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The Red Army Rises – the Impact of Threat Assessment on Defence System and Military Thinking in Finland in the 1920s

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This article examines how the threat of the Red Army was perceived in Finland during the 1920s and 1930s, and how this threat assessment influenced the development of Finland's defence system. The main focus of the article is on the developments of the 1920s and the solutions that were reached during that time. It primarily addresses the development of the defence system, but also considers the evolution of Finnish military thinking in its early stages. The research question of the article is: "How did the threat assessment affect the development of Finnish defence and military thinking during the 1920s and 30s?" The article is mostly based on the author's dissertation project that examines the development of the Finnish covering troop concept from 1918 to 1942.

The War of Independence of Finland in 1918 led to the establishment of the defence forces of independent Finland. The development of the Finnish Defence Forces and the entire defence system began after the war and was later tested during the Winter War and Continuation War in 1939–44. A significant factor in the development of Finnish defence and its phases, as is always the case with armed forces, was threat assessment – particularly of the threat from the Red Army.

One of the key turning points in the development of the defence forces and the general situation was the Treaty of Tartu (Estonia), signed on 14 October 1920, with which Finland made peace with Soviet Russia. The Finnish Defence Forces took a peacetime stance, and the work of developing the country's defence could begin. However, Finland continued to closely monitor the situation beyond the

eastern border. Despite the peace declaration, Soviet Russia continued to be seen as a threat.

The situation in Soviet Russia also began to calm down. The Russian Civil War started to turn in favour of the Red side, and the situation stabilised. The war concluded in 1920, but military action continued until 1922, in the form of border wars aimed at suppressing independence movements in the border areas of Soviet Russia, which believed separatism was fomented by foreign forces. The border wars were also an attempt by the Soviet state to regain areas that had already seceded.[1] With the arrival of peace, the Soviet Union was established in 1922. At the same time, the process of transitioning the Red Army to a peacetime stance and developing it began.

The development of Soviet armed forces begins

During the War of Independence, the headquarters and the post-war General Staff of the Finnish Defence Forces closely monitored the situation beyond the border. The intelligence branch collected and analysed information and prepared intelligence summaries. Intelligence information was gathered through the military attaché network from Western allies, information acquired from the domestic and foreign press, as well as intelligence organisations.[2] Based on the documentary material preserved in the Finnish National Archives, it can be stated that very good situational information was obtained. The sources provided fairly accurate information on the numbers, units and deployments of forces beyond the border, as well as their

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[1] Jukka Kulomaa, *Syvään taisteluun. Johdatus Neuvostoliiton maavoimien sotataitoon 1917–1991* (Jyväskylä: Gummerus, 2004), 10; YE tiedustelutoimiston viikko- ja yleiskatsaukset 1920–1922, YE Os IV, SArk-1401/8-10, Kansallisarkisto (KA); YE, Tykistön tarkastaja, R-98/50, KA.

[2] *Suomen Puolustuslaitos 1918–1939, Puolustusvoimien rauhan ajan historia,* toim. Jarl Kronlund (Porvoo: WSOY, 1988), 226–227; Reino Arimo, *Suomen puolustussuunnitelmat 1918–1939, osa I* (Helsinki: Sotatieteen laitos, 1986), 141–142; Heidi Ruotsalainen, *Salatun tiedon tuottajat, Suomen sotilasasiamiesjärjestelmän kehitys 1918–1939,* väitöskirja (Tampere: Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu, 2020), 72–73.

movements. Events on the border, in areas adjoining Finland and even farther away were also fairly well known. The main intelligence products were the weekly intelligence summaries, which in 1921 became bi-weekly publications called general summaries. In 1924, the reporting interval was further extended to a month. These summaries provided a good understanding of the contemporary situational awareness.[3]

The development of the Red Army was also monitored publicly. Finnish military magazines published articles about the development of the Red Army during the 1920s and 1930s. The most active writing occurred in the 1930s. Special attention was given to the Red Army's training and armament efforts. Attention was also paid to the rearmament that took place within the framework of the five-year plans and the growing strength of the Red Army.[4]

The experiences of the Russian Civil War had an impact on the direction in which the Red Army was developed. Soviet threat scenarios saw the possibility of enemy strikes from multiple directions, with the greatest danger coming from the west. To respond to the threat, the Red Army had to be capable of waging war on a wide front and fighting a powerful enemy.[5]

However, there was no initial consensus on the direction in which the Red Army should be developed. Opposing views were represented by Lev Trotsky (1879–1940), who challenged Lenin's authority, and his main opponent, Mikhail Frunze (1885–1925). Trotsky saw a permanent Red Army as an intermediate phase, and held that it should be disbanded after the Civil War and replaced by a small professional army supplemented by a militia system.[6] Frunze believed

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[3] Viikkokatsaukset 1918: YE Os Ia, R-82/23, YE Os IV, Sark-1401/8; 1919: YE Os IV, Sark-1401/8; 1920: YE Os IV, Sark-1401/8; 1921: YE Os, Tsto IV, Sark-1401/10; 1922: YE Tykistön tarkastaja, R-98/50; 1923: YE, Toimisto IV, Sark 1401/10; 1924: YE, Toimisto IV, Sark 1401/19, KA.

