

Ottoman Campaigns in the First World War

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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 author's appraisal of which operations might be considered as the Ottoman army's 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 army's 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 army's 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.

Table 1 Ottoman Army Campaigns in the First World War

Campaign Type/Name/Inclusive Dates	Strategic Objective	Outcome
<u>Deliberate Offensive Campaigns</u>		
Sarıkaş (December 1914-January 1915)	Annihilation of the Russian army	Unsuccessful
First Suez (February 1915)	Seize the Suez Canal	Unsuccessful
Tortum/Malazgirt (June-July 1915)	Reclaim Malazgirt	Successful
Elişkirt Valley (August 1915)	Reclaim the Elişkirt Valley	Unsuccessful
Second Army (August-September 1916)	Reclaim the Elişkirt Valley	Unsuccessful
Second Persian (May-June 1916)	Seize Karin/Hamadan	Unsuccessful
Second Suez (July-August 1916)	Seize the Suez Canal	Unsuccessful
<u>Offensive Campaigns of Opportunity</u>		
Libya (1914-1918)	Incite rebellion/threaten Egypt	Unsuccessful
First Persian (January 1915)	Seize SE Persia	Successful
Armenian Rebellion (April-November 1915)	Protect Lines of Communications	Successful
Encirclement of Kut (November 1915-April 1916)	Annihilation of the British army	Successful
Çoruh (June-July 1916)	Reclaim Erzurum/Trabzon	Unsuccessful
Trans-Caucasian (February-May 1918)	Reclaim Erzurum/Kars	Successful
Dagestan/Caspian (June-November 1918)	Seize/Occupy Baku & area	Successful
<u>Deliberate Defensive Campaigns</u>		
Asir (1914-1918)	Retain Sana & area	Successful
Yemen (1914-1918)	Retain Yemen & area	Successful
Northeast Frontiers (November 1914)	Preserve the border & frontier	Successful
Gallipoli (February 1915-January 1916)	Retain the Dardanelles	Successful
Kut/Ctesiphon (September-November 1915)	Retain Baghdad	Successful
Koprükoy (January 1916)	Preserve the Caucasian frontier	Unsuccessful
Erzurum (February 1916)	Retain the Erzurum Fortress	Unsuccessful
Trabzon/Lazistan (March-April 1916)	Retain Lazistan	Unsuccessful
Bayburt/Erzincan (July 1916)	Retain Erzincan	Unsuccessful
Gaza Line (January-June 1917)	Retain Gaza	Successful
Baghdad (March 1917)	Retain Baghdad	Unsuccessful
Gaza/Beersheba (October 1917)	Preserve the Gaza Line	Unsuccessful
Megiddo (September 1918)	Retain central Palestine	Unsuccessful
<u>Defensive Campaigns of Expediency</u>		
Mesopotamia (1914-1915)	Retain the Shat al Arab	Unsuccessful
Hejaz-Arab Revolt (June 1916-October 1918)	Retain Medina & LOCs	Successful
Jerusalem (November-December 1917)	Retain Jerusalem	Unsuccessful
Jordan Valley (March-May 1918)	Preserve the Jordan River Line	Successful
Syria (September-October 1918)	Retain Syria/maintain force in being	Unsuccessful

German/Austrian Deliberate Offensive Campaigns

Romanian campaign (1916)	Seize the Dobruja	Successful
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German/Austrian Deliberate Defensive Campaigns

Galician campaign (1916)	Defend the Galicia sector	Successful
Macedonian campaign (1916-1917)	Preserve the Bulgarian front	Successful

Source: Author's compilation

Strategic Direction and the Concentration of Forces

The Ottomans made essentially five significant strategic decisions concentrating forces, which affected operational posture and campaign planning in the First World War.¹ The first decision actually occurred well before the outbreak of the war with the approval of the pre-war concentration plan in April 1914. In the second the Gallipoli invasion forced the Ottomans to reconcentrate their forces for defensive operations on the Gallipoli Peninsula. The following three decisions in 1916, 1917, and 1918 reconcentrated forces for offensive operations in the Caucasian, Mesopotamian/Palestine, and Trans-Caucasian/Caspian theatres, respectively.²

In terms of war and campaign planning, it is essential to examine the initial strategic situation before entering into a discussion of the Ottoman army's particular campaigns of the First World War. The empire entered the war under circumstances which remain contentious today and there were no clearly defined war aims.³ However, several historians have advanced the idea that a 5 August 1914 letter from Ottoman grand vizier Sait Halim to the German ambassador, Baron Hans von Wangenheim, stands as the best articulation of Ottoman war aims (rather than the Secret Treaty of Alliance signed two days previously with Germany). Sait Halim's letter demanded six conditions under which the empire would enter the war, these were: Germany would

¹ The concept of "strategic decision-making" also includes such things, for example, as decisions which affect alliance warfare, economic and industrial planning, balancing ends/ways/means, or resource allocations between services. In this context, I use the term narrowly to describe decisions concentrating major military forces for operational level combat operations.

² For the most comprehensive chronology of the Ottoman war effort see Kemal Ari, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı Kronolojisi* (AnGenelkurmay Basimevi, 1997).

³ Cemal Akbay, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Siyasi ve Askeri Hazırlıkları ve Harbe Girişi* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basimevi, 1991), pp. 75-6.

support the abrogation of the capitulations, Germany would support a division of war spoils with Bulgaria, Germany would not conclude peace until all territory occupied by the enemy was liberated, in the case of Greek intervention Germany would support the return of the Aegean islands, Germany would support a small border change in Caucasia, and Germany would procure appropriate reparations.⁴ Clearly such goals must be seen as limited objectives in a limited war setting rather than a larger and more total war of aggression. For the most part Sait Halim's demands must be seen as a restoration of some of the territory lost in the Russian and Balkan Wars of 1877 and 1912, economic recompense for great power intrusions, and compensation for the costs of past wars. Sait Halim's demands frame the initial war strategy of the Ottoman army which may be characterized as inherently defensive in nature and, moreover, set the empire against European great powers.

