

# Defence in depth: Finland continues to modernise to counter Russian threat

[Content preview – Subscribe to Jane's Defence Weekly for full article]

**In the wake of Russian aggression in Ukraine, Finland is continuing to modernise its ground forces and updating its doctrine. *Samuel Cranny-Evans* reports**

The Finnish Army is famed for its defence against invading Soviet forces during the 1939–40 Winter War. Following the Second World War Finland remained neutral, striking a balance between the Soviet bloc and the West. However, the country's proximity to and relationship with Russia continues to dictate its defence posture, which has been drastically reviewed since Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea and subsequent intervention in Ukraine.

This review has catalysed the modernisation of the Finnish ground forces, expanding their capabilities and readiness to deter Russian aggression. The shape and speed of this reform could serve as a model for NATO forces or prospective alliance members in Russia's near abroad facing a similar dilemma.



*A Finnish M270 MLRS battery conducts a fire mission during live-fire exercises at the Rovaniemi exercise area in November 2016. The FDF's M270s have been upgraded to fire guided MLRS and ATACMS rounds to deliver precision effects out to 165 km. (Jane's/Peter Felstead)*

1761705

Ukraine's situation shows that preparation is key. According to Mykola Bielieskov, deputy director of the Institute of World Policy in Kiev, Ukraine's armed forces had a readiness level of 43% in 2014, with only one in four battalions ready to perform combat operations at short notice. The lack of readiness hampered deterrence, enabling poorly equipped separatists and Russian-backed forces, supported by an effective misinformation campaign, to achieve early successes against Ukrainian forces.

Now those gains have been consolidated by Russian threats of further intervention, Ukraine has effectively been forced to cede political control of the Donbass region to Russia. It follows that very high readiness and the ability to respond immediately to all threats are the most effective means of ensuring territorial integrity against Russian aggression.

Finland's strategy has been to increase and revise its artillery capabilities, which are now focused on preventing an enemy from advancing and inflicting losses on that enemy in predefined areas, according to the book 'The Artillery Fights with Fire: the development of artillery tactics in Finland during our independence', written by Kessel Pasi and published in 2017 by Finland's National Defence College. This is coupled with a re-equipped and reinvigorated infantry force supported by modernised armour and a doctrine built around the specific threat posed by Russia.

This model of procurement, which can also be observed in Poland, is dictated by closeness to the potential aggressor and the need to survive an initial assault without an ally's immediate support. Such a model may have ramifications for the likes of Estonia, Latvia, and Romania, which share borders with Russia, as well as states closely allied to Russia and those further removed, such as Georgia, Norway, and Sweden.

## **Artillery**

Arguably the most important element of Finnish modernisation concerns its artillery, with development encompassing the force's equipment, doctrine, and tactics. This is unsurprising given the Russian predilection for artillery.

In 'The Russian Way of War' Lester Grau and Charles Bartles state that the Russian Ground Forces are an artillery-focused army, noting that they practise manoeuvre by fire, which is a tactic involving an artillery position engaging multiple targets from the same firing position, as opposed to relocating as the manoeuvre forces advance. The authors claim this enables many important targets to be destroyed quickly, with artillery focusing on achieving fire superiority over an enemy rapidly so that a force's main battle tanks (MBTs) and infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) can advance. However, such a tactic places artillery at greater risk of counter-battery fire.

The importance of artillery to the Russian Ground Forces can be further emphasised by the structure of a Russian brigade, which includes four mobile battalions equipped with MBTs or IFVs, depending on their focus, and four battalions of artillery: an artillery unit to manoeuvre unit ratio

of 1:1. Each brigade includes 36 2S19 Msta-S self-propelled howitzers (SPHs), 18 BM-21 Grad or CV 9A52-4 'Tornado' multiple rocket launchers (MRLs), and an anti-tank battalion consisting of six MT-12 Rapira towed guns and 12 tracked tank destroyer vehicles, according to Grau and Bartles. Given the large quantity of indirect- and direct-fire support assets and the prominence they have within Russian manoeuvre doctrine, artillery is thus pivotal to the Russian battlefield.

Against this background the Finnish Defence Forces' (FDF's) focus on artillery assumes a logical trajectory requiring more artillery with greater mobility and survivability. The most prominent procurement addressing these concerns is the purchase of K9 Thunder tracked SPHs from South Korea's Hanwha Defense, 48 having been ordered in February 2017.

**[Continued in full version...]**

(696 of 4186 words)

For the full version and more content:

## Intelligence that Matters

*With more than 100 years of experience in factors such as shifting defence spending and the capabilities of the world's militaries, Jane's delivers unparalleled data and insight. Our renowned open-source intelligence and potent analytical tools, backed by our deep industry expertise, is used by militaries, national security and defence industry organisations across the world to anticipate and respond to threats; identify and capture new business opportunities; and sustain defence capabilities.*

To learn more visit <http://janes.com/products>

For advertising solutions visit [Jane's Advertising](#)