[4] Antti Laitinen, *Puna-armeijan uhka. Kirjoittelu Neuvostoliiton puna-armeijasta suomalaisessa sotilaslehdistössä 1922–1939*, abstract (Itä-Suomen yliopisto, 2020).

[5] Kulomaa, *Syvään taisteluun,* 20.

[6] Petteri Lalu, *Syvää vai pelkästään tiheää? Neuvostoliittolaisen ja venäläisen sotataidollisen ajattelun lähtökohdat, kehittyminen, soveltaminen käytäntöön ja nykytilanne. Näkökulmana 1920- ja 1930-luvun syvän taistelun opit*, väitöskirja (Tampere: Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu, 2014), 72.

that there would be no swift resolution in war, so a sufficiently strong force was needed to attack decisively. Therefore, Frunze rejected the idea of a small professional army and believed there was no alternative to a mass army – one that was sufficiently strong, highly prepared and based on a cadre system.[7]

The dispute was also partially related to internal power struggles, which ultimately led to Trotsky being sidelined and Frunze's views prevailing in military matters.[8] From 1924 onwards, the Red Army began to be reformed in line with Frunze's ideology. Official Soviet history dates the reforms to the years 1924–28, but they continued into the 1930s.[9]

The threat of the Red Army

The developmental stages of the Red Army and the differences of opinion did not go unnoticed in Finland. The situation across the border and in the entire Soviet Union was closely monitored. In the general assessments, the years 1920 and 1921 stand out, as the Russian Civil War faded and came to an end, and the transition of the armed forces to a peacetime composition was noticed. The post-Civil War border skirmishes, the Karelian uprising, and other internal disturbances – such as the Kronstadt rebellion – led to some confusion in the reorganisation of the Red Army. These matters were noticed and reported on quite meticulously in Finland.[10]

From 1922 onwards, the general summaries show a clear calming of the situation in the Soviet Union. For Finland, the turning point seems to have been the suppression of the Karelian uprising in winter 1921/22 – an attempt by Karelians, who lived in East Karelia, to gain the independence from the Soviet Russia. Karelians were supported

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7 Lalu, *Syvää vai pelkästään tiheää?*, 75; Kulomaa, *Syvään taisteluun,* 24.

8 Kulomaa, *Syvään taisteluun,* 25.

9 Lalu, *Syvää vai pelkästään tiheää?*, 78.

10 YE tiedustelutoimiston viikko- ja yleiskatsaukset 1920–1922, YE Os IV, SArk-1401/8-10, KA; YE, Tykistön tarkastaja, R-98/50, KA.

by about 500 Finnish volunteers. The withdrawal of troops from the Finnish border in the late summer of 1922 finally stabilised the situation and established a state of peace as the number of troops started to settle. But the troops were only being rearranged, and at the same time, border security was taking shape. This marked the beginning of Finland's close monitoring of the development of the Red Army, which also became the focus of reporting.[11]

In the following years' summaries, the reporting on the situation beyond the Finnish border became minimal, as the content of the summaries focused almost exclusively on the development of the Red Army.[12] However, in the general summaries of the early 1920s, there is no sign of concern about the growth of the threat. At times, the summaries even stated that there was no immediate threat of attack. This was likely due to the difficult internal situation in the Soviet Union and the Red Army being in an early stage of development after the Civil War and border skirmishes – a kind of "starting point". However, deep conclusions about contemporary analysis cannot be drawn from the summaries since they were not very analytical. The nature of the summaries was highly descriptive, so mostly analyses were conducted and conclusions were drawn elsewhere, most probably in the operations department of the General Staff.[13] The summaries should be seen more as building blocks of analysis.

By the end of 1919, the threat potential was already quite clear. A memorandum sent to the Ministry of War in December discussed plans for the mobilisation and development of the armed forces, outlining the future challenge of the balance of power and the rapid

[11] YE tiedustelutoimiston yleiskatsaukset 1922, YE Os IV, SArk-1401/10, KA; YE, Tykistön tarkastaja, R-98/50, KA.

[12] YE tiedustelutoimiston yleiskatsaukset 1923–1926, YE Os IV, SArk-1401/10, 19 ja 22, KA.