This geo-political decision conflicted significantly with the war plans of the Ottoman general staff which did not envision going to war against any of the great powers. The war plans themselves, written in the spring of 1914, established the Bulgarian and Greek frontier as the principal location to concentrate the army, while maintaining a strong supplementary defensive posture against the Russians.⁵ In fact, of thirteen Ottoman army corps available in 1914, the concentration plan moved six army corps to Thrace and the Constantinople area as an army of observation against Bulgaria. The three corps in the Caucasus were to be reinforced by the two army corps from Mesopotamia. The remaining two army corps remained in Palestine and Hejaz-Yemen respectively. Because war against Great Britain was an unthinkable possibility minimal combat forces remained in Mesopotamia and on the Sinai frontier. These forces once concentrated and after the imposition of the British blockade, became *de facto* strategic prisoners of the feeble railway system which could not move large forces rapidly from one end of the empire to another.⁶ Thus, the initial campaigns of the Ottoman army in

⁴ See Edward Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), pp. 26-7; and Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 114-6.

⁵ Fahri Belen, *Birinci Cihan Harbinde Türk Harbi 1914 Yili Hareketleri, I Cilt* (Ankara: Genelkurmany Basimevi, 1964), pp. 47-64. See also Erickson, *Ordered to Die*, pp. 37-47 for a comprehensive treatment of war planning and concentration of the army.

⁶ Belen, *Türk Harbi 1914 Hareketleri*, pp. 54-64, It is important to note that, after 1871, the railway systems of the major European powers were subsidized and planned to accommodate the mobilization of armies.

the First World War were an outcome of the concentration plan, which was designed against Bulgaria and hence nearly useless when confronted in a multi-front war by the armed, industrialized might of the British, French, and Russian empires.

In turn, facing full-scale war in the late fall of 1914, Ottoman war planners (led by assistant chief of the general staff German Colonel Friedrich Bronsart von Schellendorf) scrambling to accommodate the changing geo-political situation had but two realistic scenarios for possible campaigns. These were offensives in the Caucasus, using the nine infantry divisions of the Third Army, and an offensive from Palestine toward Egypt, using the infantry divisions of the VIII and XII Corps. In each case these conventional forces could be augmented by irregular forces, including tribal cavalry and volunteer units, which would add weight to the combat power of the conventional forces.⁷ At German instigation some thought was given to an amphibious operation which would land Ottoman forces on the Russian Black Sea coast but, in the end, this was disregarded because command of the sea could not be assured. Thus, the stage was set for the launching of two offensive campaigns in the winter of 1914/15. A further defensive campaign was imposed on the Ottoman military when Britain invaded Mesopotamia forcing the army into an unplanned defensive campaign there using local forces.

As the war progressed, there were four further changes in the strategic direction of the concentration of Ottoman forces. The first occurred, beginning in May 1915, as a result of the British invasion of the Gallipoli Peninsula. Initially the Ottoman Fifth Army was composed of six infantry divisions but, by the late summer, Enver reinforced the peninsula with over twenty infantry divisions. He accomplished this by shifting forces from other theatres of war to Gallipoli resulting in a disastrous defeat for the allies. However, as a result, a surplus of forces had built up in Thrace which became strategically redundant after the allies withdrew from the peninsula. Moreover, an alliance with Bulgaria further reduced the need to keep major forces near Constantinople. This situation in early 1916 provided Enver with a third strategic

The poverty-ridden Ottoman Empire could not afford this and, thus, its railways were built by entrepreneurs for economic reasons.

⁷ Edward Erickson, *Palestine: The Ottoman Campaigns of 1914-1918* (Barnsley, Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Books Ltd, 2016), pp. 12-20.

opportunity to reconcentrate the Ottoman army for decisive operations.⁸ In turn he decided to redeploy the Second Army to central Anatolia in order to launch an offensive campaign to recover the territory lost to the Russians over the disastrous winter of 1915/16.⁹ Moreover, Enver sent additional surplus infantry divisions to assist the Austro-German efforts in Galicia, Romania, and Macedonia.

In 1917, Enver, in consultation with his German partners, decided to form an army group in Syria with the objective of retaking Baghdad. This strategic decision resulted in the formation of the Yildirim Army Group near Aleppo and Damascus (also known to the Germans as Army Group F).¹⁰ However, because of the collapsing operational situation in Palestine, the army group was sent to the Gaza line for defensive purposes rather than to Mosul for offensive purposes.

In the late spring of 1918, Enver authorized a further change of strategic direction by launching offensive campaigns to retake the territory lost to the Russians in 1916 (the Trans-Caucasian campaign).¹¹ Enver then recognized a strategic opportunity in the summer of 1918 and ordered a full-blown campaign to conquer the entire Caucasus region (the Dagestan/Caspian campaign). Forces sufficient for the undertaking of these campaigns were immediately available and the redeployment of additional forces was unnecessary.

An Overview of the Ottoman Campaigns¹²

Of the fourteen offensive campaigns waged by the Ottoman army in the First World War, seven were deliberate campaigns and seven were campaigns of

⁸ Mesut Uyar and Edward Erickson, *Military History of the Ottomans From Osman to Atatürk* (Santa Barbara, Calif: Praeger Security International, 2009), p. 264.

⁹ İsmet Görgülü, *On Yıllık Harbin Kadrosu 1912-1922, Balkan-Birinci Dünya ve İstiklal Harbi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurum Basımevi, 1993), pp. 101-3.

¹⁰ Fahri Belen, *Birinci Cihan Harbinde Türk Harbi 1917 Yılı Hareketleri, IV Cilt* (Ankara: Genelkurmany Basımevi, 1966), pp. 113-123.

¹¹ Fahri Belen, *Birinci Cihan Harbinde Türk Harbi 1918 Yılı Hareketleri, V Cilt* (Ankara: Genelkurmany Basımevi, 1967), pp. 149-155.

¹² Unlike the official British or American historical designations of campaigns, i.e. the Somme campaign or the Meuse-Argonne campaign, nowhere do similar judgements appear in the Turkish histories. The author is a specialist in the history of the Ottoman army in the late imperial period and the designations of Ottoman campaigns in this article are his judgements.

opportunity. Deliberate campaigns are planned in advance through a staff plan which is derived from the conceptual design of the commander. The plan tasks subordinate commanders with missions and/or objectives and the resources needed are allocated (such as units, ammunition, and supplies, and where to employ them) and moved to staging areas. Once there, rehearsals of the attack are scheduled and conducted and, often, timelines are assigned for the seizure of sequential objectives. On the other hand, campaigns of opportunity present themselves unexpectedly and are essentially “come as you are” operations. They become possible based on a window of opportunity caused by factors such as an absence of enemy forces, the passing of the initiative, or the ability to achieve surprise.

