Security Review

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Russian Military Transformation Tracker: Issue 1,

August 2018-July 2019

2019
Russia has been actively strengthening its armed forces during the last few years. Rearmament, modernization and battle readiness improvement programs run in parallel with structural changes. Some of these changes have a pointed geostrategic significance.

Russia’s earlier transfer to a brigade-based system has been reversed with a return to divisions that are believed in Russia to be better suited for large-scale frontal warfare. A network of military bases is being established in the Arctic. Most ominously, since 2015, Russia’s regions bordering Ukraine, which previously had contained no permanent land maneuver units, have been filled with them. These areas now have two new Russian armies that include three new mechanized divisions among other forces.

Given the kind of foreign policy that is exercised by Moscow, including its habit of invading neighbors, the Russian military clearly deserves some keen attention.

On 7 August 2018 – the tenth anniversary of the Russian military invasion of Georgia – the Rondeli Foundation published an interactive map of the Russian armed forces compiled by the author of this review. The map shows the location of the Russian land maneuver and artillery units, air bases, naval bases and major anti-aircraft units as well as all types of Russian military facilities that are located abroad. Since then, I have been updating the interactive map according to the changes in the Russian military structure that have been taking place after the map’s publication.

The data monitoring over the last year that was necessary to keep updating the map uncovered an impressive ongoing transformation in the Russian military. The interactive map and the present review do not touch upon matters such as Russian land forces’ reararmament or military exercises. There is a great deal of information about these issues but the interactive map and its updating process deal only with the fundamental structure of the Russian military and with the changes that are happening in this basic structure. **In many cases this means the establishment of new fighting units.**

Despite such narrow research interest, the data has been plentiful. **In the year that has passed since the publication of the map on 7 August 2018, the Russian military has undergone a serious number of structural changes.** The continuous shooting war in the Donbass region of Ukraine, growing tensions between Russia and NATO and, most of all, the Kremlin’s imperial ambitions in its neighborhood that so far remain unfulfilled provide a disturbing context for the updates concerning the ongoing transformation of the Russian military.

This review presents the results of the monitoring of the Russian armed forces’ structural changes for the period between August 2018 and July 2019. The interactive map and its search function will help readers navigate the names and locations of the Russian units mentioned below.

The Rondeli Foundation will continue to monitor developments within the Russian armed forces in the future.

**The Ukrainian Frontier**
Newly-created Russian divisions near the border with Ukraine have kept growing over the last year. This process is still not over and continues during 2019. Meanwhile, occupied Crimea has been strengthened with additional anti-access/area denial capabilities while the Black Sea Fleet (based both in Sevastopol, Crimea and nearby in Novorossiysk) has received several new ships.

The 254th Mechanized Regiment was established in Klintsy, Bryansk Oblast, as a part of the new 144th Mechanized Division (HQ in Yelnya, Smolensk Oblast) of the 20th Army (HQ in Voronezh). Among other sources, the existence of the regiment was mentioned** in a news item published by a local newspaper on 29 October 2018.

A tank regiment (almost certainly the 228th Tank Regiment) is being established in Yelnya, Smolensk Oblast during 2019. It also belongs to the 144th Mechanized Division of the 20th Army.

On 1 December 2018, a new mechanized regiment was established within the 150th Mechanized Division (HQ in Kadamovskiy, Rostov Oblast) of the 8th Army (HQ in Novocherkassk, Rostov Oblast). Like the 20th Army and its 144th Division, the 8th Army and its 150th Division are among the units that have been created near Ukraine’s border since 2015 and still keep growing. The new regiment is based in Rostov Oblast like the rest of the 150th Division’s units but its exact location and name/number are not known at the time of writing.

A new missile brigade armed with Iskander-M short-range ballistic missile systems was established in early 2019, probably under the name of the 464th Missile Brigade. It is based in the northern Astrakhan Oblast and belongs to the 8th Army.

Russia’s future plans include adding artillery and recon brigades to the 8th Army.

On 27 February 2019, the Russian Ministry of Defense announced its plan to establish two more regiments within the 20th Army in 2019. It is unclear at the time of writing whether this statement concerns the continued formation of the 254th Mechanized Regiment and/or the 228th Tank Regiment that are mentioned above or relates to other additional new regiments.

In the occupied Crimea, Russia has established two air defense battalions armed with S-400 surface-to-air missile systems since August 2018. The total number of S-400 battalions in Crimea has now reached four, based in four different spots of the Crimean Peninsula. The S-400 forces in Crimea belong to the 31st Air Defense Division (HQ in Sevastopol) of the 4th Air and Air Defense Forces Army (HQ in Rostov-on-Don). The 31st Division includes two anti-aircraft missile regiments – the 12th and the 18th. The 12th Regiment has headquarters in Sevastopol which also hosts the first of its S-400 battalions since January 2018. The regiment received its second battalion, based in Yevpatoriya, in September 2018. The 18th Regiment has its headquarters and the first of its S-400 battalions (since January 2017) in Feodosia. It received the second S-400 battalion, based in Dzhankoi, in November 2018.

