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REVUE MILITAIRE SUISSE INTERNATIONALE EDITION : FINLAND





Editorial

Seen from Switzerland : The Finnish Example

Colonel (GS) Alexandre Vautravers
Vice-President, Swiss Officer's Society (SSO)

Finland and Switzerland are not so much geographically close as they are in terms of security and defense policy. In 1939-1940, when France was experiencing a 'phony war' and Switzerland was worried about its military unpreparedness, the 'winter war' was the subject of close attention.

Winter War

The pressure and political blackmail brought to bear on the small Finnish state, followed by the war of air-land aggression, left its mark on Swiss minds. So much so that many strategic scenarios recall this period - during the Cold War, of course, but even today. Russia's political and military involvement in Ukraine over the last twenty years is a daily reminder of this.

In 1939, Swiss public opinion was moved by the valiant and stubborn resistance of the Finns. So much so, in fact, that a film devoted to the war enjoyed considerable success in terms of audience and esteem. Indeed, neutrality does not preclude emotion or solidarity.

This empathy led to support and even genuine military cooperation. Finland had similar armaments, strengths

and weaknesses to Switzerland at the time. Both were facing adversaries with mechanized and parachute forces, massive support weapons, not to mention considerable numerical superiority. The Finnish experience of building three defensive lines - known as the Mannerheim Line - and the delaying value of field fortifications reinforced the Swiss concept of engagement from the Limmat position until 1940. The effectiveness of fighter warfare and Finnish Jäger units may also have been a factor in the decision to create the first Swiss 'grenadier' units in 1943.

In terms of armaments, Swiss engineers were very interested in Finnish anti-tank weapons and tactics. It was at this time that improvised explosives were given the nickname 'molotov cocktails'. Anti-tank rifles were also being mass-produced in Swiss factories. During the conflict, the Swiss army acquired a large number of Finnish machine pistols, later built under license in Hispano Suiza's Geneva factories from 1943 onwards.

Cold War and Hot Wars

Since the end of the Cold War, Finland and Switzerland have developed in parallel on many fronts: maintaining the militia system and relatively high levels of manpower

for territorial defense, developing peacekeeping operations, interoperability and cooperation in training, rapprochement with NATO, not to mention choices in terms of armaments: F/A-18, Leopard 2, CV-90, F-35A in particular.

The war and the support given to Ukraine by most Western countries put an end to a period of disarmament and changed the strategic situation in Europe for good. At a time when the majority of European countries were reducing their forces, accepting capability shortfalls in favor of strategic interdependence, abandoning their defense and focusing on expeditionary sub-warfare operations, it was fashionable to criticize the strategic stability and obsolescence of Finnish strategy. Finland's accession to the Atlantic Alliance now demonstrates the validity of this stability of strategic objectives and the maintenance of long-term defense and equipment programs.

Finland's - and, more recently, Sweden's - membership of NATO raises questions and sheds light on Switzerland's security policy. Security and cooperation are not incompatible.

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The Swiss Hawk Mk. 66 are now flying in Finnish colors.



Mannerheim and Switzerland

A hero of Finnish independence, at the head of the 'White' armies supported by the German Empire, Commander-in-Chief of the Finnish armies during the Winter and Continuation Wars, then President and Head of State (1944-1946), Baron and future Field Marshal Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim is a central figure in Finnish history.



On his retirement, the Marshal settled in Valmont near Montreux, where he was cared for and wrote his memoirs. This did not prevent him from traveling regularly. He died on January 27, 1951 at the cantonal hospital in Lausanne. A monument is dedicated to him in Territet, where a commemorative ceremony is held every first Saturday in June. A picture of this ceremony can be seen on the previous page.

Pierre-Antoine Goy's book not only provides information on Mannerheim's biography, but also goes beyond it. Based on the archives of the Finnish and Swiss defense attachés during the Winter War and the Continuation War, it describes the close intelligence collaboration between the two countries' services, mentions the two Swiss officers invited to Finland during the conflict, and questions the distance between Mannerheim and Guisan, given that they lived just a few kilometers apart from each other from 1947 onwards.

Pierre-Antoine Goy, *Mannerheim – Maréchal de Finlande et allié de la Suisse*, Cabédita, Bière, 2013, 213 pages.