The Ottoman army’s deliberate offensive campaigns include Sarıkamış (December 1914-January 1915), First Suez (February 1915), Tortum/Malazgirt (June-July 1915), Elişkirt Valley (August 1915), Second Army (August-September 1916), Second Persian (May-June 1916), and Second Suez (July-August 1916). Its offensive campaigns of opportunity include First Persian (January 1915), Armenian Rebellion (April-November 1915), Libya (1915-1918), Encirclement of Kut (November 1915-April 1916), Çoruh (June-July 1916), Trans-Caucasian (February-May 1918), and Dagestan/Caspian (June-November 1918).

There were eighteen defensive campaigns waged by the Ottoman army in the First World War of which thirteen may be characterized as deliberate campaigns and five as campaigns of expediency. Deliberate defensive campaigns are those where time and resources allow the commander to plan an arrangement of forces intended to hold ground for some defined period of time. On the other hand, when battles are forced on a commander before he has time and resources to plan operations in a deliberative manner, the author characterizes this situation as a defensive campaign of expediency. These are the defensive equivalent to offensive campaigns of opportunity.

The Ottoman army’s deliberate defensive campaigns include Asir (1914-1918), Yemen (1914-1918), the Northeast Frontiers (November 1914), Gallipoli (February 1915-January 1916), Kut/Ctesiphon (September-November 1915), Koprukoy (January 1916), Erzurum (February 1916), Trabzon/Lazistan (March-April 1916), Bayburt/Erzincan (July 1916), Gaza Line (January-June 1917), Baghdad (March 1917), Gaza/Beersheba (October 1917), and Megiddo (September 1918). Its defensive campaigns of expediency include

Mesopotamia (1914-1915), the Hejaz-Arab Revolt (June 1916-October 1918), Jerusalem (November-December 1917), Jordan Valley (March-May 1918), and Syria (September-October 1918).

Additionally, the Ottoman army also participated in three European eastern front campaigns, planned, and executed by the German army. Two of these operations were deliberate defensive campaigns, the Galician campaign (1916) and the Macedonian campaign (1916-1917). The Ottoman army also participated in the Romanian campaign (1916), which was an offensive campaign of opportunity. In all three cases the Ottoman army's level of participation was a single army corps of two or three infantry divisions. While these operations were not truly Ottoman campaigns the operations of the army corps involved provide additional evidence which showcases an Ottoman approach of war.

Deliberate Offensive Campaigns - Sarıkamış and First Suez

Because of its disastrous outcome in the snows of Caucasia the Sarıkamış campaign has long been criticized as a hopelessly fatal endeavour from the onset. In fact, nothing could be farther from reality. The origins of the Ottoman campaign began with the brilliant German battles of annihilation against the Russians known as Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes in August and September 1914. In these East Prussian battles smaller German forces boldly manoeuvre to encircle two Russian armies. Shortly after encirclement Russian command and control collapsed leading to mass surrenders. Enver Pasha, then Ottoman Minister of War, studied these campaigns and came to the conclusion that Russian armies were inherently weak in command arrangements and catastrophically vulnerable to encirclement.¹³ With this in mind at the outbreak of war in November 1914, Enver envisioned such a campaign of encirclement in the Third Army's area of operations.

The Ottoman Third Army composed three army corps each of three infantry divisions; additionally, the army had a small cavalry division assigned as well. Enver's plan employed the XI Corps and the 2nd Cavalry Division to fix Russian General

¹³ Hakki Altınbilek and Naci Kir, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi Kafkas Cephesi, 3ncü Ordu Harekâtı Cilt I İkinci Kitap* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1993). , pp. 347-357.

Nikolai Yudenich's Caucasus Army along the front while the Ottoman IX and X Corps executed a single envelopment to cut the Russian lines of communications. The plan, which proceeded in late December in harsh winter conditions, was based on surprise and manoeuvre to place three Ottoman infantry divisions astride the road at the key town of Sarıkamış.¹⁴ Holding this key location cut the Russian supply lines from their front-line units to their logistical hub at Kars. Enver designed the campaign to achieve the strategic goal of removing the Russian threat to eastern Anatolia.

Despite the freezing weather, Enver's soldiers marched 75 kilometres in three days and seized most of Sarıkamış on schedule. However, unlike the Russian commanders in East Prussia, General Yudenich did not panic and rushed reinforcements to the town just in time to thwart Enver's design.¹⁵ Then Yudenich counter attacked and, rather than trapping the Russians, the Ottomans were themselves trapped as Enver's offensive collapsed. In the dramatic retreat the Ottoman IX Corps was completely destroyed, and the X Corps rendered combat ineffective.¹⁶ Enver's basic assumptions about Russian command and control proved fatally flawed and Yudenich's steady and tight management ensured the Ottoman defeat. We might consider not the failure but how close the plan came to victory.

At the same time that Enver was planning the Sarıkamış campaign, Cemal Pasha in Palestine was planning the First Suez campaign. Cemal's plan envisioned marching a reinforced army corps across the waterless Sinai Peninsula to seize a bridgehead across the Suez Canal. Cemal assumed this success would demonstrate the weakness of the British army and trigger a large-scale revolt among the disaffected Egyptian population.¹⁷ Cemal's campaign plan was based on manoeuvre, simplicity, and clarity of objective, which would serve the strategic purpose of cutting Britain's sea lines of communications to India.

¹⁴ Fahri Belen, *Birinci Cihan Harbinde Türk Harbi 1915 Yılı Hareketleri, II Cilt* (Ankara: Genelkurmany Basımevi, 1965), pp. 90-8; Michael Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 124-5.

¹⁵ Altınbilek and Kir, *3ncü Ordu Harekâtı I*, pp. 454-508.

¹⁶ W.E.D. Allen and Paul Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields, A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border 1828-1921*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), pp. 276-285.

