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**Romania's Entry into the
First World War:
The Problem of Strategy**

by

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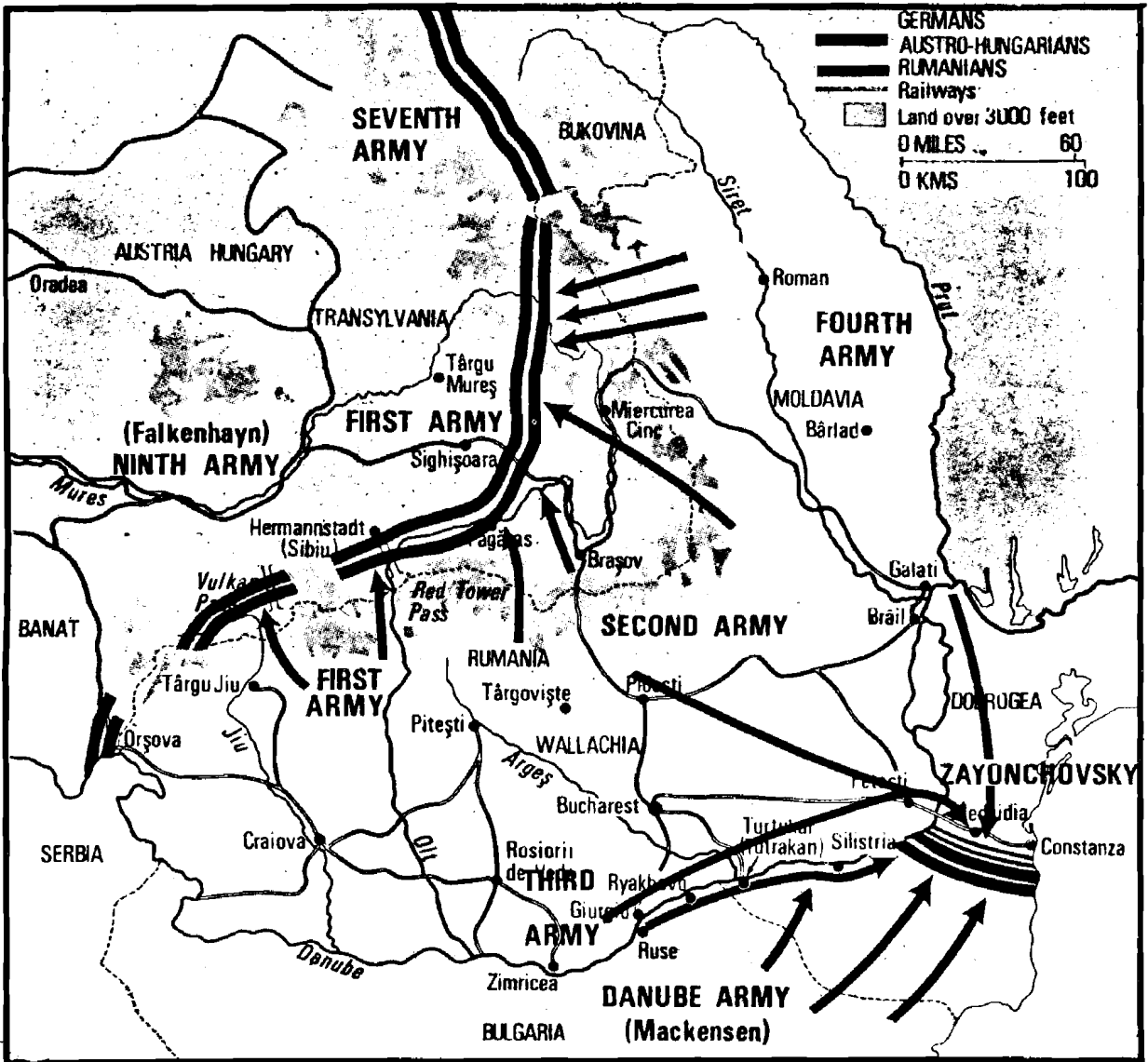
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The Romanian Campaign of 1916

From Peter Young (ed.), *History of the First World War*, Vol. IV, No. 9 (London, BPC Publishing, Ltd., 1970).

Romania's Entry into the First World War: The Problem of Strategy

by

Glenn E. Torrey *

At the outbreak of the First World War in August, 1914, all of the belligerents were suffering from what one commentator has called "the short war illusion."¹ Guided by strategic concepts carried over from the nineteenth century, the military leaders of both the Central Powers and the Triple Entente implemented war plans that were offensive in nature and presupposed a relatively short campaign. Little or no consideration was given to other options, to defensive strategy, or to the economic and political demands of a prolonged conflict. Like gamblers wagering everything on one decisive throw of the dice, Europe's generals vied with one another to strike the first blow, staking their nation's security, if not its very existence, on one massive, rapid opening campaign. Win or lose, they believed, the war would be short.

The war for which Europe had planned was fought in the fall of 1914. The French tried "Plan 17," the Russians, "Variant A," the Germans, the "Schlieffen Plan," and yet there was no decision. By the end of September the Western Front had degenerated into a stalemate with German and French soldiers facing each other from trenches that stretched from Switzerland to the North Sea. In the east the battlefronts were more fluid but equally indecisive. The search for a solution to this stalemate then began. Tacticians attempted to solve the enigma of trench warfare; economic planners attempted to mobilize more resources for war; diplomats sought to add new forces to their respective coalitions. Relative to the latter, there was sharp competition for the assistance of European nations not yet committed, especially those in Southeastern Europe (Turkey, Italy, Bulgaria, and Romania) which occupied strategic positions astride the flanks and supply lines of the warring coalitions. Each of these nations had territorial ambitions and eventually entered the war to achieve them: Turkey (November, 1914), Italy (May, 1915), Bulgaria (October, 1915), and Romania (August, 1916).