Russian air defense forces in Crimea now also include four battalions of Pantsir-S1 medium-range surface-to-air missile systems. Two of these battalions had been based on the peninsula prior to August 2018. The

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* The official Russian term for its mechanized units is motostrelkovy which literally means “motor rifle.” In order to avoid confusion with motorized units and to employ clear terms, in this review I call the units what they actually are - mechanized.
** Most of the sources in this review are Russian-language.
other two Pantsir-S1 battalions were added later in 2018. The first one was established in Crimea in October 2018. The second one – in December 2018.

Russia also continues to bolster its already serious anti-ship missile forces on the Black Sea, restoring the Utyos coastal defense missile system in Crimea with possible plans to rearm it with new missiles. Presently, Russian coastal defense units on the Black Sea include: the 15th Coastal Missile Artillery Brigade (Sevastopol), 11th Coastal Missile Artillery Brigade (Utash, Krasnodar Krai) and the 854th Separate Coastal Missile Regiment (Sevastopol).

The Russian Black Sea Fleet received its third Admiral Grigorovich / Project 11356P/M class missile frigate, Admiral Makarov, in early October 2018 when the ship arrived at its permanent base in Sevastopol. Other new additions to the fleet include: Buyan-M / Project 21631 class missile corvette Orekhovo-Zuyevo, arriving in Sevastopol in December 2018; two Project 22160 class large patrol ships – Vasily Bykov and Dmitriy Rogachev – that joined the Fleet at its Novorossiysk base on 20 December 2018 and 11 June 2019, respectively; Yuriy Ivanov / Project 18289 class intelligence collection ship Ivan Khurs that arrived at the Sevastopol base in late December 2018. The Alexandrit / Project 12700 class minesweeper Ivan Antonov was commissioned in the Baltic Sea on 26 January 2019 but was later going to join the Black Sea Fleet.

The Caucasus

A moderate increase in Russian forces has taken place since August 2018 in both the eastern and western parts of the North Caucasus region. Much more ambitious plans in terms of the growth and the consolidation of the Russian ground forces in the region have been announced for the near future.

During the winter of 2018-2019, Russians added an air mobile battalion to their 34th Mechanized Brigade (Mountain) based in Storozhevaya, Karachay-Cherkess Republic – in the western part of the North Caucasus. The brigade had already included two mechanized mountain battalions and a recon battalion along with a self-propelled howitzer and air defense battalions.

The 177th Naval Infantry Regiment was established in Kaspis, Republic of Dagestan, on 1 December 2018. The regiment belongs to the land forces of the Russian navy’s Caspian Flotilla and was formed on the basis of the flotilla’s 414th and 727th Separate Naval Infantry Battalions.

In late 2018 or early 2019, the Caspian Flotilla also got a new air defense battalion, armed with Buk-M3 medium-range surface-to-air missile systems.

In December 2018, the Russian Ministry of Defense reported the establishment of a unit of Su-30SM fighter jets “at one of the airdromes in Dagestan.” Since the Russian air force had not operated a fixed-wing military airplane base on the territory of Dagestan as of earlier 2018, this amounted to the establishment of a new functional air base for fixed-wing aircraft. The Russian Ministry of Defense did not specify its exact location.

The naval component of the Caspian Flotilla used to be divided between the naval bases in Astrakhan and Kaspis, Dagestan. As of the winter 2018-2019, it was in the process of fully transferring to Kaspis. As a part of this process, Buyan / Project 21630 class corvettes Volgodonsk and Makhachkala had moved to Kaspis by December 2018.
Regarding the future, official Russian sources tell Russian media about plans to expand the 19th Mechanized Brigade (located in the eastern outskirts of Vladikavkaz, Republic of North Ossetia-Alania) and the 136th Mechanized Brigade (Buynaksk, Republic of Dagestan) into mechanized divisions. Such a transformation would mean the further growth of the Russian military might in the Caucasus.

**The Baltic Region**

In the Russian-controlled parts of the Baltic region, particularly in the exclave outpost of Kaliningrad Oblast, Moscow has been strengthening its land forces and increasing the anti-access/area denial capabilities with plans to continue doing so in the near future. Other changes included the structural transformation of the Baltic Fleet’s aviation and the addition of a new corvette to its naval component.