[13] The material produced by the intelligence section of the General Staff (Yleisesikunnan tiedustelutoimisto) was mostly quite descriptive. It seems analytical reports and general summaries were produced outside the intelligence section. Analytical documents and summaries can be found mostly in the material produced by the operations department.

mobilisation capacity of the Soviet Union.[14] Even though Soviet Russia was in chaos and it would still be several years before the determined and systematic development of the future Red Army, the problem of inferiority and time was already recognised before the 1920s.

At the turn of the decade and in the early 1920s, threat perceptions and threat assessments were established, and their foundations remained the same throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The analyses always concluded that the Russians would have the opportunity to concentrate strong forces on the Karelian Isthmus near Leningrad (St. Petersburg) quickly and without being noticed, allowing them to take the initiative. According to the assessments, if the Finnish government were to mobilise, the Red Army would at worst already be positioned behind the border river in starting positions. Three scenarios were seen in the threat assessment: a complete surprise attack, a significant cavalry attack across the border, and a delay in Finland's own mobilisation due to delays in the government's decision-making. It was estimated that the opponent would aim to swiftly advance towards Viipuri (Vyborg). The main focus of the attack would be on the Karelian Isthmus, supported by a secondary attack north of Lake Ladoga. There, the attack would also take place on a broad front across the border. In addition, the threat of an amphibious landing on the north shore of Lake Ladoga was assessed. The goal of the Red Army would be a breakthrough on the Karelian Isthmus or to compel Finnish forces to retreat north.[15]

These threat assessments formed the basis for the development of the defence forces and defence plans. In the summer of 1920, the so-called Enckell Committee (Komitea armeijan uudelleenjärjestelyä

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[14] YE:n muistio sotaministerille, YE Os Ia, 2113, 13.12.1919, YE Osasto I 1919, T10590/1, KA.

[15] YE:n muistio Sotaväen päällikölle 8.1.1920, YE Os Ia,11/20 sal, YE Osasto I 1920, T10590/5, KA; YE Muistio eräästä Suomen sotavoimien uudestijärjestelyä koskevan ehdotuksen tarkastelusta, päiväämätön ja n:otta, T2855/5, KA; YE muistio Suomen puolustusmahdollisuuksista, Tsto I ak 84/21 sal, 2.2.1921, YE Tsto I, T-10590/10, KA; YE:n muistio kannaksen puolustuksesta, YE Tsto I ak 447/I/22 sal, 7.9.22, YE Tsto I 1922, T-2856/1, KA.

varten – Enckellin komitea)[16] met to consider the reorganisation of the defence forces in peacetime. In 1922, another committee, the Wetzer Organisation Committee (Kenraali Wetzerin määrävahvuuskomitea – Wetzerin komitea),[17] met to examine the composition and mobilisation arrangements of the Defence Forces.[18]

In the fall of 1922, the Wetzer Organisation Committee concluded that the existing composition and mobilisation plan did not adequately respond to the threat and sought a solution to the problem. As a result of the committee's proposals and the ensuing discussion, the president accepted the defence minister's proposal and appointed a War Council (Sotaneuvosto) in 1923 to further consider the

[16] The committee received its unofficial name from its chairman, Major General Oscar Enckell (1878–1960), who served as the Chief of the General Staff of Finland from 1919 to 1924. He received his education under the Russian Empire at the Finnish Cadet School and the Nicholas General Staff Academy in St. Petersburg. Enckell served in the Imperial Russian Army, participating in the Russo-Japanese War from 1904 to 1905 and serving as the head of the intelligence office of the Russian Army General Staff from 1907 to 1914. During World War I, he served as the Russian military attaché in Rome. After leaving the Russian Army, Enckell served in the Serbian Army General Staff from 1918 to 1919 and, in the spring of 1919, handled special assignments for the commander of the Entente forces in Constantinople and the Caucasus. Enckell returned to Finland in the late spring of 1919 and was registered in the Finnish Army's official list as a colonel on 27 May 1919. *Itsenäisen Suomen kenraalikunta 1918–1996*, toim. Rauno Lipponen (Porvoo: WSOY, 1997), 66.

[17] The committee was named after its chairman, Major General Martin Wetzer (1868–1954). Like Enckell, Wetzer received his training in the Imperial Russian Army. He completed his officer training at the Finnish Cadet School. However, Wetzer did not attend the Nicholas General Staff Academy and instead served in various positions in Finnish units until the dissolution of the Finnish Army in 1906. In the following years, he worked as a civilian until he was called back to service at the outbreak of World War I. Wetzer served in the war as a battalion and regiment commander until 1917, when he resigned from the Russian Army. After that, he served in various roles during the Finnish War of Independence in 1918 and the Estonian War of Independence in 1919. Wetzer resigned from the Estonian Defence Forces in the spring of 1919 and returned to active service in the Finnish Army, where he commanded the 2nd and 3rd Divisions, while also working in civilian jobs from 1920 to 1921. Wetzer ultimately retired to the reserves on 5 June 1925. *Itsenäisen Suomen kenraalikunta 1918–1996*, 456.