Romania occupied a particularly prominent role in the diplomatic competition for new allies. Not only was her position in the Balkans critical from a strategic point of view but her vast supplies of grain and

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¹ L. L. Farrar, Jr., *The Short War Illusion* (Santa Barbara, 1973).

her oilfields (the largest in Europe) became increasingly vital as the war dragged on month after month. Since 1883 Romania had been a secret ally of Germany and Austria-Hungary but by 1914 this allegiance was dead. Three million of the Romanian race lived in the Hungarian province of Transylvania where they were subjected to cultural and political discrimination by the chauvinist Magyar ruling class. But, until the outbreak of war, there appeared to be no immediate prospect of improving their lot or, as the more radical politicians of the Romanian Kingdom hoped, detaching the province to bring about the creation of a "Greater Romania." The involvement of the racially-troubled Austrian empire in a world war threw into question its continued existence and enflamed Romania's desire to join in an Entente victory and achieve the "national ideal."²

The weak military position of the Entente during the first two years of the war and Romania's fear of retaliation from Germany and her allies caused Bucharest to maintain neutrality temporarily and engage in diplomatic negotiations with both groups of belligerents. But by the summer of 1916 the situation appeared to have changed. Germany seemed completely occupied with heavy fighting at Verdun and the Somme; Russia, thanks to General Brusilov, had dealt Austria-Hungary a serious military defeat. Furthermore, the Entente had finally agreed to Romania's extensive territorial demands, had promised to supply her poorly equipped army with guns and munitions, and had obligated themselves to undertake vigorous supporting offensives on all fronts to cover Romania's mobilization and entry into action. The Romanian government, although it had doubts of the intention and the ability of their prospective allies to deliver all that they promised, realized that further delay could endanger the achievement of their war aims. Premier Ionel Bratianu, who dominated the Romanian government, was acutely aware that if the situation of Austria-Hungary continued to worsen, the Dual Monarchy might sue for peace and thereby eliminate Romania's opportunity to profit from her complete disintegration. The only irrefutable claim to the Romanian lands was by occupation and the shedding of blood.³ Consequently, on August 27, 1916, the Romanian government took the plunge and delivered a declaration of war in Vienna.

Romania's strategic position for a war against the Central Powers was exposed and precarious. Projecting into the Balkan peninsula like an elongated boot, she was surrounded on three sides by the armies of the Central Powers and their allies. To the north and west, the Austro-Hungarian forces guarding Transylvania, the prize of Romanian irredentism, were weak: 34,000 border and customs guards, gendarmes,

² See Serban Radulescu-Zoner, *Romania Si Tripla Alianta La Inceputul Secolului Al XX-Lea 1900-1914* (Bucharest, 1977).

³ Glenn Torrey, "Rumania's Decision to Intervene: Bratianu and the Entente, June-July, 1916," *Rumanian Studies*, Vol III (1973-75), 3-29.

and overaged *Landsturm*.⁴ But this was deceptive, for behind them lay the power of their German allies who, in the last analysis, could not permit the collapse of the Dual Monarchy and were prepared to rush in strong reinforcements.⁵ To the south stood Bulgaria, her leaders bitter over losses to Romania in the Second Balkan War and her hopes for revenge buoyed up by the conquest of Serbia in 1915. Although the main Bulgarian army was committed to tying down the Anglo-French expeditionary force at Salonika, there were strong forces on the Danube, reinforced by several German battalions, all under the command of Germany's August von Mackensen, the conqueror of Serbia whose very name aroused apprehension in the hearts of many Romanians.⁶ Romania, therefore, faced the dangers of a war on two fronts, over almost 1,400 kilometers of frontier.

Furthermore, despite their optimistic promises, Romania could expect little immediate help from her prospective allies. Her only direct link with the Entente was through the deteriorating Russian Empire whose own military problems left her ill-prepared to aid Romania, and whose overstrained transportation system was an uncertain link to England and France upon whom the Romanian army was totally dependent for its munitions and equipment of war. About all the Entente could do immediately was to promise "offensives on all fronts" with the hope that they would draw off sufficient Austro-German-Bulgarian forces to insure Romania's survival. As events would prove, this hope was never fulfilled.

To meet this strategic challenge, Romania's chief resources were sturdy peasant soldiers. Over 800,000 men were to be called from a total population of nine million, although only about 550,000 were to be assigned to operational units.⁷ But brave and dedicated as they might be, they were poorly trained, poorly equipped, and poorly led.⁸ In fairness to the Romanian army, which fought well later, it should be pointed out that its opponents, benefiting from two years of bloody experience, had learned much, particularly the importance of automatic weapons and massed firepower. The Romanian tactics on the other hand remained wedded to the pre-1914 emphasis on movement and the use of the bayonet. Romanian rifles were inaccurate, weak in

⁴ Conrad to Aussen Ministerium, July 19, Kriegsarchiv (Vienna), Militaer Kanzelei/69-2/1916/Ops. Geh. No. 40. Kriegsarchiv (Vienna), *Oesterreich-Ungarns Letzter Krieg 1914-1918*, Vol. V (Vienna, 1934), 241 ff. Gerard E. Silberstein, *The Troubled Alliance*, (Lexington, Kentucky, 1970), puts the figure at 25,000 (p. 329). The official Romanian estimates were realistic (65,000-75,000). Ministerul Apararii Nationale, Marele Stat-Major, serviciul istoric, *Romania in razboiul mondial 1916-1919*, Vol. I, *Documente-Anexe* (Bucharest, 1934), 124.