¹⁷ Yahya Okçu and Hilmi Üstünsoy, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi IVnü Cilt, 1nci Kısım, Sina-Filistin Cephesi, Harbin Başlangıcından İkinci Gazze Muharebeleri Sonuna Kadar* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1979), pp. 167-177.

Cemal began detailed planning of his offensive in December 1914 using the three infantry divisions of the VIII Army Corps. This corps was one of two army corps available to Cemal, but he also had coastal and internal defensive responsibilities which prevented him from using his entire army. Cemal supported the VIII Corps with Arab irregulars and an infantry division from Medina.¹⁸ Importantly, the Ottoman Special Organization (*Teşkilatı-Mahsusa*) secretly sent agents into Egypt to prepare the rebellion by inflaming a pre-existing dissident base. Cemal envisioned that breaching the canal defences in coordination with a rising of the Egyptian revolutionary committees would create impossible conditions for the British garrison. This would then lead to a British withdrawal from Egypt, a goal that was under any circumstances wildly optimistic.

In mid-January 1915, the VIII Corps began to move east from Gaza arriving on the canal south of Ismailia at the end of the month. The three-pronged multi-echeloned manoeuvre across the Sinai was remarkable because of careful logistical planning and support, which enabled three infantry divisions to reach the Suez Canal in condition to fight. Cemal hoped to surprise the British garrison tactically at the canal and strategically with a country-wide rebellion. Arriving at the canal, Cemal launched a daring night amphibious crossing of the canal on 2/3 February against alert and ready British defences which had been forewarned by aerial reconnaissance. Cemal's assault ended in a disastrous repulse and the nearly absolute destruction of the assault force. At that point, Cemal's accompanying Special Organization officers informed him that the hoped-for rebellion had failed to ignite.¹⁹ Without the support of the Egyptian population, Cemal had no choice but to cancel his offensive and retreat (in fact the British had learned of the plot and already rounded up many of the revolutionary leaders).

Both the Sarıkamış and First Suez campaigns were deliberately planned although they used the at-hand resources already available in theatre.²⁰ There was great clarity in the selection of the objectives and, in both cases, the mobility of the Ottoman infantry enabled the army corps to reach their attack positions and nearly their operational

¹⁸ Görgülü, *On Yıllık Harbin Kadrosu*, p. 138.

¹⁹ Okçu and Üstünsoy, *Sina-Filistin Cephesi*, pp. 211-221.

²⁰ Necmi Koral et al., *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi Osmanlı Devri Birinci Dünya Harbi İdari Faaliyetler ve Lojistik*, *Xncu Cilt* (Ankara, Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1985), pp. 153-203.

objectives. However, in each case the operational assumptions about the enemy and the situation proved badly flawed. When the assumptions proved wrong neither Enver nor Cemal had any kind of fall-back plans (which today are called branch plans or sequels) to manage the failure. Cemal's army, which was not pursued or trapped by its enemy, retreated intact while the Third Army lost over 40,000 men. In comparison it may be useful to consider that no combatant army's offensive campaigns succeeded in 1914 or 1915.

Offensive Campaigns of Opportunity - Kut al Amara and Dagestan/Caspian

In the fall of 1915, a small Anglo-Indian army, led by Major General Charles Townshend, approached Baghdad on the Tigris River in Mesopotamia. Townshend was opposed by Nurettin Pasha whose army composed the XIII and XVIII Corps. Nurettin task organized his two corps into a solidly entrenched defensive line and defeated Townshend's attack on 22 November at the Battle of Ctesiphon. Townshend pulled out three days later and began a retreat south along the Tigris River. He expected that Nurettin would stand fast in his works.

Nurettin, however, immediately reorganized his forces by assigning his three most effective infantry divisions and his cavalry brigade to the XVIII Corps to form a *corps de'chasse*.²¹ Nurettin, although not a trained Ottoman General Staff officer, was an aggressive commander who had come up in an army steeped in doctrines of the decisive encirclement battle.²² As Townshend retreated downstream to Aziziya, Nurettin launched a vigorous pursuit and attempted to encircle him.²³ Townshend's army narrowly escaped and retreated to Umm at Tabul where Nurettin again almost encircled him. Townsend escaped once more before retreating into the town of Kut al Amara. Nurettin besieged him there but he also sent forces eighty kilometres east along the Tigris River to block British relief forces. The remarkable mobility and rapidity of Nurettin's XVIII Corps encirclement operations shocked Townshend to the extent that

²¹ Görgülü, *On Yıllık Harbin Kadrosu*, pp. 157, 163-4.

²² Necati Ökse, Nusret Baycan and Salih Sakaryalı, *Türk İstiklal Harbi'ne Kalılan Tümen ve Daha Üst Kademelerdeki Komutanların Biyografileri* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1989), pp. 29-31.

²³ Behzat Balkış and Nezihî Fırat, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi III'ncü Cilt, Irak-İran Cephesi 1914-1918, 1'inci Kısım* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1979), pp. 407-421.

he decided to remain in Kut for a relief that never arrived. After a number of failed relief efforts by the Tigris Corps Townshend surrendered his starving army on 29 April 1916.

Of note, in the months before Townshend's surrender Nurettin was replaced by Enver's uncle Halil Pasha and Nurettin never received proper credit for his victory.²⁴ However, he remained in the nationalist army after the First World War and rose to the position of lieutenant general commanding the First Army. In this position, Nurettin's army executed Mustafa Kemal's operational encirclement and annihilation of the Greek army in late August 1922, which resulted in the destruction of two Greek army corps. Nurettin's army then pursued the collapsing Greeks in a campaign that ended at Izmir (Smyrna) in a complete victory.²⁵

The collapse of the Russian army in 1917 (brought about by revolution) created a strategic opportunity in Caucasia which Enver was quick to exploit. Launching the Third Army (composed of three army corps), under Major General Vehip Pasha, in February 1918, the Ottomans rapidly reconquered territory lost in 1916.²⁶ Vehip formed the provisional Yakup Şevki Pasha Group in what might be termed today "an operational manoeuvre group" composed of the 1st Caucasian Corps and the 5th Caucasian Infantry Division.²⁷ Vehip sent the group straight towards Kars and kept it moving until the 1877 frontier was restored. By May 1918, the Şevki Pasha Group was within fifty kilometres of Tiflis. Sensing strategic opportunity Enver decided in June 1918 to launch an *ad hoc* offensive campaign to conquer Dagestan/Caspian.