[18] YE ak:t Komitea armeijan uudelleenjärjestelyä varten, n:o 1. sal, kesäkuu 1920 ja n:o 2. sal, 8.9.1920, YE Os I, 1920, T-10590/5, KA; Wetzerin määrävahvuuskomitean mietintö 10 February 1923 ja pöytäkirjat, PLM-32/Ee2, KA; Sotaneuvoston pöytäkirja ja liite, 6 November 1923, YE Tsto I 1923, T-2858/1, KA.

situation. After two days of work, the council submitted its report.[19] In its statement, the council clarified the threat assessment, stating that the only real threat was Russia. At the same time, the assessment of the attack area was expanded. An attack could occur along the entire eastern border from the Karelian Isthmus to the Arctic Ocean. However, due to its circumstances and central location, the Isthmus was still considered the focal point. To further examine defence issues in depth, the council proposed the establishment of a separate Defence Preparations Council in its statement. This proposal led to the establishment of the so-called Defence Revision Committee (Puolustusrevisionikomitea*)* on 26 November 1923.[20]

The task assigned to the Defence Revision Committee established by the government was to examine Finland's defence arrangements and, if necessary, propose "restructuring" considering economic resources and military aspects. The Defence Revision Committee was created as a parliamentary committee in order to gain political support for its proposals. The committee was chaired by Principal of New Swedish Coeducational School in Helsinki Eirik Hornborg, and its membership included five military members and five representatives from political parties.[21]

After working for about two years, the revision committee submitted its report to the government on 21 January 1926.[22] The report was a situational analysis that thoroughly considered the entire defence system for the first time and made extensive development proposals. The revision committee report also defined the tasks of the defence forces, emphasising their preventive role in war. The Defence Revision Committee also paid significant attention to the threat of the rapid concentration of the Red Army and its resource superiority.[23]

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[19] Wetzerin määrävahvuuskomitean mietintö 10 February1923 ja pöytäkirjat, PLM-32/Ee2, KA; Sotaneuvoston pöytäkirja ja liite, 6 November 1923, YE Tsto I 1923, T-2858/1, KA.

[20] Sotaneuvoston pöytäkirja ja liite, 6 November 1923, YE Tsto I 1923, T-2858/1, KA.

[21] Ibid.; Raine Pölönen, *Yhteisen komiteatyön ensiaskeleet. Sotilaiden ja poliiitikkojen suunnittelutyö puolustusrevisionissa 1923–1926*, diplomityö (Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu, 2019), 38–39.

[22] Puolustusrevisionin mietintö 1926, osat I-II, PLM-32/Ee8 ja osat III-IV, PLM-32/Ee9, KA.

[23] Puolustusrevisionin mietintö 1926, osa I, luku 1, Suomen sotilaspoliittinen asema, PLM-32/Ee8, KA, 3–19.

The final session of the Defence Revision Committee, 11 January 1926. Source: Military Museum, Finland

The work of the Defence Revision Committee was the first comprehensive assessment of the state of Finland's defence and its development needs. Its report proposed extensive changes,[24] but these could not all be implemented due to differing opinions and resource constraints. At the same time, the powerful development of the Red Army continued in the Soviet Union, and Finland was very aware of this.

Mikhail Tukhachevsky (1893–1937), who served as Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army in the late 1920s, advocated, like Frunze, for the strong development of the Soviet forces. He saw a need for a large number of mechanised troops and new weapons. In the Frunzean view of war, the importance of attack and modern technology would increase. In the 1920s, the Red Army did not yet

[24] The revision proposed, among other things, increasing the wartime troops from seven divisions to at least 13 divisions, as well as significantly strengthening the covering troops. Puolustusrevisionin mietintö 1926, osa I, luku 5, Puolustusmahdollisuudet, PLM-32/Ee8, KA, 88–92, 99, 114.

have the capacity for this, but the focus was firmly on the future. The key to its development would be the improvement of heavy industry and the production of modern military equipment.[25] Even in the late 1920s, it was clear that if the Soviet Union's economy could not be improved and the country industrialised, the technological backwardness of the Red Army compared to other European states would continue.[26] The start of industrial production took time, so in the 1920s, the strength of the Red Army still lay in infantry masses. The real change came only in the 1930s.[27]

The reports of the General Staff of the Finnish Defence Forces in the late 1920s noted a continuous increase in budget allocations directed towards the development of the Soviet armed forces. In the Soviet Union's 1925 budget, 20% of the total funds were allocated to defence expenditure. Attention was also paid to the growth of motorisation and mechanisation of the Red Army. A new position was also established in the spring of 1929: the commander of mechanised and motorised troops.[28]

The Finnish General Staff assessed in 1931 that the Red Army had 450 tanks, divided into four tank regiments and three detached companies. In 1934, a comprehensive assessment of the development of the Red Army was completed. It was noted that the Red Army was at the forefront of European development in all defence branches, as a technically advanced million-man army with good tactical skills. It was reported that the Red Army had two motorised divisions and two motorised brigades, as well as 18 smaller motorised units in infantry and cavalry divisions.[29] The development of the Red Army, noted in the early 1920s, gained significant momentum in the second half of the decade and accelerated even further in the 1930s.