⁵ Carl Muehlmann, *Oberste Heeresleitung und Balkan im Weltkrieg 1914-1918* (Berlin, 1942), p. 171.

⁶ *Letzter Krieg*, V, 245.

⁷ Ion Cupsa, *Armata Romana in campaniile din anii 1916-1917* (Bucharest, 1967), p. 27.

⁸ Lt. Colonel Alexandru Ioanitu, *Razboiul Romaniei, 1916-1918*, Vol. I (Bucharest, n.d.), 22-27, has a good analysis of the capabilities of the Romanian army.

firepower, and short in range. Only a small number of hand grenades were available and very few soldiers knew how to use them. Romanian regiments averaged two to six machine guns each, against approximately 50 for each Austro-German regiment. In light artillery the Romanian army was similarly deficient; heavy and mountain guns were virtually non-existent. Ancient cannon, stripped from 19th century fortresses around Bucharest and sent to bolster the southern front, were of such age and variety that the fortress at Turtucaia, in the words of one observer, "looked like an artillery museum."⁹ The Romanian aviation service, barely in its infancy, consisted of a handful of out-moded, disparate models that seldom were in condition to fly. General Zottu, ill and overdue for retirement, remained as Chief of the Romanian General Staff because intense rivalry among the other generals made his replacement difficult. Premier Bratianu, who was generally ignorant of military affairs, relied for advice upon General Iliescu, his minister of war and a trusted friend, but an inept military leader.¹⁰

The strategy devised by the Romanian leaders to cope with their military problem was inscribed in the Romanian war plan, Hypothesis Z. Its preamble clearly stated not only the military goals of the Romanian war effort but also its political aims as well:

Hypothesis Z foresees the undertaking of a war on two operation fronts namely:

- a) On the North-North-West front, against the Central Powers
- b) On the Southern front, against Bulgaria

The general purpose of the war which we will undertake is the realization of our national ideal, that is to say the integration of the fatherland. The conquest of the territory inhabited by Romanians which today is found included in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy must be the fruit of the war.

In order to achieve this aim, the majority of our forces, Armies I, II, and North will operate offensively in Transylvania, Banat, and Hungary, attacking in the general direction of Budapest. The Southern Army (III) will assure liberty of action for the major forces, defending the national territory and repulsing attacks which the Bulgarians should undertake from the South.¹¹

More specifically, Hypothesis Z called for a rapid advance of the northern armies (420,324 or 80% of the men) from the Carpathian frontier to the Mures river in Central Transylvania where the first important Austro-Hungarian resistance was expected. After an initial engagement

⁹ Pamfil Seicaru, *La Roumanie dans la Grande Guerre* (Paris, 1968), p. 304.

¹⁰ Iliescu was severely criticized after the defeat of the Romanian army and went to great lengths to defend his work as Secretary General of the Ministry of War. Dumitriu Iliescu, *Documente privitoare la razboiul pentru integritatea Romaniei* (Bucharest, 1924).

¹¹ *Romania in razboiul mondial, Vol. I, Documente-Anexe*, 111.

and an advance westward to the Apuseni mountains (30 days after mobilization), the invasion would enter its final phase in which the Romanian army would march on Budapest. In the south, the remaining Romanian forces (142,523 or 20% of the total) were distributed along the Bulgarian frontier, but only 71,815 in the Dobrudja and the fortified Danube bridgeheads of Turtucaia and Silistria, where the brunt of the Bulgarian fighting was bound to occur. The other 70,000 troops were to man the Romanian side of the Danube. According to Hypothesis Z, the Romanian forces in the south would remain on the defensive for about 10 days, until an expected Russian expeditionary force arrived, and then the Russo-Romanian army would take the offensive, destroying all enemy forces in northern and western Bulgaria, creating a buffer zone for the defense of Romania and freedom of action for the operations in the north. The possibility of a Bulgarian offensive appears to have been discounted.¹² It is important to note that the basic strategic choice made by Hypothesis Z, namely committing the Romanian army to make its major offensive effort in the north, was based primarily on political rather than military reasons. That is to say, the "liberation" of Transylvania took precedent over military considerations such as the threat of enemy invasion and the creation of a more viable strategic position from which to prosecute the war. This emphasis upon the occupation of territory rather than upon the destruction of enemy forces was a classical military error.¹³ And of interest also is the commitment of the southern army to the offensive too. The ten-day delay envisioned by Hypothesis Z would simply serve to insure that the beginning of the offensive in the south would coincide with the first encounter with Austro-Hungarian resistance in the north.

Little information has heretofore come to light about how much serious consideration was given to alternate strategies by Romanian political and military authorities in the summer of 1916.¹⁴ But new evidence, the unpublished memoirs of Bratianu's military agent in Paris¹⁵ which have recently become available for research, reveal that there was serious discussion about making the major Romanian effort in the south. Although this point of view had to be abandoned eventually in face of resistance in Bucharest, it did result in an abortive military convention, initialled in Paris on July 23, 1916, which attempted to combine the objectives of both the northern and southern strategies.