To accomplish this ambitious undertaking, Enver formed the Eastern Army Group under the command of his uncle Halil Pasha.²⁸ Enver relieved Vehip and turned over command of the Third Army to Esat Pasha (Vehip's brother and who had commanded ably at Gallipoli in 1915). Enver then formed a new Ninth Army from the

²⁴ Fahri Belen, *Birinci Cihan Harbinde Türk Harbi 1916 Yili Hareketleri, III Cilt* (Ankara: Genelkurmany Basimevi, 1966), p. 129.

²⁵ Edward Erickson, *Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Leadership-Strategy-Conflict* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2013), pp. 43-7.

²⁶ Hakki Altınbilek and Naci Kir, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi Kafkas Cephesi, 3ncü Ordu Harekâtı Cilt II İkinci Kitap* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basimevi, 1993), pp. 443-450.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 477.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 525-7.

nucleus of the group commanded by Yakup Şevki Pasha and retained him in command. Enver ordered the Third Army to take Baku on the Caspian Sea and the Ninth Army to move into northern Persia. In a three-week campaign, the Third Army marched three hundred kilometres to besiege Baku while the Ninth Army marched a longer distance to take Sekiz and Mayene in Persia.²⁹ In late July, Enver reorganized his forces by activating the two-division Army of Islam, which finished the conquest of Baku and marched north toward Derbent. The armistice brought these aggressive and successful operations to a halt.

Offensive Counterinsurgency Campaign of Opportunity - The Armenian Rebellion³⁰

In the spring of 1915, the Ottoman intelligences services and the government believed that a rebellion instigated by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and supported by Russia and Britain was about to explode in eastern Anatolia.³¹ The Ottoman general staff viewed this as an existential threat to the logistics posture of the Ottoman Third and Fourth Armies because the Ottoman Armenian population lived astride the lines of communications.³² Incidents of terrorism and rebellion rose and threatened to interdict vital supply lines. In April, the Armenian committees seized the city of Van and were relieved by the Russian army and expatriate Armenian legions. The loss of Van combined with the British landings at Gallipoli propelled the general staff to take action against the Armenian committees. At this point in the war almost the entire Ottoman field army was deployed on active fronts leaving no combat forces in the interior to deal with rebellion. Absent the empire's traditional means to deal with rebellion (sending in large-scale army units to crush the rebellion) the general staff

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 551-593.

³⁰ Because of the heavily politicized literature and opinions regarding what is called the Armenian genocide, this assessment of the 1915 Ottoman Armenian relocations as a military campaign is very controversial. I believe that it is critical to separate the 1915 relocations of Ottoman Armenians from the counter-Armenian operations of 1918-1921. Readers interested in a detailed understanding of these arguments should refer to Edward Erickson, *Ottomans and Armenians, A Study in Counterinsurgency* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 161-229.

³¹ Maxine Gauin, "Strategic threats and hesitations: The Operations And Projects of Landing In Cilicia And The Ottoman Armenians (1914-1917)," pp. 19-20 *Yüzyıllarda, Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri Sempozyumu* (Istanbul: Uluslararası Sempozyum, 2015), pp. 1003-4.

³² Altınbilek and Kir, *3ncü Ordu Harekâtı I*, pp. 590-2.

planned a campaign of population removal similar to those conducted by Spain in Cuba, the United States in the Philippines, and Britain in the Boer republics.

The ministry of the interior, in conjunction with the general staff, issued orders to remove the entire Ottoman Armenian population of six eastern Anatolian provinces, regardless of their affiliation with or support of the Armenian revolutionary committees, to camps far away from the critical lines of communications.³³ In principle a friendly local population enabled rebels and guerrillas to hide and to be supported with arms and food. While this was being accomplished, the Ottoman army raised new forces which were directed into the provinces to deal with the remaining rebels. By June, the relocations were in full swing and, over the summer and fall, the few available Ottoman army units in Anatolia eliminated the remaining Armenian military committees. The campaign ended in the late fall of 1915 with the relocation of about 350,000 Ottoman Armenians and the total defeat of the rebels.³⁴ The military victory was not without cost as thousands of innocent Ottoman Armenian citizens were killed in what has come to be known as the Armenian genocide.

Offensive Irregular Campaign of Opportunity - The Senussi in Libya

The Ottoman Empire had lost its two provinces in what is now Libya to the Italians in the Italo-Ottoman war of 1911-12. In that war, Ottoman officers, including Enver and Mustafa Kemal, led Senussi in an irregular guerrilla campaign against the Italian enclaves along the Mediterranean littorals. The Treaty of Ouchy in October 1912 ended the war giving the Libyan provinces as well as the Dodecanese Islands to Italy. As the world turned in 1913-1914, the Ottoman military retained its contacts with the Senussi leadership and, in late 1914, the Ottoman general staff decided to encourage the Senussi to action. Several Ottoman officers, including Nuri Bey and Jafar el Askeri, were dispatched to Libya with the intention of encouraging the Senussi to attack the British in Egypt.³⁵

³³ Message from the Directorate of Security, Ministry of the Interior to Fourth Army, 23 May 1915.

BOADH, File 53/94 reproduced in Ozdemir and Sarıncay, *Türk-Ermeni İhtilafı Belgeleri*, Document 12.

³⁴ Erickson, *Ottomans and Armenians*, pp. 183-211.

³⁵ Ahmet Tetik, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa (Umur-ı Şarkıyye Dairesi) Tarihi, Cilt 1: 1914-1916* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2014), pp. 107-157.