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[25] Kulomaa, *Syvään taisteluun,* 27–28.

[26] David M. Glantz, *The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union. A History* (London: Frank Cass, 1992), 29.

[27] Kulomaa, *Syvään taisteluun,* 60.

[28] Vesa Tynkkynen, "Daavid vastaan Goljat", *Tuleva sota – ennustamisen sietämätön vaikeus,* toim. Vesa Tynkkynen (Keuruu: Edita, 2017), 154.

[29] Ibid., 155.

Red Army moto-mechanised troops in exercise. Source: Soviet publication Rabotche Krestjanskaja Krasnaja Armija, *Moskva 1934*

In March 1933, it was observed that the Soviet Union had deployed tank troops to the border with Finland. According to intelligence reports, one regiment with 120 tanks had been deployed to the border.[30] By the end of 1937, according to a memorandum from the General Staff's intelligence branch, the 11th Mechanised Army Corps and two detached mechanised brigades had been deployed to Leningrad and its surrounding areas. In the event of a conflict, Finland would likely be a secondary direction of the main campaign, but if Finland were to face a conflict with the Soviet Union alone, a total of nine infantry divisions, one mechanised army corps, one detached mechanised brigade and one cavalry brigade would be stationed behind the borders.[31] The establishment and deployment of mechanised forces near Finland posed a completely new and significant threat to Finland.

The development that began in the 1920s posed not only the significant challenge of the Finnish defence being outnumbered, but also perhaps the most threatening and immediate issue of the high

30 Ibid., 158.
31 Ibid., 160.

readiness, rapid mobility and firepower of the Red Army, which meant that Finland had been too late to react. How could it now prevent the Red Army from passing through before a field army could be established and concentrated? Thus, the issue of the covering force became a matter of life and death in the 1920s.

Protecting mobilisation and concentration: The covering mission becomes key

The question of covering troops, the need to reduce defence spending, and the pressure to shorten military service in the 1920s created a dilemma, the solution to which would be a key issue. The starting point for everything was the task of covering and its successful execution. However, economic pressures and the desire to shorten military service[32] were a challenging reality that could not be ignored.

In the 1920s, Parliament had repeatedly demanded a reduction in defence spending and a shorter period of military service. The challenge, however, was how a shortened service period could allow Finland to respond to the threat of a sudden attack or to fulfil the covering mission.[33] The mission of peacetime forces was to protect the establishment and deployment of wartime forces if necessary. To have a sufficient number of peacetime forces – that is, conscripts – the question was how long service periods would need to be to fulfil the covering mission.

In 1927, the government set up a committee to consider the issue of service time. The committee, after finishing their work in the late summer of 1928, concluded that the service period could not be shortened without jeopardising the covering mission.[34]

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[32] The service period was 12 months for troops and 15 months for leaders. *Suomen Puolustuslaitos*, 181.

[33] Reino Arimo, *Suomen puolustussuunnitelmat 1918–1939, III osa* (Helsinki: Sotatieteen laitos, 1987), 82.

[34] In addition to the chairman, the committee had eight members, of whom four were members of parliament and two were military personnel. The chairman, Kyösti Kallio, later became president of Finland. Ibid.

Colonel Leonard Grandell, a chief of the Mobilisation Department in the Finland General Staff, 1927–1936. Source: Military Museum, Finland

Peacetime forces were inherently insufficient to meet the level of covering troops required by the General Staff and Defence Revision, because part of the peacetime forces were untrained recruits, while the rest operated mainly as the backbone of the field army in the prevailing cadre system. According to calculations, a service time of up to two years would have been needed to effectively fulfil the covering mission. Despite this challenge, the Defence Revision Committee did not support an increase in service time.[35]

In 1924, Major Leonard Grandell, a member of the Defence Revision Committee, had proposed a transition to a territorial system. In the territorial system, the forces would move away from the cadre-based system. Instead of supplementing peacetime forces, the field army would be entirely composed of reservists by region. This would

[35] Vilho Tervasmäki, "Maanpuolustussuunnitelmat", *Talvisodan historia. 1., Suomi joutuu talvisotaan,* toim. Sotatieteen laitoksen sotahistorian toimisto (Porvoo: WSOY, 1984), 71.

have solved the covering troops challenge, as there would then be almost sufficient strength in peacetime forces for covering troops. The revision committee approved the proposal, but the idea was rejected due to criticism from the General Staff.[36] However, the solution remained under consideration.