¹² *Ibid.*, I, 112-121. George Protopopescu, "Planul de campanie al M. C. G. roman pentru primul razboi mondial," *Acta Musei Napocensis*, Vol. IX (Cluj, 1972), 293.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ See Victor Atanasiu, "Unele consideratii asupra angajarii Romaniei in primul razboi mondial-Ipoteza Z," *Studii, Revista de Istorie* (Bucharest, 1971), 1211-30.

¹⁵ Vasile Rudeanu, "O Viata. Amintiri, Comentarii," 3 vols. (Bucharest, n.d.) typescript. Sectia de Manuscris, Biblioteca Academiei. Based apparently upon a diary or journal, Colonel Rudeanu's memoirs are an invaluable source but must be used with caution. Writing several years after the fact (1938?), he was not immune from exaggerating his own role and attributing to himself a prescience that is hard to accept. In addition, he sometimes transposes dates, usually as a result of forgetting the 13-day difference between the old and new calendars.

Although this convention never came into force and was superseded by the official military convention signed in Bucharest on August 17, it provides valuable insight into the disagreement and confusion that existed between Romania and her allies over strategy on the eve of war.

Colonel Vasile Rudeanu, an able Romanian staff officer proficient in several languages, had served abroad almost continuously since the fall of 1914. After trips to Austria, Germany, and Italy in the interests of Romanian munitions purchase, he had been resident in Paris since early 1915 as chief of the Romanian procurement mission in France and Great Britain. As Bratianu preferred to negotiate personally with the allies rather than through the Romanian diplomatic service, Rudeanu was increasingly used by Bratianu as a go-between. French Premier Briand also used Rudeanu as an intermediary. In December, 1915 he asked Rudeanu to travel to Bucharest to reassure Bratianu personally that France was committed to satisfying Romania's terms for entering the war. Bratianu, in turn, entrusted Rudeanu with the task of maintaining in Paris and London the credibility of Romania's ultimate intention to join the Entente during the difficult time when the Austro-German-Bulgarian conquest of Serbia created a situation in the Balkans which required considerable Romanian cooperation with the Central Powers. Rudeanu labored long and hard during the early months of 1916 to sell Romania's case to her future allies who feared that Bratianu was playing a double game.¹⁶ In Paris, Rudeanu had easy access to the French General Headquarters and a close working relationship with Briand himself. Consequently, it was natural that when the time came for England and France to open direct negotiations for a military convention relative to Romania's entry into war, Rudeanu served as the intermediary between Paris and Bucharest.

The primary negotiations for Romania's entry into the war began early in July and were being conducted in Bucharest under Russian leadership. However, there were several factors which militated for direct military talks between Romania on the one hand and the western allies on the other. For one, the negotiations in Bucharest were making agonizingly slow progress and the French, sorely pressed at Verdun, were feverish in their desire to speed Romanian entry. Furthermore, several items of military nature concerned Romania and the western allies alone, notably the guarantee of Romania's supply of munitions and the coordination of Romanian action with an Anglo-French offensive at Salonika. During the second week of July the French made direct overtures for the opening of negotiations in Paris. Only July 7, Rudeanu wired Bratianu that he had been invited to a meeting with the French General Staff which "advised" the conclusion of a military convention.¹⁷ Two days later Briand called Rudeanu to his office and asked him to take part in a conference at French General Headquarters for the pur-

¹⁶ Rudeanu, II, 358-69.

¹⁷ Rudeanu to Bratianu, #6237, July 7, Arhiva Biblioteca Centrala de Stat (Bucharest), Fondul St. Georges, CCCXCVI/8.

pose of stabilizing a plan of action for the Romanian army in connection with the allied forces at Salonika.¹⁸ Bratianu, for his part, welcomed direct Anglo-French involvement in the negotiation over Romania's entry. Like all Romanians he was suspicious of Russia and had a strong fear of being left "tête à tête" with St. Petersburg. The involvement of England and France would guarantee the fulfillment of the obligations Russia assumed. Furthermore, he wanted written guarantees of the Anglo-French commitment to support Romania with munitions and an energetic offensive at Salonika. Consequently, he immediately authorized Rudeanu "to examine with the French General Staff the conditions of an offensive combined with Sarrail, whose offensive must precede ours in order to allow us time to mobilize. We dispose for the southern front, at the maximum, 150,000 men to which must be added 50,000 Russians."¹⁹

Bratianu's instructions to Rudeanu reflected the decision, embodied in Hypothesis Z, that the main Romanian effort would be made in the north. This view appears to have been tacitly accepted by the allied leaders. Earlier in 1916, the Russians had urged that Romania send a majority of her forces against Bulgaria.²⁰ But by July the success of the Brusilov offensive caused the Russians to "advise" that Romania's main thrust be in the north.²¹ The British, engulfed in a bloody offensive at the Somme, also favored the major blow be in the north "in order to defeat our main enemies, Austria and Germany."²² The French attitude appears to have been ambivalent. As late as June, 1916, General Joffre, the French Chief of Staff, had been pressing in Bucharest for the main Romanian attack in the south.²³ Although he and other French leaders appear to have resigned themselves to the northern strategy, some officers on the French General Staff and Colonel Rudeanu himself continued to argue for just the opposite: a strong defense against Austria while the bulk of the Romanian army attacked in the south with the purpose of linking up with the Anglo-French forces advancing from Salonika. This would open a direct line of communication and supply between Romania and her western allies and between them and Russia as well. After smashing Bulgaria and clearing Romania's rear, the allied armies could turn northward and march toward Budapest and Vienna. As one French officer put it, possibly to make

¹⁸ Rudeanu, II, 422.