Although Italy did not enter the war against the Ottomans until May 1915, Senussi operations in early 1915 attacked isolated garrisons. In November 1915, a Senussi force advanced across the Egyptian frontier seizing Sollum and attacking Sidi Barrini.³⁶ The Senussi force, led by the Grand Senussi Sayed Ahmed accompanied by Nuri and Jefar, was composed of several thousand irregular tribesmen, of who about 400 were regulars trained by Jefar.³⁷ Taking Sidi Barrini, the Senussi advanced on Christmas to encircle Mersa Matruh but effective British counter moves prevented the Senussi from taking the town. Combat renewed in January 1916 with further unsuccessful attempts by the Senussi to encircle the British. Undaunted by this setback, Nuri seized the oasis town of Siwa in February and then launched a raid deep into southern Egypt. However, the British were determined to end this threat and, in late spring 1916, the British pushed the Senussi back to Bir Hakim (south of Tobruk). By summer they had pushed the Senussi back across the frontier and ended the western threat to Egypt. The Senussi then began an irregular guerrilla campaign against the Italians, who were now at war with the Ottoman Empire as well, and minor operations continued until the end of the war.

Deliberate Offensive Operation - The Romanian Campaign

Although not an Ottoman campaign, the tactical operations of the Brigadier General Mustafa Hilmi's VI Corps in Romania during the Austro-German summer 1916 offensive are worthy of consideration. Hilmi's corps of two first class infantry divisions were assigned to German Field Marshal August von Mackensen's Danube Army and participated in an offensive campaign of opportunity.³⁸ The highly mobile VI Corps was so successful that von Mackensen requested and received a third infantry division from Enver's strategic reserve. Von Mackensen's successful campaign was characterized by long hard marches of hundreds of kilometres punctuated by intense battles that took the VI Corps to the Russian frontier. The VI Corps' performance again showcased the

³⁶ Şükrü Erkal, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi Vİnci, Hicaz, Asir, Yemen Cepheleeri ve Libya Harekâtı 1914-1918* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1978), pp. 627-641.

³⁷ George McMunn and Cyril Falls, *Military Operations Egypt and Palestine, From the Outbreak of war with Germany to June 1917* (London: HMSO, 1928), pp. 103-5.

³⁸ Gülhan Barlas, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi Avrupa Cephesi (Özet)* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1996), pp. 90-206 and Görgülü, *On Yıllık Harbin Kadrosu*, pp. 175-195.

capability of the Ottoman army to conduct mobile operations in a fluid tactical environment.

Deliberate Defensive Campaign - Gallipoli³⁹

Ottoman planning for the Gallipoli campaign began in the fall of 1912 when the Greek navy threatened the peninsula with an amphibious assault.⁴⁰ The plan remained dormant through 1913 and the dangerous summer of 1914 when the Ottoman army mobilized and implemented the defensive plan and reinforced the peninsula. By the spring of 1915, III Corps stood ready on the peninsula and the recently activated XV Corps garrisoned the Asian shores. In late March, the Ottoman general staff activated the Fifth Army with German General Otto Liman von Sanders in command of the defences of the Dardanelles. Liman von Sanders adapted some aspects of the two-and-a-half-year-old defensive plan but left it conceptually intact. The original defensive plan relied on superior situational awareness which enabled the Ottoman commanders to release their reserves decisively and then move rapidly to counter the landings. Liman von Sanders moved some of the reserve units closer to the beaches but largely left the plan as it had been written.⁴¹

The unchanging cornerstones of the defensive plan for the defences of the Dardanelles were vigorous and rapid tactical level counterattacks. These counterattacks would be launched in battalion or regimental strength and were designed to force the invaders back into the sea or, in the worst case, to limit their beachheads to a very small area. To accomplish this, very small forces screened the beaches themselves while the bulk of the combat strength was positioned inland in protected locations.⁴² Ottoman

³⁹ Although the extant Gallipoli literature in English is vast, it is not relevant to an identification of the Ottoman campaign. Suffice it to say that the British conducted three sequential Gallipoli campaigns—the naval campaign, the amphibious campaign, and the August breakout campaign.

⁴⁰ Hikmet Süer, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, Balkan Harbi (1912-1913), II Cilt, 2nci Kısım, 1nci Kitap, Şark Ordusu, İkinci Çatalca Muharebesi ve Şarkoy Çikmarması* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1993), pp. 135-142.

⁴¹ Muhterem Saral, Alpaslan Orhon and Şükü Erkal, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi Vncü Cilt, Çanakkale Cephesi Harekati İnci Kitap (Haziran 1914-Nisan 1915)* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1993), pp. 246-253.

⁴² Remzi Yiğitgüden, Muhterem Saral and Reşat Hallı, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi Vnci Cilt, Çanakkale Cephesi Harekati (Amfibi Harekat)* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1979), pp. 12-29.

commanders at every level refined the plans continuously and, over the winter and spring of 1915, constantly rehearsed the counterattacks and artillery fire plans. On 25 April 1915, the allied Mediterranean Expeditionary Force landed at two locations on the Gallipoli peninsula and in Asia. Fifth Army infantry battalions and regiments immediately launched counterattacks, the most famous of which was Mustafa Kemal's 57th Infantry Regiment which stopped the Australian landing at ANZAC Cove. Similarly, vigorous, but less well-known, counterattacks halted the allied main effort at Cape Helles while other efforts cordoned off the French diversionary landing in Asia. Although the allies were not pushed back into the sea their campaign devolved into a series of unsuccessful trench warfare battles which ultimately failed.

In the second phase of the British campaign, known as the ANZAC Breakout Campaign (but sometimes erroneously called Suvla Bay); the Fifth Army successfully countered the British offensive by rapidly concentrating reserves.⁴³ Mustafa Kemal is sometimes credited with this but, in fact, Fifth Army and corps-level commanders had previously made the critical decisions early enough to influence the outcome in their favour. Part of the Ottoman success at Gallipoli must also go to the army's capability to cross attach regiment and to create *ad hoc* provisional groupings of forces and then to follow this up with the formal activation of combat groups.⁴⁴

Deliberate Defensive Campaign - The Gaza Line

In the spring of 1917, Cemal Pasha's Fourth Army had constructed a short, entrenched position in front of the town of Gaza on the Sinai frontier. Cemal was expecting a British attack and tasked German Major General Friedrich Kress von Kressenstein with planning the defences. Von Kress developed a plan for his small Ottoman Army in which he created *ad hoc* provisional task forces built around trusted subordinates for various tactical tasks.⁴⁵ Of note von Kress added infantry to the

⁴³ İrfan Tekşüt and Necati Ökse, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi Osmanlı Devri Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi Vnci Cilt 3ncü Kitap, Çanakkale Cephesi Harekati (Haziran 1915-Ocak 1916)* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1980), pp. 301-379.