**The 11th Tank Regiment** was established in Gusev, Kaliningrad Oblast, by January 2019. The new regiment belongs to the 11th Army Corps (HQ in Kaliningrad) of the Baltic Fleet’s land forces. Prior to the tank regiment’s formation, the 11th Army Corps had already included: the 79th Mechanized Brigade (Gusev), the 7th Mechanized Regiment (Kaliningrad), the 244th Artillery Brigade (Kaliningrad), the 152nd Missile Brigade (Chernyakhovsk) armed with Iskander-M short-range ballistic missile systems and the 22nd Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment (Kaliningrad). The Baltic Fleet’s other land forces include the 336th Naval Infantry Brigade (Baltiysk), a naval Special Forces battalion under the official name of the “561st Maritime Recon Point” (Parusnoye) and the 25th Coastal Missile Regiment (Donskoye).

In January 2019, Russian media reported that the aforementioned 244th Artillery Brigade had received Khrizantema-S anti-tank missile systems. It also reported that artillery brigades in the land forces of the Russian navy’s other Fleets would also get these systems during 2019. In February 2019, the 244th Artillery Brigade received over ten Msta-S self-propelled howitzers.

The 1545th Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment (Kruglovo, Kaliningrad Oblast) of the Baltic Fleet’s 44th Air Defense Division (HQ in Kaliningrad) was re-armed with S-400 surface-to-air missile systems in early March 2019. The regiment had been previously armed with S-300V4 systems. Besides the 1545th, Kaliningrad Oblast also contains the 183rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment (in Gvardeysk, also under the 44th Air Defense Division) which has an even greater number of the S-400 systems, along with the S-300PS systems.

In December 2018, the 1489th Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment (Vaganovo, Leningrad Oblast) of 2nd Air Defense Division (HQ in St Petersbourg) of the 6th Air and Air Defense Forces Army (HQ in Saint Petersburg) was also re-armed, receiving S-400 systems.

The Russian military also restructured its aviation in the Kaliningrad exclave. During the winter of 2018-2019, Russians re-arranged the aircraft they have in Kaliningrad Oblast, re-establishing the 689th Fighter Regiment and the 4th Maritime Attack Aviation Regiment at the Chkalovsk air base. By May 2019, Russians established the 132nd Mixed Aviation Division in Kaliningrad Oblast to command the aviation component of the Baltic Fleet. Reported future plans include the addition of other air units to the 132nd Division.

In July 2019, Russian media reported the establishment of a new helicopter regiment equipped with Ka-27, Mi-8 and Mi-24 helicopters. The new regiment’s location is probably the Donskoye air base in Kaliningrad Oblast.
A new missile corvette *Mytishchi* (*Project 22800 Karakurt* class) joined the Baltic Fleet at its Baltiysk naval base on 17 December 2018.

In February 2019, the Russian Ministry of Defense revealed its plans to add a “mobile reserve anti-aircraft missile regiment” and an anti-ship missile battalion to the Baltic Fleet forces during 2019. Other future plans include the projected transfer of the Black Sea Fleet’s *Alrosa* submarine (*Kilo / Project 877V* class) to the Baltic Fleet’s Kronstadt base.

**The Arctic**

Russian armed forces have continued to strengthen their position in the Arctic region during the year since August 2018.

In early 2019, Russians established the 3rd *Air Defense Division* within the 45th *Air and Air Defense Forces Army* (HQ in Safonovo, Murmansk Oblast) that is under the Northern Fleet’s command. The location of the new division’s headquarters is not clear at the time of writing.

In August 2018, Russians launched the construction of a new base for the 3rd *Division’s air defense unit* in Tiksi, Sakha Republic, on the shore of the Laptev Sea. The unit’s formation is planned to be completed in 2019 and it is going to be armed with S-300V4 surface-to-air missile systems.

Besides the future unit in Tiksi, the 3rd Air Defense Division also received under its command 33rd *Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment* (Rogachevo, Novaya Zemlya, Arkhangelsk Oblast) that had belonged to the 1st Air Defense Division (HQ in Severomorsk, Murmansk Oblast) of the 45th Army until its transfer to the newly created 3rd Division.

By September 2018, at least two *Bastion-P mobile coastal defense missile systems* were delivered to the coastal missile battery based on Kotelnny Island, north-east of Tiksi. The Bastions replaced Rubezh systems that had been previously based on Kotelnyn.

More broadly, the Russian military continues the process of the construction and upgrade of its military bases network in the Arctic region.

The strengthening of the Northern Fleet included *Ivan Gren / Project 11711* class landing ship *Ivan Gren* joining on 22 October 2018 and a new *special purpose detachment* (Special Forces unit) being established at the fleet’s Severomorsk base in early 2019.

Along with the further development of the Arctic bases network, Russian future plans in the region include the establishment of a new (probably 174th) separate fighter regiment on the basis of the MiG-31BM interceptors that presently belong to the 98th Separate Mixed Aviation Regiment (Monchegorsk air base, Murmansk Oblast).