¹⁹ Bratianu to Rudeanu, July 14, St. Georges, CCCXCVI/8.

²⁰ Atanasiu, p. 1213. Russian preference for the south seemed to be linked with reluctance to commit the troops that joint operations in the north might require. In fact during the first half of 1916, General Alekseev was not favorable to Romania's entering the war at all. V.A. Emet, "Contradictiile dintre Rusia si Aliati in Legatura cu Intrarea Romaniei in Razboi 1915-1916," *Analele Romino-Sovietice*, seria istorie, XI (1957), 88-89.

²¹ Emet, p. 93.

²² General William Robertson to General Joseph Joffre, July 19, France, Etat-Major de l'Armée, Service Historique, *Les Armées Françaises dans la Grande Guerre*, Tome VIII/1, Annexes, 3e vol. #1384.

²³ *Romania in razboiul mondial 1916-1919, Vol. I, Capitolele I-VIII*, 94-95.

it more palatable to the Romanians, this strategy would be "an invasion of Transylvania in two phases."²⁴

However much this southern strategy had to offer from a strictly military point of view, it was unacceptable to the Romanian government.²⁵ A prior and immediate attack on Austria-Hungary seemed essential. On the one hand, war had many opponents and the only feasible issue upon which to rally enthusiasm was the liberation of Romanians "languishing under the Hapsburg yoke." Furthermore, the interventionists in Bucharest, incited by emigres from Bukovina and Transylvania who had sought refuge in the Regat, formed a troublesome group of opponents for Bratianu. He would have found it difficult to convince them of the need to postpone an immediate march into the unredeemed provinces. But probably most important was Bratianu's nagging fear that if Romania did not establish her claim to Transylvania by conquest as soon as possible, the opportunity to realize the national ideal might be lost. For one thing, Russia might refuse to surrender this territory once she had occupied it. But weighting more heavily on Bratianu's mind in the summer of 1916 was the fear that Austria-Hungary might sue for peace and thereby tempt the Entente to repudiate promises made to Romania. The presence of the Romanian army and the spilling of Romanian blood on Transylvanian soil was the only sure claim.²⁶

Consequently the draft military convention worked out in Paris by Rudeanu and the French General Staff followed the guidelines of Hypothesis Z. Assuming Romania's commitment to a northern strategy, it dealt with the details of the Anglo-French offensive at Salonika and its coordination with a Romania thrust south of the Danube with the "objective of destroying the enemy forces and of realizing their juncture with the least delay."²⁷ Although the Paris draft convention went beyond Hypothesis Z in providing not only the clearing of northern Bulgaria but a link up with Anglo-French forces, it cannot be considered as contradicting it. On July 17, the French wired London asking that a British delegate be sent to Paris for the signing of the convention.²⁸ The War Committee, under the impression that Rudeanu had full powers to conclude a binding agreement, decided to send General William Robertson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, to Paris for the signing.²⁹

²⁴ Rudeanu, II, 432-33.

²⁵ There may have been some support for the southern strategy on the Romanian General Staff as one informed source indicates that Hypothesis Z was adopted in the summer of 1916 only after "much debate." Atanasiu, p. 1213.

²⁶ See Glenn Torrey, "Rumania's Decision to Intervene: Bratianu and the Entente, June-July, 1916," *Rumanian Studies*, Vol. II (1972-73), 3-29.

²⁷ Rudeanu to Bratianu, #8630, July 21, St. Georges CCCXCVI/8; *Les Armées Françaises* VIII/1, Annexes, 3 vol. #1391; Rudeanu, II, 436-8.

²⁸ Briand to Cambon (London), #2231-33, July 17, Archives Diplomatiques, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (Paris), *Guerre 1914-1918*, Vol. 112, p. 24.

²⁹ Grey to Bertie (Paris), #1603, July 19 Great Britain, Foreign Office, 371/2606.

At two discussions with the Allied leaders on July 22 and 23, Colonel Rudeanu finalized and signed the terms of the military convention.³⁰ The first meeting was held in French military headquarters at Chantilly. Briand, apparently aware of some indications that Bratianu was beginning to hedge on a commitment to attack Bulgaria, called Rudeanu on the day of the meeting to state: "I hope that you maintain the idea of offensive action of the Romanian army to the south in conjunction with the allied army of Salonika and that you will support it at the conference." Rudeanu replied: "Absolutely." The Chantilly conference reaffirmed the preliminary draft which called for plans to launch a Russo-Romanian offensive south of the Danube in conjunction with the Allied offensive at Salonika while the main Romanian army was invading Transylvania.