⁴⁴ Edward Erickson, *Gallipoli, The Ottoman Campaign*. Barnsley, Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Books, Ltd, 2010, pp. 90-1, 136-8, 182-3.

⁴⁵ Belen, *Türk Harbi 1917 Hareketleri*, pp. 104-119.

Colonel Esat's 3rd Cavalry Division thereby creating a highly mobile combined arms task force. According to von Kress' plan he would lure the attacking British Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) deep inside his lines while holding Gaza. At a culminating point, von Kress planned to launch enveloping counterattacks to encircle and annihilate the British.⁴⁶ On 27 March 1917 the British attack began, and von Kress drew them northward as planned. In mid-afternoon he launched his small but highly mobile divisional task forces against the British army's exposed right flank. The British commanders recognized their acute vulnerability and began a withdrawal. Von Kress was unable to trap his enemy, but his plan did save the town of Gaza and restored the line.

Von Kress planned a defensive campaign which hinged on the mobility of his Ottoman army divisions. In a very fluid situation, his subordinate commanders had to be capable of rapid action as well as be decisive decision-makers. In this campaign they proved more than capable to the task and the Fourth Army came close to inflicting a disastrous defeat on the British.

Defensive Campaign of Expediency - The Jordan Valley

After General Sir Edmund Allenby cracked the Gaza line in October 1917, the EEF conducted a pursuit which ended in the seizure of Jerusalem. Later in 1918, Allenby decided to conduct offensive operations from the Goraniye bridgehead on the Jordan River in order to seize Amman. He opened his first offensive on 21 March 1918 which made progress toward Es Salt. Goraniye lay within Brigadier General Cemal (Mersinli) Pasha's Fourth Army's sector which held the river with the VIII Corps. The Ottoman corps commander was Colonel Ali Fuat (Erdem) who very rapidly formed provisional combat groups from Lieutenant Colonel Asim's 48th Infantry Division and several assault companies and battalions.⁴⁷ These combat groups counterattacked Allenby's forces and pushed them back into their original bridgehead.

Allenby launched a second attempt to take Amman on 30 April and Ali Fuat responded once again by forming a provisional combat group under Asim. The army

⁴⁶ Okçu and Üstünsoy, *Sina-Filistin Cephesi I*, pp. 600-647.

⁴⁷ Görgülü, *On Yıllık Harbin Kadrosu*, pp. 150-2

group chief of staff, Colonel Kazım, was present at Ali Fuat's headquarters (for a conference) and assisted in organizing the defences. Based on Kazım's advice the army group commander, Liman von Sanders, ordered the adjacent Seventh Army to send forces to assist Cemal's Fourth Army. On 1 May, Cemal ordered the XX Corps to send Colonel Esat's 3rd Cavalry Division which immediately crossed the Jordan toward Es Salt. In a series of brilliantly coordinated manoeuvres, Esat and Asım moved their forces to threaten the vulnerable British left flank. These rapid movements of the highly mobile Ottoman cavalry and assault detachments enabled the Fourth Army to force the British to retreat.

Defensive Campaigns of Expediency - Megiddo and Syria

By the summer of 1918, the strategic and operational initiative in Palestine has swung heavily in Britain's favour not the least reason being the arrival of General Sir Edmund Allenby as the commander of the EEF. Allenby planned a breakthrough of the Ottoman lines followed by a deep envelopment by cavalry divisions in order to encircle and trap Liman von Sanders' army group. Liman von Sanders had taken of command of the Ottoman armies in Palestine and Syria in February 1918 and had fought the British to a standstill over the spring, however, by the fall his weakened and starving armies were in very poor logistical condition.

Liman von Sanders deployed the Eighth, Seventh, and Fourth Armies, which were all less than a normal army corps in strength, in a linear defence from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. At this point in the war, the Ottoman army in Palestine was reduced to a static stationary condition because of an inability to provide draft animals and forage to the army.⁴⁸ Nevertheless the army group prepared a deliberate positional defence that was paper thin with no substantial reserves available for counterattacks. It was a hopeless operational and tactical position because Allenby enjoyed a large superiority in infantry, cavalry, artillery, and in the air. Liman von Sanders' defensive plan relied exclusively on the ability of Ottoman front line

⁴⁸ Merhum Kâmil Onalp et al., *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi IVnü Cilt, 2nci Kısım, Sina-Filistin Cephesi, İkinci Gazze Muharebesi Sonundan Mütarekesi'ne Kadar Yapılan Harekât (21 Nisan 1917-30 Ekim 1918)* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1986), pp. 600-613, 752-753.

infantrymen to hold their lines.⁴⁹ At daybreak on 19 September 1918, Allenby unleashed his long-awaited offensive which concentrated 24,000 Anglo-Indian infantrymen against 3,000 poorly supported and starving Ottoman soldiers. Allenby followed a mid-morning breakthrough with a three-division cavalry exploitation that shattered Ottoman resistance. Liman von Sanders barely escaped capture and the Ottoman Eighth Army was almost entirely destroyed.

Of note, Seventh Army commander Brigadier General Mustafa Kemal's calm steady hand intervened to save his army from a similar fate as the Eighth Army. Kemal pulled his army back just in time by sending the 3rd Cavalry Division and assault troop battalions north to block Allenby's cavalry from completing the British encirclement. Kemal held a key road junction open until the very last moment enabling his army to withdraw behind the Jordan River.

The deliberate defensive plan for the defences of Palestine was a complete failure mainly because of the absence of mobile tactical and operational reserves. However, the army group's collapse led to a defensive campaign of expediency through Syria. As Allenby's overwhelmingly powerful cavalry corps attempted a classic exploitation and pursuit, Mustafa Kemal and his corps commanders once again displayed the remarkable tactical agility that was still present in some formations at this late stage of the war. The withdrawal of a beaten army under pressure from a more mobile and powerful enemy is considered to be one of the most difficult of all military operations. In few cases does the defeated army survive this ordeal.