**Asian Regions: Ural, Siberia, Central Asia and the Far East**
Certain changes in the Russian military structure have taken place during the year since August 2018 in the regions east of the Ural Mountains, although much fewer than the changes in the European Russia.

In Primorsky Krai, Russians decided to alter the structure of their local ground forces, although so far there is no sign of an increase in their strength. Until 2018, the maneuver forces of the 5th Army (HQ in Ussuriysk, Primorsky Krai) consisted of four mechanized brigades. The army also has artillery and Iskander-M missile brigades. On 1 December 2018, Russians established the 127th Mechanized Division (HQ in Sergeyevka, Primorsky Krai). According to the information available at the time of writing, the newly formed division has two mechanized regiments. The basis of the two regiments, as well as of the 127th Division’s headquarters, are two former brigades of the 5th Army – 59th (Sergeyevka) and 60th (Kamen-Rybolov and Monastyrishche, Primorsky Krai). It is possible that in the future some of the 5th Army’s other units also will be included in the 127th Division.

The 520th Coastal Missile Artillery Brigade in Kamchatka Krai received one battalion each of the Bastion-P and Bal mobile coastal defense missile systems in the first half of 2019.

In November 2018, the 1530th Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment (Bolshaya Kartel, Khabarovsk Krai) that belongs to the 25th Air Defense Division (HQ in Komsomolsk, Khabarovsk Krai) of the 11th Air and Air Defense Forces Army (HQ in Khabarovsk) transferred to S-400 surface-to-air missile systems from the S-300PM systems it had been armed with previously.

A major change took place in the air force structure with the new 21st Mixed Aviation Division (HQ in Chelyabinsk), established in the fall of 2018 to command the air units based in the Ural region as well as some based in Siberia. The 21st Division belongs to the 14th Air and Air Defense Forces Army (HQ in Yekaterinburg).

On 1 March 2019, Russians created a new mixed aviation squadron at the Kyzyl air base (Tyva Republic). This air base had not hosted permanent air units prior to that. The squadron belongs to the 32nd Separate Transport Mixed Aviation Regiment of the 21st Mixed Aviation Division.

Another Russian air base that has received a permanently stationed unit is in the disputed Kuril Islands. In early August 2018, a flight of Su-35S fighters from the 303rd Mixed Aviation Division (HQ in Khurba, Khabarovsk Krai) of the 11th Air and Air Defense Forces Army (HQ in Khabarovsk) began its service at the Yasny air base on Iturup (Japanese: Etorofu) Island.

In January 2019, the press service of the Russian Central Military District announced the formation of an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) battalion at the Russian 201st Military Base in Tajikistan. The battalion was set to be established in the middle of 2019.

The Russian Pacific Fleet received a new ship – corvette Gromkiy of the new Steregushchiy / Project 20381 class on 25 December 2018.

Plans for the near future in the Far East include the formation of a new anti-aircraft missile brigade and a Bastion-P coastal missile battalion as well as the establishment of a new 865th Fighter Regiment, armed with MiG-31BM interceptors, at the Yelizovo air base in Kamchatka Krai. Presently, the interceptors in question belong to the 317th Mixed Aviation Regiment, in Yelizovo.
Airborne Troops

The Russian Airborne Troops (VDV) is a separate branch in the Russian military. The VDV has elite status and was used in the vanguard role during the Russian invasions of Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. While the VDV units are located in various regions of Russia, they are highly mobile and are expected to be used in any major military conflict irrespective of its location. During the last year, they have followed the trend of transformation and strengthening that is evident across the Russian armed forces.

The 76th Air Assault Division (HQ and units in Pskov) received its new 237th Air Assault Regiment on 1 December 2018. The new regiment was added to the 76th Division’s two existing air assault regiments.

Russians are also making their VDV forces heavier. In early 2019, they added three tank battalions to their airborne troops – one each in the 76th Air Assault Division, 7th Air Assault Division (HQ in Novorossiysk, Krasnodar Krai) and the 56th Air Assault Brigade (Kamyshin, Volgograd Oblast). The VDV had possessed no tank units prior to that.

The expansion of the VDV forces is set to continue. The 7th Air Assault Division will follow the path of the 76th. In 2017, the 171st Separate Air Assault Battalion was formed in addition to its two existing maneuver regiments. Unlike them, the 171st Battalion is based in the occupied Crimea. Now there are plans to expand the battalion into a new 97th Air Assault Regiment by the end of 2019.

A separate artillery brigade is also set to be formed within the VDV in the near future.

In the more long-term perspective, the 31st Air Assault Brigade (Ulyanovsk, Ulyanovsk Oblast) is planned to be expanded into a new 104th Air Assault Division by 2023. The future division’s units are going to be based in Ulyanovsk, Penza and Orenburg.