The second meeting was held on July 23 at the Ministry of War in Paris with British, French, Italian and Russian delegates present for the purposes of discussing, composing, and signing a final draft. Rudeanu recalled an air of tension. Negotiations in Bucharest on the main political and military conventions had been going slowly and the Allied leaders were suspicious of Bratianu's intentions. "It is inexplicable," Joffre told Rudeanu, "all conditions put by Mr. Bratianu for Romania to enter the war have been satisfied and yet Mr. Bratianu continues to hesitate, to argue, and to object." "I told you," intervened General Robertson bruskiy, "Romania will never enter the war, she maneuvers politically." Rudeanu's attempt to defend his country's policies was cut short by the opening of the formal negotiating session. Joffre spoke first outlining the preferred plan, that of a Romanian defensive stance in the north and main offensive effort in the south. This plan, he lamented, was not acceptable to the Romanian government. But, he continued, his staff and Colonel Rudeanu had worked out an alternate plan which, allowing for an immediate Romanian invasion of Transylvania, would still retain the advantages of a southern offensive for the Allies: crushing the German-Bulgarian army, knocking Bulgaria out of the war, isolating Turkey and opening a Mediterranean supply route to Romania and Russia. Romania would have the support of a Russian army in the south of approximately the same size as the number needed to maintain the defensive. At the end of his discourse, Joffre asked: "Is Colonel Rudeanu in accord with this plan?" Rudeanu replied that he was. He characterized the juncture of the Romanian and Allied armies in Bulgaria and the opening of a supply route an "imperative strategic maneuver." While the operation had good prospects of success, if it did not achieve its objective it could be converted into a defensive posture, he argued. Bulgaria was certain

³⁰ The following summaries of the two meetings are based on Rudeanu's memoirs. Although some caution must be used in accepting the exact dialogue he recreates, the basic trend and outcome of the meetings are confirmed by French and British sources. Rudeanu, II, 446-48; Robertson to Hardinge (F.O.), #145286, July 25, F.O. 371/2606.

to attack Romania in any case and given the difficult-to-defend southern frontier, an offense was the best defense.

Subsequent discussion touched on a number of related points. Rudeanu asked that the Salonika offensive begin ten days prior to the Romanian attack; Joffre would grant only eight. Rudeanu asked that Russian supportive forces on the Danube be equal to those the Romanian (150,000); the Russian delegate, General Gilinsky, referred the final decision on military considerations to his government. Rudeanu asked for more precise terms concerning the Allied supply of munitions for Romania, especially the Romanian concern for maintaining a viable transportation link through Russia. Joffre and Robertson, after a brief private discussion replied: "France and England, themselves, will assume responsibility."

Following agreement on the points under discussion, the secretary of the conference had them typed, read to all those assembled and then presented for signature. Rudeanu, however, pointed out that he did not have authorization to sign for his government. Robertson retorted "immediately in a dry and hard tone" that "for approximately two years Colonel Rudeanu repeated constantly at the Foreign Ministry in Rome, at the Foreign Office in London, and at the Foreign Ministry in Paris that as soon as the conditions posed by President Bratianu were satisfied, Romania would enter immediately into the war. These conditions are satisfied or on the way of being satisfied and now, today, Colonel Rudeanu refuses to sign the draft of the military convention with Romania, prolonging thus the political maneuvers of President Bratianu in order to avoid Romania's entering the war." Rudeanu recalls that he was crushed, as if hit by a "powerful blow." But before he could reply, General Gilinsky intervened with a face-saving compromise: "Neither am I authorized by my government, but I accept the draft, I will sign it 'ad referendum' . . ." "With these words," Rudeanu recalls, "without hesitating a single moment, I went briskly to the table on which was the small packet with copies of the military convention and I signed them, each 'ad referendum.'"

Before Rudeanu could report to Bucharest the details of the document he had signed, Bratianu began to object. On July 21, Briand, through the French minister, had asked the Romanian premier to authorize Rudeanu to sign a military convention. Bratianu, who claimed that until that time he "had received nothing from Rudeanu," said he had only intended that his military representative "examine" conditions of cooperation with Sarraill which then would be incorporated into the military agreement in Bucharest.³¹ His motive for one and not two

³¹ Bratianu to Lahovari, July 21, St. Georges, CCXCVI/8; Briand to Blondel (Bucharest), #219-220, July 20, Archives Diplomatiques, *Guerre*, 112/51. Bratianu's telegram outlining his objections reached Alexander Lahovari, the Romanian minister in Paris, at about the same time as Rudeanu came to report the signature of the agreement. After Lahovari read Bratianu's disapproval, Rudeanu remarked: "It is too late Mr. Minister, today at noon I signed a draft of a military convention which foresees the

conventions seems to have been to insure French and English signatures on the main military convention with Russia. But also, he expressed special objection to the obligation Rudeanu had accepted for a Romanian attack on Bulgaria and stated that he did not intend to take the initiative in declaring war on his southern neighbor.³² This attitude seems strange in light of the fact that the Romanian war plan committed the Romanian army to just such an attack ten days after the declaration of war against Austria-Hungary and that Bratianu's own proposals to Russia for a political and military convention assumed this attack. The explanation of Bratianu's inconsistency lies, I think, in his fleeting and unrealistic hope of averting, or at least delaying, the conflict with Bulgaria.³³

Bratianu's rejection of the Rudeanu convention and his refusal to accept an obligation to declare war on Bulgaria led to a serious impasse in the entire process of political and military negotiation over Romania's entry into the war. Britain and France continued to demand Romanian action in the south and privately spoke of breaking off negotiations.³⁴ Bratianu, on the other hand, insisted: "We have no motive for attacking Bulgaria. If we enter into war it is in order to liberate Romanian territory with millions of Romanians."³⁵ He told Fasciotti on July 26 that the Entente proposal for a Romanian offensive against Bulgaria was "absolutely unacceptable."³⁶ He wired Rudeanu that he would accept such an obligation only if "Russia increased to 200,000, two hundred thousand, men their contingent on the Danube front."³⁷ Joffre replied that 150,000, the figure discussed but not included in the Rudeanu convention, would be more easily approved by the Russian High Command.³⁸

