth of Soviet Military Power in Asia," in *Asia in Soviet Global Strategy*, eds. Ray S. Cline, James A. Miller, and Roger E. Kanet (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 43.

[136] John Miller, *Mikhail Gorbachev and the End of Soviet Power* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 40.

Afghanistan, and 3) removing their support from Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia and operations in Thailand.[137] Gorbachev executed all of these. Gorbachev was less successful with the United States when he proposed a mutual de-escalation by reducing their military footprint in Cam Ranh Bay to a logistical support center in exchange for the United States to follow suit with Subic Bay in the Philippines.[138] While the United States declined the offer, arguing their position at Subic Bay supported missions beyond deterrence, this did not stop the Soviets from making dramatic cuts to Cam Ranh Bay.

In 1989, the Soviets withdrew their fighter and bomber squadrons. By the end of 1991, all capital warships returned to Vladivostok, leaving three submarines, reconnaissance aircraft, and 500 personnel in Cam Ranh Bay. Formal military cooperation with the Soviet Union and Vietnam ended in May 1992.[139] Despite a few hundred naval technicians, Soviet presence declined into insignificance. As the Soviet Union transitioned to the Russian Federation, attempts to prolong the lease over Cam Ranh Bay at a better price ensued from the mid-1990s into the early twenty-first century without success. In May 2002, Russia signed an agreement to return control of Cam Ranh Bay to Vietnam.[140]

In the wake of this power vacuum left by Russia's military decline and US focus in the Middle East, China no longer felt restrained in pursuing regional hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region. Fearing this growing assertiveness, particularly in the South China Sea, Vietnam loosened

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[137] Yao Wenbin, "Soviet Military Deployments in the Asia-Pacific region: Implications for China's Security," in *The Soviet Far East Military Buildup: Nuclear Dilemmas and Asian Security* eds. Richard H. Solomon and Masataka Kosaka (Dover: Auburn House Publishing, 1986), 103.

[138] Carlyle A. Thayer, "Indochina, 1982-1985: Peace Yields to War," in *Reshaping Regional Relations: Asia-Pacific and the Former Soviet Union*, eds. Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 207.

[139] Ibid.

[140] "Russia closes Vietnam Naval Base," *BBC News*, May 2, 2002, accessed October 20, 2017, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1964253.stm.

its 2001 declaration denying the use of Cam Ranh Bay to foreign powers for military purposes.[141] Vietnam also courted Russia and the United States in 2010, establishing a continued presence at Cam Ranh Bay to check Chinese expansion.[142] Russia and Vietnam also entered into a strategic partnership in 2001 which elevated to a comprehensive strategic partnership in July 2012.[143] Since those agreements, Russia's presence continues to grow with increased military traffic. This included overflight and airbase rights to Russian military aircraft and assured access to Cam Ranh Bay for Russia's Pacific Fleet.[144]

Beyond the increase in presence in Cam Ranh Bay, Russia remains the principal supplier of military equipment to Vietnam.[145] In March 2013, Vietnam secured a comprehensive arms deal with Russia that included six Kilo-class submarines, twenty-four Su-30 aircraft, two stealth frigates, as well as air defense missiles, and helicopters.[146] Included in this equipment sale, Russia agreed to provide technical assistance and military advisors.[147] Russia also provided funding and technical assistance in upgrading the facilities in Cam Ranh Bay to include its submarine training center.[148] This support enabled Vietnam to field coastal artillery equipment in

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[141] Ian Storey and Carlyle A. Thayer, "Cam Ranh Bay: Past Imperfect, Future Conditional," 452.

[142] Ibid.

[143] Nikolas Gvosdev and Christopher Marsh, *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors* 149.

[144] Rakesh Krishnan Simha, "Power Play: Russia searches for bases in the Pacific," *Russia Beyond*, February 27, 2017, accessed October 20, 2017, https://www.rbth.com/blogs/continental_drift/2017/02/27/power-play-russia-searches-for-bases-in-the-pacific_710046.

[145] *The Military Balance*, (2017): 268.

[146] Greg Torode Chief, "Russia Gets Comfy in Cold War Port Moscow Military Chief Proves '5-Star' General - that's the Quality of the 'Resort' for His Troops He Secured Near Vietnam's Strategic Cam Ranh Bay," *South China Morning Post*, Mar 10, 2013. 11, accessed October 20, 2017, https://lumen.cgsccarl.com/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1315420534?accountid=28992.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid.

