

[Expeditionary Forces in the First World War: Issues and Implications](#)

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The First World War swept nations around the globe into conflict. Many of these generated what is called an “expeditionary force,” the most famous of which are perhaps the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) and the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). But there were no fewer than seventeen sets of military forces serving in an “expeditionary” mode. These ranged from Turkish troops fighting on the Eastern Front to Russians and Portuguese on the Western Front, from the British in Mesopotamia to Germans in Macedonia, and include the Australian Naval and Military Expedition to German New Guinea and the American North Russia Expeditionary Force in 1918-1919. Their formation and designation, military deployment, political and military status, coordination with other military units, relations with the civilian population, disposition, combat and eventual return homeward to disbandment raise a host of questions.

The classic definition of an “expeditionary force” is quite straightforward: a military force sent to fight in a foreign country. During the War, most countries aside from those within the British Empire used a conscription approach to military manpower. They also, however, used such an approach to the labor auxiliaries to the combat troops, so a natural question is whether the conscripted labor “troops” (as they were often designated) were also in some significant sense “expeditionary.” The term expeditionary is usually distinguished from troops that were “advisory” or “liaison” in nature. But where were the boundaries between these designations? Were they a matter of the mission, the political status of the troops, the size of the forces? Generals Liman von Sanders and von der Goltz commanded Turkish troops in combat operations. How should they and other Germans serving in Turkey be viewed?

These historical questions have analogs in other conflicts. Aside from the long prior practice of sending troops abroad, the designation played a role in World War II and was used by some countries in the Korean conflict. It was used by the French in Indochina, but not by the Americans in the Vietnam War. The term was not used for the Gulf War of 1990-91 or the conflict in Iraq starting 2003, arguably also expeditionary in nature, but it has today explicitly been invoked by the American Department of Defense to describe the American forces fighting ISIL in the Middle East.

Our goal is to establish a symposium/workshop for discussion of the issues surrounding force projected in the expeditionary mode primarily in the First World War, with an eye to sparking a

larger discussion and publications on the subject in the coming two years. We would like you to consider joining us at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, on 1 April 2017. A select number of participants will be funded, and proposals will be evaluated beginning 3 January 2016. For further information, contact esencer@knox.edu.

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