Bratianu's response to the Russian alliance proposals, presented to the Entente ministers in Bucharest provisionally on July 22 and more completely on July 25, spoke of assembling a joint Russo-Romanian force in the Dobrudja but rejected a declaration of war or an attack

entry of Romania into the war alongside the allies on the date of August 1." Rudeanu goes on in his memoirs: "The minister, who spoke with me standing, turned yellow, his eyes dialating. He appeared surprised and frightened. He sat down in a chair and said slowly: 'What have you done, Colonel? You have thrown Mr. Bratianu into a serious mess.' Sorry, Mr. Minister but as things developed, I could not do otherwise." Rudeanu went on to explain the circumstances to which Lahovari replied: "All this is interesting but is not justification for you to sign the military convention without authorization." Rudeanu explained that it was signed "ad referendum." "Ah!" Lahovari said, "that changes things." Rudeanu, II, 468-71.

³² Blondel to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, #229-31, July 22, Archives Diplomatiques, *Guerre*, 112/66.

³³ St. Aulaire to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, #21, August 21, Archives Diplomatiques, *Guerre*, 112:2/150.

³⁴ Minute by Hardings (F.O.), #143720, July 24, F.O. 371/2606.

³⁵ Rudeanu, II, 438.

³⁶ Fasciotti to Ministero degli Esteri, July 26, Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Esteri (Rome).

³⁷ Rudeanu, II, 475.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 476.

on Bulgaria.³⁹ This led the intractible Neratoff, director and acting head of the Russian Foreign Ministry in the wake of Sazonov's resignation, to conclude that "Bratianu intends to let the 50,000 Russians cover the Dobrudgean front while the Allied army attacks at Salonika, leaving Romania free to invade Transylvania and the Banat." He termed the issue the most serious point of difference in the entire alliance negotiations.⁴⁰

The attitude of Alekseev and the Russian military toward Romania's southern front was more equivocal but equally critical of Bratianu's policy. On the one hand, his first concern was to gain Romania's aid for the Brusilov offensive which by now was running out of steam. When the Romanians appealed for Russian support in resisting the French demand for an offensive south of the Danube, he wired Joffre: "It would be difficult for us to ask the Romanians to start an offensive simultaneously in two directions before the situation clarifies itself. In the first place, all efforts [should be] against Austria. . . ." ⁴¹ Furthermore, Alekseev was concerned about being able to meet the Romanian demand for military assistance in the south. He termed Bratianu's demand for 150,000 Russians "irrealizable" and even confided to his allies that "three divisions" not "50,000" should be specified in the military convention, lest the decimated character of the Russian units force him to send four rather than three, "a very difficult thing in the present situation."⁴²

In the face of the continued French insistence upon a Romanian offensive south of the Danube, Alekseev spelled out again to Colonel Tatarinoff on July 29 his fear that this offensive would weaken "the invasion force in Transylvania, but we cannot contradict the insistent wishes of our allies and must support them."⁴³ Tatarinoff answered that "I cannot find arguments to insist on this offensive because until now I have asked them to throw all their free forces against Austria-Hungary. I believe that if we insist on an offensive against Bulgaria this would do nothing but delay the negotiations."⁴⁴ On the other hand, while basically opposed to a major southern offensive, Alekseev was angered that the Romanians, while refusing to declare war, still demand an allied offensive at Salonika and 50,000 Russian troops on

³⁹ Blondel to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, #229-31, July 22, Blondel to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, #234-35, July 26, Archives Diplomatiques, *Guerre*, 112/66, 102.

⁴⁰ Paleologue (St. Petersburg) to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, #761-62, July 28, Archives Diplomatiques, *Guerre*, 112/117.

⁴¹ Emet, p. 95.

⁴² Hanbury-Williams (St. Petersburg) to Robertson, #249, July 28, Public Record Office, Foreign Office, 371/2607; Janin (St. Petersburg) to Joffre, Archives Diplomatiques, *Guerre*, 28 July, 112/123.

⁴³ Emet, p. 96.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-7.

the Danube. Both he and Neratoff began to assume a hard line toward Romania.⁴⁵

The mounting pressure of military events, especially fearful allied losses on the western front, the need for Romanian cooperation to complement the Salonika offensive and the conviction that if delayed much longer, Romania's military contribution would be worthless, forced the Entente to capitulate on its demand for a Romanian offensive or even a declaration of war on Bulgaria. The British led the way. After Barclay telegraphed from Bucharest on July 28 that it was urgent to commit Romania to an agreement quickly lest Entente military reverses set in and ruin the negotiation, the Foreign Office told Paris that Great Britain would not press for a declaration of war on powers other than Austria-Hungary and advised their other allies to do likewise.⁴⁶ Briand immediately joined the British. "I agree with Grey that in the last analysis we cannot bring this about but Germany will probably incite the Bulgars to attack. . . ." He then speculated that the Russian divisions in the Dobrudja could unilaterally begin hostilities with the implication that they would drag Romania into the war with them.⁴⁷ At the same time, Joffre told Rudeanu that recognizing the impossibility of securing the 200,000 Russian support troops Romania desired, the military terms of the Rudeanu agreement would be redrafted, eliminating the obligation for Romania to attack Bulgaria.⁴⁸

The irony of the situation is that simultaneously with the Allied decision to concede, but independently of it, Bratianu himself had decided to compromise. On August 3, before the news of the Allied capitulation on the Bulgarian declaration of war reached him, he authorized Rudeanu in Paris to inform the French that he would accept an obligation to declare war on Bulgaria ten days after the beginning of the Romanian offensive against Austria-Hungary.⁴⁹ He thereby made Romania's commitments correspond to the plan to attack Bulgaria embodied in "Hypothesis Z." But later the same day, he telegraphed Rudeanu a second time ordering him not to make use of the first telegram "because the Allies have accepted our point of view."⁵⁰ But the argument between Bratianu and his future allies had consumed almost two weeks. The loss of this precious time meant that Romania's entry when it did come on August 27 would take place under more un-

⁴⁵ Paleologue to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, #764, July 29, Archives Diplomatiques, *Guerre*, 112/127.

