

- controlling key straits in the region;
- attacking allied sea lines of communication (SLOCS).

These missions highlight the strategic importance of the Northern Territories and the Kuriles, control of which would have facilitated the movement of naval forces between the Sea of Okhotsk and the Sea of Japan, including the resupply of Petropavlovsk.

In the event of hostilities, control of the straits adjacent to Japan would have been seriously contested. Soviet planners realized that American and Japanese naval units would have been capable of causing substantive damage to Soviet vessels in confined waters, and Soviet attack submarines and strike bombers would have attacked allied naval and air forces, specifically U.S. carrier battle groups, before they could reach within striking range of the USSR or contribute to the air battle over the Northern Territories, the Kuriles, and Hokkaido.

To penetrate U.S. fleet air defenses, and to neutralize Japanese forces, the Soviets would have had to conduct mass coordinated attacks with long-range, land-based, air-to-surface missile (ASM)-capable bombers and with sea launched cruise missiles (SLCMs). Long-range land-based interceptor aircraft would have been deployed to protect Soviet bases from attack. In response, American and Japanese forces would have had to gain air superiority over the Northern Territories, the Kuriles, the eastern Sea of Japan, and the southern Sea of Okhotsk, and to destroy Soviet bombers before they reached their cruise missile launch points (approximately 320 km from target).

It is hardly surprising that the Japanese had been unable to enter into serious negotiations on reversion with the Soviets; the question could not be addressed successfully without the agreement and active participation of the United States.

To these strategic and military realities must be added the burden of history and the past litany of Soviet sabre rattling tactics whose objective was to intimidate the Japanese, to the point where they would question the value of maintaining a security relationship with the United States, but whose real effect was to provide a convincing argument for increased Japanese defence spending and to keep the Soviet Union in top ranking of those countries most mistrusted by the Japanese public.²⁰

From the Soviet perspective, the Japanese security posture of the late 1980s was cause for concern, including a series of increases in Japanese defence spending, American naval and air bases in Japan and the suspected presence of nuclear weapons at these facilities; the growing Japanese focus on the capabilities of the "offensive" Air (ASDF) and Maritime (MSDF) Self Defence Forces rather than the "defensive" Ground (GSDF) Self Defence Force; and the extension of zones patrolled by the ASDF and MSDF to 1,000 nautical miles offshore in cooperation with American forces.²¹