



The Finnish Campaigns: Failure of Soviet Operational Art in World War II

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The Soviet Union is well-known for its development of operations as the linkage between tactics and strategy, and its application as operational art. The Red Army's development of deep battle during the interwar years and its refinement during World War II is an exceptional example of operational art and a testament to the genius of the Soviet Union's military theorists. Soviet-style operational art grew from an ideological concept at a theoretical level, to a political controlled strategic doctrine, emerged as an offensive biased operational mindset, and, if Finland is overlooked, resulted in World War II deep battle success. The Red Army achieved victory in both Finnish campaigns through sound strategic planning, mass, and decisive tactical action. However, Finland's systematic withdrawal prevented the destruction of its army - the key Soviet operational objective. Within five years the Soviet Union defeated Finland in two wars, but failed to realize its doctrinal concept of deep battle and by its own definition operational art. A direct corollary can be drawn between Soviet tactical success and her realization of strategic ends without achieving operational goals. This experience questions the importance Soviet doctrine placed on operational art and highlights the primacy of competent strategic planning.

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