⁴⁶ Barclay to Grey, #617, July 28, Foreign Office, 371/2607; British Embassy to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, July 29, Archives Diplomatiques, *Guerre*, 112/139.

⁴⁷ Briand to Paleologue, #114-45, July 31, Archives Diplomatiques, *Guerre*, 112/152.

⁴⁸ Rudeanu, II, 476.

⁴⁹ Bratianu to Rudeanu, August 3, St. Georges, CCXCVI/8.

⁵⁰ Bratianu to Rudeanu, August 3, St. Georges, CCXCVI/8.

favorable conditions.⁵¹ Considering what was lost in the way of military advantage (and in allied goodwill as well), one is entitled to question Bratianu's wisdom in holding so obstinately to his point of view.

In summary, how can we evaluate Romanian strategy in the summer of 1916? From a strictly military point of view, the southern strategy advocated by Rudeanu and the French had much to offer. The elimination of Bulgaria from the war, the isolation of Turkey and the establishment of a land bridge to Romania and Russia would have immeasurably increased their capacity to wage war. But had the Germans decided to rush heavy reinforcements to Bulgaria, the Romanians would have needed similar help from the British, French, and Russians. Perhaps the experience of Serbia would have been repeated: allied assistance being too little, too late. On the other hand, the Austrians would have seen to it that Austro-German priority was given to the building up of defenses in Transylvania rather than in saving Bulgaria. And, if instead of advancing into Transylvania the Romanian army had assumed a strong defensive posture on the crest of the Carpathians, Austro-German penetration of Romania would have been difficult and the southern army would have had freedom of action to pursue the campaign in Bulgaria. Of course, this presupposes the commitment of a majority of Romania's forces to the south. The forces allowed by the Rudeanu agreement as well as Hypothesis Z were completely inadequate. The obvious drawback of the southern strategy was that it would have provided no direct support for the Brusilov offensive. Not only would this have been unacceptable to the Russians, but it would have neglected what most contemporary observers considered a good opportunity to deliver a death blow to Austria-Hungary. Nevertheless, however correct such an assumption was at the beginning of the summer when the Russian army was making progress, it became increasingly problematical as Brusilov lost momentum. As it turned out, Romania entered the war after the Russians had lost the initiative and the Germans were rushing in heavy reinforcements.

The northern strategy, on the other hand, might have had a better chance of success if the Romanian forces in the south had made a strategic retreat back across the Danube in order to set up a stronger defense against the Bulgarians. The surrender of the Dobrudja would have effected an economy of forces, avoided the costly mistakes subsequently made in the southern campaign, and thus have given the northern offensive the freedom of action Hypothesis Z envisioned.⁵² As

⁵¹ Russia's Brusilov offensive, which had routed the Austro-Hungarian army in June and July, stalled in August and, in addition, the Bulgarian army launched an unexpected attack at Salonika on August 18 which frustrated and delayed the Anglo-French offensive on which the Romanians were counting to cover their mobilization and entry into the war. See Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front 1914-1917* (New York, 1975), chapters 11-12.

⁵² G. A. Dabija, *Armata Romana in Rasboiul Mondial (1916-1918)*, Vol. I (Bucharest, n.d.), 166, argues that the holding of the Dobrudja was not essential and that a defensive position could have been set up on the left bank of the Danube.

events turned out, the early defeats in the south forced the weakening of the northern forces and the eventual abandonment of their offensive.⁵³ But such a withdrawal, of course, would have been completely unacceptable to the British and French who saw a Romanian attack in the south as essential to their own offensive at Salonika. As I think this study has indicated, however, political not military considerations were definitive for Romanian strategy, and from this point of view, an attack in the north was imperative. The odds favoring this undertaking, never very good even from the beginning, steadily decreased as prolonged negotiations delayed Romania's entry. There is good evidence that Bratianu began to recognize this danger as the day of Romania's entry finally arrived and, pessimistic as he was by nature, almost expected a Romanian defeat.⁵⁴ This defeat was made more certain by the strategy of preparing offensives on both fronts. By so doing the Romanian army failed to achieve the advantages of either while reaping the disadvantages of both.

⁵³ Some commentators feel that it was the *execution* rather than the strategy itself that was defective. That is, if the Romanian high command had carried out a more decisive application of Hypothesis Z and if it had not panicked at the initial Bulgarian successes and stopped the offensive in Transylvania and transferred troops to the south, then victory would have been attainable. Protopopescu, *Ibid.*, 294-96, 301. George Protopopescu, "Mari Comandanti roman in primul razboi mondial," *Acta Musei Napocensis*, Vol. VII (Cluj, 1970), 387. This criticism is similar to that leveled at the execution of the Schlieffen Plan by the German chief of staff, Helmut von Moltke, in the opening campaign against France in 1914.

⁵⁴ See Glenn Torrey, "Rumania and the Belligerents 1914-1916," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. I (1966), 190.

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