Liman von Sanders and Mustafa Kemal repeatedly withdrew their diminishing forces under intense British pressure by leaving small detachments in contact. These detachments were most often composed of Kemal's constantly decreasing cavalry squadrons and his small number of assault troop companies. The conduct of such operations depended on effective command and control which placed enormous trust in subordinate commanders to make timely decisions in the absence of guidance. These tactics delayed Allenby's cavalry over and over and allowed the main Ottoman forces to retreat and regroup. The step-by-step retreat of Liman von Sanders's army group was a remarkable achievement. At the armistice, Kemal's Seventh Army remained

⁴⁹ Belen, *Türk Harbi 1918 Hareketleri*, pp. 60-75.

organizationally intact and was digging in for a final defence of the Anatolian heartland.

Defensive Counterinsurgency Campaign of Expediency - The Hejaz-Arab Revolt

In the summer of 1916, what has come to be called “The Arab Revolt” broke out in Mecca and the eastern Arabian Peninsula. Like the Russian-inspired Armenian Rebellion the British instigated the Arabs to revolt by promising them independence and gold. Famously Colonel TE Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) assisted the Arabs. However, unlike the Ottoman Armenians in eastern Anatolia, the Arabs did not live in an area of vital strategic or operational importance to the conduct of the war. In fact, the Ottoman provinces in Arabia and Yemen were a strategic liability of small military value. As a consequence, the Ottoman general staff waged a minimalist defensive campaign of expediency against the Arabs.⁵⁰

Most of the Arab effort until October 1918 involved the cutting of the Hejaz railway (which connected Amman with Medina) to which the Ottomans reacted by limiting their response to damage control and repairs.⁵¹ Although highly publicized in the west the Arab Revolt was a minor operational problem which the Ottomans were able to easily contain with few resources. In October 1918, the Arabs captured Damascus, but this occurred as Liman von Sander’s army group was in the process of abandoning the city in the withdrawal from Syria. British military histories credit the Arab Revolt with siphoning off Ottoman manpower from the main front in Palestine, however, this is untrue.

⁵⁰ Edward Erickson, “Wasp or Mosquito? The Arab Revolt in Turkish Military History,” *British Journal for Military History* 4, Issue 3 (July 2018): pp. 1-16.

⁵¹ Şükrü Erkal, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Türk Harbi VInci, Hicaz, Asir, Yemen Cepheleleri ve Libya Harekâtı 1914-1918* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1978), pp. 341-347.

The Offensive Campaigns and Operations, An Assessment

The Sarıkamış, Libya, First Suez, Elişkirt Valley, Second Army, Çoruh, Second Persian, and Second Suez campaigns ended in failure while the First Persian, Tortum/Malazgirt, Encirclement of Kut, Armenian Rebellion, Trans-Caucasian, and Dagestan/Caspian campaigns were successful.

The principal operational signature of the Ottoman army's offensive operations was its capability to manoeuvre. Whether the campaigns were deliberately planned or were campaigns of opportunity, the army's ability concentrate forces rapidly and move them to decisive points was a critical capability. We do not today associate this capability with the conventional literature about the Ottoman army in the First World War, which tends to present the army as slothful and inept. However, the capability to manoeuvre is not synonymous with mobility and is a function of higher-level command and control. At the tactical level, the army's ability to march rapidly and attack gave Ottoman commanders an edge in mobility over their opponents. This was a definite advantage in combat.

Operational and tactical commanders in the Ottoman field armies executed combat operations in a decentralized mode which enabled rapid decision making. This approach to war is accurately described as maneuverist and we might add opportunistic as well. In truth, many Ottoman commanders seemed to perform more effectively when, to use a German army phrase, they operated under conditions of "loose reins" rather than "tight reins."⁵² This was an important consideration in understanding why the Ottoman army was far more successful in its offensive campaigns of opportunity.

The Defensive Campaigns, An Assessment

The Asir, Yemen, Northeast Frontiers, Gallipoli, Kut/Ctesiphon, Gaza Line, Jordan Valley, and Hejaz-Arab Revolt campaigns ended successfully while the Koprukoy, Mesopotamia, Erzurum, Trabzon/Lazistan, Bayburt/Erzincan, Baghdad,

⁵² Daniel J. Hughes and Richard DiNardo, *Imperial Germany and War, 1871-1918*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2018), pp. 66-72.

Gaza/Beersheba, Jerusalem, Megiddo, and Syria campaigns ended in failure. However, a case can be made that, because the Seventh Army was not destroyed, the Syrian campaign ended on the best terms possible.

Unlike its European counterparts the Ottoman army could not rely on weapons and machines produced by an industrial society nor could it rely on technological innovations produced by an educated and cohesive population. Without the vast amounts of armaments and equipment which characterized the armies of the First World War the Ottomans could not wage a war of material (*materialschlacht*). Instead, the Ottoman army was forced to rely on its human capital - especially its small but highly trained cadre of general staff officers. In doing so the Ottoman army maximized freedom of action based on the initiative and decision-making skills of its operational level commanders. As a result of these factors, the Ottoman army was more successful in defensive campaigns of expediency than in its deliberately planned defensive campaigns.

The operational and tactical signatures of the Ottoman defensive campaigns were mobility and the initiative of commanders. The British were perpetually confounded by the capability of Ottoman commanders to place troops at the decisive points. As a matter of record it was not until late in 1917 that the British, abundantly supplied with men, armaments, and logistics, were able to take ground from determined Ottoman defenders. This was then only possible because of the generalized loss of mobility of the Ottoman army caused by inadequate logistics.

Conclusion

The Ottoman army conducted thirty-two campaigns in the First World War and participated in three additional German/Austrian campaigns in Europe. Table 1 shows a comprehensive list of these campaigns. Of these (and including the German/Austrian campaigns) the Ottoman army was successful in achieving its operational objectives in seventeen of thirty-five cases or 49 percent of the time. Given our generally held dismal western views about the quality and capability of the Ottoman army in the First World War this calculation may seem surprising to many readers. Without conducting a complete analysis, I believe that the Ottoman record is comparable to that of Britain and

France and better than of Russia and Italy. The Ottoman army was especially successful in conducting offensive campaigns of opportunity and partially successful in conducting defensive campaigns of expediency both of which depended on opportunity, initiative, and mobility. The overall operational performance of the Ottoman army should not be overshadowed by the fact that it lost the war.

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