Impressum

Editor in chief:
COL (GS) Dr. Alexandre Vautravers
a.vautravers@revuemilitairesuisse.ch

Editors:
LTC (GS) Dr. Julien Grand
1LT Christophe Tymowski
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info@reygroup.ch
administration@revuemilitairesuisse.ch
d.mastrogiacomo@smg-ge.ch
christophe.gerber@elca.ch
info@ofne.ch
roger.haupt76@bluewin.ch
patrick.noger@sfo-fog.ch
edouard.vifian@vtg.admin.ch
francesco@rappa.ch

Administration, subscription & advertising:
Association de la Revue militaire suisse (ARMS)
Avenue Général-Guisan 117, 1009 Pully, SWITZERLAND
Tel. +41 21 729 46 44
E-mail: info@revuemilitairesuisse.ch
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MAJOR GENERAL Mathias Tüscher, President, ARMS



Today, Finland's land forces' strength equals all other Scandinavian countries combined.

Finland

Finland: One Century of Armed Independence

Colonel (GS) Alexandre Vautravers
Editor in Chief, RMS+

At the convergence of the geopolitical interests of Sweden, Germany and Russia, Finland gained its independence in 1917 following the collapse of the Tsar's regime. A short civil war between pro- and anti-Russian 'Reds' and 'Whites' took place in 1918, confirming this autonomy and a certain rapprochement with the West. But by 1920, relations with the USSR were once again tense.

The defeat of the 'Reds' in the civil war, border and trade incidents, and the 1937 naval blockade all heightened tensions. Following the German-Soviet Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of August 23, 1939, the USSR considered Scandinavia its area of influence. In October, the USSR issued an ultimatum to the Baltic States and Finland, demanding that they be allowed to build military bases on their territory. The Baltic States gave in and lost their independence in the summer of 1940. Finland refused, leading Stalin to invade the country on November 30, 1939. The 'Winter war' ended on March 13, 1940. After a series of ambushes and humiliating defeats, the Red Army nevertheless managed to make some territorial gains in February, resulting in the loss of 9% of Finnish territory, ratified by the Treaty of Moscow.

In search of allies for its reconstruction, the United Kingdom gave up and it was finally Nazi Germany that agreed to supply arms, in exchange for rights of passage for its armed forces. This rapprochement led Finland to attack the USSR in June 1941. Until 1944, Finnish troops took part in the occupation of Karelia and the siege of Leningrad. Finland became a co-belligerent of Germany, signing the anti-Komintern Pact, but never joined the Axis. At the Teheran Conference in 1942, the Allies agreed that Finland had waged war against the USSR but not against any other country - thus considering that Finland was fighting a separate war. The withdrawal of Finnish forces from the Red Army led to the signing of a separate armistice in Moscow on October 19, 1944. Under the terms of this agreement, Finnish troops drove the Germans out of their territory by force of arms - what became known as the 'Lapland War' (1944-1945). This, along with the loss of new territories (Vilpuri), prevented the country from being occupied by the USSR and preserved Finland's



Scenes from the 'winter war' (above) and the 'continuation war' against the USSR. Despite several clear tactical successes, these conflicts ended by two essentially moral victories, which allowed Finland to maintain its independence.



independence.

During the war, Finland built up an army of over 600,000 soldiers. Nearly 96,000 people were killed, including 2,500 civilians (2.5% of the population of 3.8 million) and 3,500 prisoners of war.

At the end of the conflict, the Commander-in-Chief of the Finnish forces, Field Marshal Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim, became President of the Republic. In 1947, the Government reluctantly withdrew from the Marshall Plan in order to maintain its relations with the USSR.

Finland's reserved yet attentive stance during the Cold War was accompanied by numerous diplomatic initiatives and conferences - where Helsinki frequently found itself in tandem with international Geneva. These included the 1973 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), followed by the Helsinki Accords (1975), which led to the creation of the OSCE in 1995.

The Treaty of Paris (1947) between Finland and the USSR limited the size and nature of the Finnish armed forces, which were restricted to defense; the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (1948) imposed coordination of Finnish defense with the USSR and Soviet military aid in the event of an attack. These two agreements, sometimes described as 'Finlandization', came to an end with the end of the USSR in 1991.

Finland has been a member of the UN since 1955, and of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) since 1961 as an associate, and then as a member in 1986. Membership of the Community and then the European Union was the subject of much debate, but a consultative referendum in 1994 paved the way for EU membership in 1995.

Since the early 1990s, Finnish forces have been developing their international cooperation, both within the regional framework of Scandinavia, and within the Partnership for Peace (PfP), which the country joined on May 9, 1994. Although there were many discussions about joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Russian aggression in Ukraine in 2022 and Sweden's application for membership (May 18) precipitated the move.

Finland became NATO's 31st member on April 4, 2023, following an accession process completed in record time.

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Above right: The Finnish infantry during the 'Continuation war' was essentially a light force, equipped with large numbers of automatic -such as the MP 31- and antitank weapons.

Below: Soviet, British and American aircraft - Finland maintained a diversity of supply during the Cold War, which already characterized the Ilmavoimat during the 1930-1940s.