In 1928, the Conscription Committee completed its work and suggested a reconsideration of Grandell's idea. In the same year, the government appointed a full-time investigator to study it. Lieutenant Colonel Aksel Airo, the investigator, completed his work in October 1929.[37]

Right at the beginning of his study, Airo explored the possibilities of shortening the service period within the existing system and concluded that it could not be done. However, if the absolute starting point was to be the shortening of service periods, the existing system would have to be changed. Airo proposed shortening the service time for troops to nine months and for leaders – NCOs and reserve officers – to twelve months. He also decided to keep the three main tasks of the defence forces: training, establishment and covering.[38]

Airo's study concluded that the solution to the whole problem was to abandon the cadre system. In his proposal, mobilisation was separated from the main tasks of the defence forces during peacetime, leaving only the training and covering missions. This would result in sufficient resources for both tasks. For mobilisation purposes, a separate territorial system would be built within the defence forces leadership, and a separate regional organisation would be established to implement it. Airo's study was largely based on Grandell's previous idea, which Airo further developed.[39]

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Arimo, *Suomen puolustussuunnitelmat 1918–1939, III osa*, 82.

[38] Reino Arimo, "Puolustusvoimien siirtyminen aluejärjestelmään 1930-luvulla", *Tiede ja Ase,* no 45 (1987): 87; Juha Ratinen, *Kaaderiperustamisesta aluejärjestelmään, suomalaisen liikekannallepanojärjestelmän kehittyminen 1918–1945,* väitöskirja (Tampere: Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu, 2018), 64.

[39] Ratinen, *Kaaderiperustamisesta aluejärjestelmään,* 75.

From left: Major General Erkki Raappana, Marshal Carl Gustav Emil Mannerheim, and Lieutenant General Aksel Airo in Lieksajärvi, Repola, White Karelia, 9 September 1942. Raappana was the architect of the Ilomantsi victory in 1944. Photo by Pauli Jänis. Source: Museovirasto, HK7744:337

There was a debate about the results of Airo's work for about a year, after which, in the fall of 1930, the Ministry of Defence established a committee to plan the reorganisation and its implementation. At the beginning of 1931, the committee's work was completed, and in the summer it was presented to the Defence Council and approved by the government, after which Parliament began to consider the necessary changes to the law. The preparations for the reorganisation began immediately in the fall of 1931, and it came into effect in 1934.[40]

In the reform, the peacetime army was divided into the regional organisation and border army units. The regional organisation was responsible for mobilisation and the border army units for covering

[40] Arimo, "Puolustusvoimien siirtyminen aluejärjestelmään 1930-luvulla", 103; Ratinen, *Kaaderiperustamisesta aluejärjestelmään,* 75.

A Bicycle Battalion on the march somewhere in South-Eastern Finland. Source: Military Museum, Finland

and training missions.[41] During wartime, the forces would consist of field armies and covering troops, with the covering troops being mainly composed of conscripts from peacetime units. The field army was composed of nine divisions. The covering troops consisted of a light brigade and forces set up by three peacetime divisions. Each division's three training infantry regiments formed a covering battalion. The divisions' bicycle battalions and Cavalry Brigade were already in their wartime compositions during peacetime, forming the mobile elements of the covering troops. The divisions' artillery regiments, like the infantry regiments, set up one artillery battalion each.[42]

The 1934 reform established both the peacetime and the wartime defence forces with which Finland would enter the Winter War five

[41] Ibid., 74.

[42] Arimo, "Puolustusvoimien siirtyminen aluejärjestelmään 1930-luvulla", 101.

years later. The wartime field army was planned in the form and strength in which it would eventually be established in the fall of 1939. When the time came, the covering troops were also deployed exactly as envisioned in the 1934 plan.

The concerns that arose in the early 1920s about the threat of the Red Army, which became significant in the mid- and late 1920s, were resolved after ten years of debate and planning. The timing problem was solved by implementing a major reform. The results of that reform were tested a couple of years later when the Winter War began.

The issue of inferiority, however, could not be solved concretely, as Finland naturally could not in any way challenge the Red Army in terms of manpower or arms and materiel. The solution had to be found through tactics and operational methods.

If you are inferior, attack!