2017.[149] This strengthening of relations between Russia and Vietnam and the dramatic increase of Russian naval and air force capabilities continues despite opposition from the United States.[150]

Russia's recent activities in Cam Ranh Bay stem from a historical interest in maintaining influence in the Asia-Pacific region. The Soviet Union and Vietnam found in each other the means to address their ambitions and challenges in the 1970s. By offering Cam Ranh Bay to the Soviets, Vietnam could secure itself and pursue its regional ambitions undeterred by China as well as address its internal challenges. While expensive, the Soviet Union possessed a critical piece of real estate with which to assert its influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Though the means to prolong this influence evaporated with the Soviet Union's collapse, their interests did not. The Russian Federation's view of Cam Ranh Bay aligns with that of its Soviet predecessors, that of an ideal forward deployed base from which to project military power. With Vietnam again threatened by China's actions in the South China Sea, Russia has leveraged its historical friendship and existing trade relationship to once again project military power from Cam Ranh Bay.

[149] *The Military Balance* (2017), 268.

[150] "Washington's Cam Ranh Demands 'Ridiculous' - Russian Senator," *Interfax: Russia & CIS General Newswire*, Mar 13, 2015, accessed October 20, 2017, https://lumen.cgsccarl.com/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1663307217?accountid=28992.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Whether for the czarist, Soviet, or current form of government, Russia's military has served as the principal mechanism to exert influence in the Asia-Pacific region. The broader purpose of this arrangement is the protection of Russia's geopolitical identity as a world power. Russia's military activities in Primorskii Krai, the Kuril Islands, and Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, are key components to Russia's image as a world power in the Pacific. Primorskii Krai holds the few warm water ports available to Russia at Vladivostok and Nakhodka Bay. While several Far Eastern districts border the coastline, only Primorskii Krai gives Russia year-round access to the Seas of Japan and Okhotsk. Stepping out further, the Kuril Islands provide Russia uninterrupted access to the Pacific Ocean. Lastly, Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam was the Soviet Union's largest base outside the Warsaw Pact countries and a symbol of its power both in the Asia-Pacific region and the world. Since the early twentieth century, with the exception of Cam Ranh Bay, the placement of military forces in these areas demonstrates the high value each hold to Russia in their influence of the Asia-Pacific region.

By seeing the buildup of forces as the only way to ensure influence, Russia's status during the twentieth century became inextricably tied to its military victories and defeats. Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War resulted in a dramatic decline in influence as Japan largely destroyed Imperial Russia's military forces in the Pacific and subsequently gained control of Port Arthur and southern Sakhalin Island. Russia would only begin to regain its influence through their victory at Khalkin-Gol in 1939 and later in Manchuria and the Kurils in 1945. Following World War II, the Soviet Union maintained a sizable force on the Kuril Islands and in the Primorskii Krai region. These forces continued to grow as tensions grew likewise with the United States, Japan, and China. The Soviet Union maintained this buildup of military power as it extended itself to Cam Ranh Bay in the 1970s, challenging Chinese and US influence in Southeast Asia.

The Soviet Union achieved historic levels of influence in the Asia-Pacific region between 1975 and 1986 when its military presence was at its greatest extent. While Soviet military expenditures continued to rise until 1988, their decline in influence began as Gorbachev sought rapprochement with the United States and China to reduce the economic strain caused by the military. Despite moderate diplomatic successes, the Soviet Union collapsed and left little influence for Russia in the Asia-Pacific region as their military presence declined through the close of the twentieth century.

Unable to match Soviet-level expenditures, Russia has taken incremental steps to reform and modernize its military to restore its former influence. These steps include the buildup of forces across its operational strategic commands, frequent readiness drills, and combined exercises with other countries throughout the Asia-Pacific region. These actions help Russia in the following ways: 1) improve the quality of its force by testing new systems, tactics, and formations, 2) provide a source of pride for Russia on the domestic front, and 3) directly and indirectly increase its influence as other countries observe Russia's improved capabilities.

While the Russian Federation's military is a shadow of its Soviet predecessor, their reforms seek to build a force capable of restoring its former influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Predicated on an idealized image of the Soviet Union as a world power narrated by Putin and his support base, these initiatives allow him to retain power by challenging the United States and China. Creating this narrative allows Russia to continue building its military power without domestic challenge so long as it demonstrates modest gains in influence without any loss to its existing territory. Further, Chinese and US challenges to Russian initiatives, with the exception of armed conflict, will only reinforce Russian resolve to return to a position of greater influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

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