
Defense Report

AUSA



Soviet Expansion In The Pacific — Can We Meet The Challenge?

With most of the world's attention directed toward the Persian Gulf, the Middle East or Central America, the breadth and scope of the Soviet Union's military and diplomatic initiatives in the whole Pacific region have received scant acknowledgement. Few Western strategists seem to have listened when General Secretary Gorbachev outlined the Soviet Union's campaign for increasing its influence throughout Asia and the Pacific, but it is becoming increasingly evident that the Russians are proceeding apace to make the Pacific the next Soviet lake.

Evidence abounds of the changing military balance in the Pacific. In the last 20 years, the Soviets have doubled their surface navy and air fleets there. During the same period, Soviet ground forces in East Asia doubled to nearly half a million men in some 53 divisions. They have developed the Vietnamese port of Cam Ranh Bay into the site of the largest concentration of Soviet aircraft and naval units deployed outside the Warsaw Pact. In the last 18 months, the Soviet Pacific fleet has been bolstered by the addition of three new surface combatants — a nuclear-powered guided-missile cruiser and two guided-missile destroyers. These forces are backed by at least 1,700 tactical aircraft and about 40 modern Backfire extended-range bombers.

In the past, American policy makers appeared to view the Soviet presence in Asia mainly as a military threat. Today, however, the threat is just as much economic and diplomatic. Each time the United States has stumbled in its relations with nations along the Pacific rim, the Soviets have been quick to take up the slack.

New Zealand's withdrawal from the ANZUS Pact, the crisis in South Korea and the communist insurgency in the Philippines are stark reminders that the United States can no longer take our Pacific alliances for granted.

The growing threat of Soviet destabilization in the vulnerable states of the Pacific rim demands that the United States Government face up to the economic, diplomatic and military threats to the nations of that region. These are challenges we dare not ignore.