In Finland during the early 1920s, the Red Army's capabilities were not highly regarded. Finnish observers viewed Soviet tactical skills and methods as primitive, discipline as poor, and training levels as inadequate. They perceived the Red Army as clinging to old Tsarist traditions that emphasised mass formations and rigid, formal offensive operations. Finnish military thinking held that such mass, formal attacks would not succeed against a flexible, informal and mobile opponent, as the Finns saw themselves.[43]

Finland began developing awareness of Red Army tactical innovations in the mid-1920s, with this development accelerating strongly in the second half of the decade. The publication of the Red Army's temporary field manual in 1925 revealed a strong emphasis on offensive

[43] Vesa Tynkkynen, *Hyökkäyksestä puolustukseen. Taktiikan kehittymisen ensimmäiset vuosikymmenet Suomessa,* väitoskirja (Joutsa: Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu, 1996), 31; Tynkkynen, "Daavid vastaan Goljat", 153; Jarkko Kemppi, *Suomalaisen sotataidon kehittyminen vuosina 1918–1924* (Helsinki: Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu, 2006), 223.

tactics, with infantry remaining the main branch while technology and concentrated firepower began receiving greater emphasis.[44]

In the following years, as material development gained momentum, the role of armoured forces also grew, and their position in Red Army tactics began to crystallise. The 1929 release of the next field manual clearly elevated offence as the main combat discipline, incorporating elements of the deep battle doctrine of Tukhachevsky and Vladimir Triandafillov (1894–1931).[45]

The deep battle doctrine took shape in the early 1930s and was formalised in the temporary field manual issued in December 1936. This doctrine aimed to simultaneously incapacitate the enemy's entire defence system throughout its depth, ultimately destroying opposing forces.[46] As noted earlier, the Soviet army was regarded as one of Europe's most powerful by the mid-1930s.[47] However, Finland faced not only questions of timing and material inferiority, but also significant challenges in military expertise.

The consistent development of Finnish tactics began in the early 1920s, once conditions had been stabilised and the defence forces' development was underway. Given Finland's limited military experience, lessons were initially drawn from World War I experiences abroad while simultaneously monitoring tactical developments in post-war Europe.[48] However, it was soon realised that World War I experiences could not be directly applied to Finnish conditions. The latest trends of the 1920s were also seen as incompatible with Finland. J.F.C. Fuller's and B.H. Liddell Hart's ideas of mechanised warfare were noted, but the large-scale use of mechanised forces on Finnish terrain was seen as impossible and beyond Finnish resources.[49] Finnish tactics were developed based on their own circumstances: Finnish conditions and resources would be the determining factor.

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44 Tynkkynen, *Hyökkäyksestä puolustukseen*, 32; Kulomaa, *Syvään taisteluun*, 45.
45 Kulomaa, *Syvään taisteluun*, 28; Lalu, *Syvää vai pelkästään tiheää?*, 94.
46 Tynkkynen, "Daavid vastaan Goljat", 158.
47 Tynkkynen, *Hyökkäyksestä puolustukseen,* 34.
48 Ibid., 22; Kemppi, *Suomalaisen sotataidon kehittyminen,* 231.
49 Tynkkynen, *Hyökkäyksestä puolustukseen,* 23.

A machine-gun squad exercising in winter 1926. Source: Military Museum, Finland

The basic factors of development were thus seen to be the local conditions: forests and winter. These were seen as offering opportunities to balance the strengths. Winter combat experiments were initiated in the early 1920s, while forest combat experiments began in the 1930s. Trials tested procedures and equipment to fully utilise Finnish conditions. Many of the innovations resulting from the trials are still in use today, such as the field kitchen, half-platoon tent and march compass.[50]

The results of the defence revision also laid down certain cornerstones for tactical development. The committee's report had extensively analysed Finnish conditions, as well as the operational possibilities of the Red Army and their own forces in terrain and areas. The report identified the threat from the Red Army as significant, guiding all development.[51] It was stated that in battle, the inferior must strive

[50] Tynkkynen, "Daavid vastaan Goljat", 153.

[51] Puolustusrevisionin mietintö 1926, osat I–II, PLM-32/Ee8 ja osat III–IV, PLM-32/Ee9, KA.

Combat exercise in South-Eastern Finland, August 1933. Source: Military Museum, Finland

for continuous activity and use of movement to even the odds.[52] The report, therefore, emphasised that in Finnish tactical thinking, activity is an absolute prerequisite for survival in adversity. Offence became the decisive combat discipline in Finnish thinking. Only by attacking can solutions be achieved.

