

Blog No: 9
15.02.2021

Journal of Military and Strategic Studies (No. 2, Vol. 20, 2021)

Edward J. Erickson*

Introduction

Unlike the British or the Americans, the Turks do not officially designate or name military campaigns in their official histories. This article presents the authors appraisal of which operations might be considered as the Ottoman armys campaigns in the First World War.

The Ottomans fought a large number of operations and battles in the war but an analysis of these in terms of defining them at the operational level is absent from the extant historiography. Reframing the Ottoman armys performance through campaigns at the operational level of war allows us to examine the entirety of the Ottoman operational theatres of war which shows an army that was more effective in combat than is generally known. The article also presents an appraisal of the various offensive and defensive campaigns that the Ottoman army conducted in the First World War as well as identifying a new vocabulary that distinguishes the armys deliberate campaigns from its campaigns of opportunity and expediency.

In examining campaigns, it is necessary to recognize that there are three levels of war - the strategic, operational, and tactical. At the operational level of war campaigns serve to connect tactical activities (usually battles and engagements) with the achievement of strategic goals. Commanders who plan and execute campaigns operate at the operational

level of war are, for the most part, army group and field army commanders, although occasionally army corps fulfil this function when operating in an independent role.

It is also important to recognize that a battle is not a campaign although in the First World War some extended and large-scale battles took on campaign-like aspects. A campaign is a series of battles and engagements designed to achieve a strategic purpose. Campaigns are longer in time and space than battles and involve indirect command, which means that the commander does not personally conduct or supervise operations in the field. In such circumstances command is conducted by assigning missions and objectives to subordinate commanders. Supervision (commonly called control) is exercised through staff procedures although it was not uncommon for a high-level commander to intervene in emergency situations. In the First World War, campaigns were generally planned and executed by field army or army group level headquarters. Campaigns are broadly of two types, offensive and defensive, and within these a campaign may be deliberate (pre-planned and pre-resourced) or a campaign of opportunity (taken in response to a window of opportunity with the resources at hand). Additionally, during the war, the Ottoman army waged counterinsurgency campaigns against Armenian and Arab rebel forces. Using these definitions, we may judge that the Ottoman army waged thirty-two campaigns (fourteen offensive campaigns and eighteen defensive campaigns) during the First World War. These campaigns are identified in Table 1 and, moreover, several of these campaigns are presented in detail as examples because of the understandings they provide about the Ottoman approach to war.

Please click to read the rest of the article: https://jmss.org/article/view/72093

Dr. Edward Erickson is a Professor of International Relations at Antalya Bilim University, Antalya, Turkey and a retired Professor of Military History from the Department of War Studies at the Marine Corps University. He retired from the United States Army as a lieutenant colonel with multiple combat tours in the field artillery and additional experiences as a foreign area officer specializing in the Middle East. Dr. Erickson is recognized as an authority on the First World War in the Middle East and Turkish military policy.

About the author:

To cite this article: Edward J. ERICKSON. 2026. "OTTOMAN CAMPAIGNS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR - JMSS - 10.02.2021." Center For Eurasian Studies (AVİM), Blog No.2021 / 9. February 15. Accessed October 30, 2026. https://avim.org.tr/public/Blog/OTTOMAN-CAMPAIGNS-IN-THE-FIRST-WORLD-WAR-JMSS-10-02-2021

Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Posta: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

© 2009-2025 Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi (AVİM) Tüm Hakları Saklıdır