PACIFIC FLEET

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The Pacific Fleet is headquartered in Vladivostok, capital of the Maritime (Primorskiy) Territory. Not surprisingly, given Russia's status as a Pacific nation with vital interests in the Asia-Pacific region, the Pacific Fleet is one of Russia's most powerful naval forces. The city of Vladivostok, established in 1860, currently occupies most of Muraviov-Amursky Peninsula, named after the Governor General of Eastern Russia in the mid-nineteenth century. Two bays, Amursky and Ussuriisky, wrap the peninsula, mirroring with their names two great rivers of the Russian Far East, the Amur, and the Ussury, its tributary.

Beginning in the 1600s, Russian explorers first reached Siberia's eastern coastline and founded the city of Okhotsk (1647). Until the mid-1800s, however, China's dominance of the southern regions of eastern Siberia restricted Russian naval activities. The construction of the port city of Vladivostok intensified Russia's need for adequate transportation links. Tsar Alexander III drew up plans for the Trans-Siberian Railway and began building it in 1891. Despite the enormity of the project, a continuous route was completed in 1905, stimulated by the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War a year earlier. Vladivostok became Russia's main naval base in the East after Port Arthur (located in Chinese territory and ceded to Russia in 1898) fell in January 1905 during the war. After World War I, Japan seized

Vladivostok and held the key port for four years, initially as a member of the Allied interventionist forces that occupied parts of Russia after the new Bolshevik government proclaimed neutrality and withdrew from the war. At the end of World War II, Stalin broke the neutrality pact that had existed throughout the war in order to occupy vast areas of East Asia formerly held by Japan. It was through Vladivostok, moreover, that some of the Lend-Lease aid, the most visible sign of U.S.-Soviet cooperation during World War II, passed on its way to Murmansk.

The Pacific Fleet includes eighteen nuclear submarines that are operationally subordinate to the Ministry of Defense and based at Pavlovsk and Rybachiy. The blue-water striking power of the Pacific Fleet lies in thirty-four nonnuclear submarines and forty-nine principal surface combatants. The Zvezda Far Eastern Shipyard in Bolshoi Kamen, a couple of hours north of Vladivostok, serves as the chief recycling facility for the Fleet, although it is currently in disrepair. The Pacific Fleet's additional home ports include Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, Magadan, and Sovetskaya Gavan'. As far as air power is concerned, the Pacific Fleet consisted in the mid-1990s of 250 land-based combat aircraft and helicopters. Two bomber regiments stationed at Alekseyevka constituted its most powerful strike force. Each regiment consisted of thirty supersonic Tu-22M Backfire aircraft. The land power of the Pacific Fleet consisted of one naval infantry division and a coastal defense division. The naval infantry division included more than half of the total manpower in the Russian naval infantry. In the mid-1990s, the Pacific Fleet infantry was reorganized into brigades.

In the late 1990s, a joint headquarters was established commanding the land, naval, and air units stationed on the Kamchatka Peninsula. Despite funding shortfalls in the twenty-first century, the Russian Pacific Fleet continues to demonstrate its resolve to increase combat readiness. Russian Pacific Fleet submarines carry out missions of regional security, strategic deterrence, protection of strategic assets, and training for anti-surface warfare.

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