Offence formed the foundation of tactical thinking and training in the 1930s, up until the Winter War. Exercise scenarios involved delaying operations of covering troops, followed by concentrated counterattacks by the main forces.[53] In combat against a superior force, the goal was to engage the enemy by encircling it, utilising movements through covered terrain in all seasons.[54]

The Finnish Army published its first field manuals in the early 1920s. These manuals had influences from many foreign field

[52] Ibid., osa I, PLM-32/Ee8, KA, 58–61.
[53] Tynkkynen, *Hyökkäyksestä puolustukseen,* 54.
[54] Tynkkynen, "Daavid vastaan Goljat", 153.

manuals. At the beginning of the decade, these manuals reflected influences from German manuals, and later, influences from Swedish manuals were incorporated. The field manuals from the early 1930s reflected Finland's own military thinking, which took into account its geographical conditions.[55]

The idea of using offence as a main combat method had already become established in the early 1930s. The inferiority of Finnish forces to the Red Army emphasised the importance of creating a local centre of gravity. By creating a centre of gravity, the aim was to achieve local superiority and thus reach a resolution. In decisive points, one had to strive to be superior even with smaller forces. Quality was also emphasised as a factor in levelling the playing field in terms of leadership and troops. In addition, the element of surprise was considered a way to equalise the balance of power.[56]

When examining the relative importance given to combat methods, it can be stated that until the Winter War, attack guided all thinking. Defence was not yet highly valued in the 1920s, but its importance increased in the late 1930s. Delay was recognised as a combat method in the 1930s, but it did not reach the level of significance of attack or defence.[57]

The challenge of numerical inferiority was addressed through activity. After covering forces engaged the enemy, Finnish commanders had to seize the initiative and launch counterattacks with their main forces. Passive, static defence would cede the initiative to the opponent, allowing them to concentrate firepower and choose breakthrough points at will. Instead, by utilising well-trained, mobile and capable troops, exploiting the favourable Finnish terrain and conditions, forces could potentially equalise the balance of power and achieve success. The principle that attack serves as the best form of defence thus became deeply embedded in Finnish military thinking once the harsh reality of inferiority became apparent.

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55 Tynkkynen, *Hyökkäyksestä puolustukseen,* 52.
56 Ibid., 55.
57 Ibid.

The importance of activity was later proven during the Winter War. The most significant defensive victories were achieved in areas where mobile operations were feasible and Finnish forces could leverage overwhelming local superiority, particularly when desperate circumstances demanded only creativity and initiative for survival.

Summary: The cornerstones of Finnish defence arrangements and tactics set in the mid-1920s

Threat assessment has always been a fundamental starting point in the planning and development of armed forces throughout history. This is especially evident in the development of Finnish defence in the 1920s. The intensity of development can be attributed to two factors: the Finnish Defence Forces took their first steps, making strong development work natural and obvious. Second, the Soviet Union emerged and began the construction and development of the Red Army at a time when the only real threat to Finland was identified as a formidable armed force.

In Finnish military history research, the prevailing view is of the realisation of the threat of the Red Army and the awakening to it in Finland in the latter half of the 1920s. The view is mostly correct, but it may be considered somewhat simplistic. It is indisputable that the threat of the Red Army materialised clearly in the latter half of the 1920s and early 1930s. The visible and strong structural and tactical development of the Red Army that began in 1924 did indeed cause significant concern and attention in Finland.

However, it should be noted that the potential threat was quite clearly understood as early as 1918, even though the Russian Civil War continued for several years after. The foundations on which the concern about the Red Army was built and materialised were also clearly articulated in the analyses of the end of that decade and in the early 1920s. These same foundations were further reinforced in the reports of the War Council and the Defence Revision Committee in 1923 and 1926, respectively.

The importance of the War Council and the Defence Revision Committee as key driving factors in the development of Finland's defence shows that threat assessments and the weaknesses in Finland's defence were already known and accepted before the latter half of the 1920s. The strengthening of the Red Army and its tactical development in the latter half of the 1920s materialised and demonstrated the previously acknowledged threat that had been identified in the analyses. New, even more threatening elements – such as motomechanisation – were added as well.

The development of Finland's defence system and Finnish tactics were already well underway when the threat of the Red Army materialised. The progress can be seen as parallel, accelerated by the observations of the latter half of the 1920s and driven by serious concern. The development of the Red Army was not a sudden realisation, but a process that had already begun in the early years of independent Finland's defence forces. This is evidenced by several memoranda and threat assessments that laid the groundwork for the development of the defence forces in various committee reports.

The years 1923 and, especially, the Defence Revision Committee report of 1926 can be seen as culminating points in the development of Finland's defence system and, to some extent, tactical thinking. They confirmed the threat assessments and challenges that guided the development of Finland's defence system in the following years. The reports also laid out the frameworks of tactical thinking based on geopolitics, power dynamics and circumstances, as well as the possibilities for action of Finnish and enemy forces in specific areas and terrains.

The threat thinking that emerged at the end of the War of Independence evolved, solidified and strengthened in the early 1920s, playing a fundamental role in the 1923–26 period. Guided by the established foundations, the entire defence system was developed, and tactical thinking and Finnish operational skills and tactics were framed. The power-balance thinking of a small country, the problem of timing, and the tactical thinking that began to develop in the 1920s are still evident in Finland's defence system and thinking to this day.

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