

# The Romanian Army's Confrontation with the Realities of Modern War: Lessons Learned from the Campaigns of 1913, 1916, and 1917

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## Abstract

The article examines the Romanian Army's confrontation with the profound transformations of modern warfare during the period 1913-1917, focusing on the experiences acquired during the Second Balkan War and the campaigns of the First World War. The study explores the manner in which the Romanian army understood, assimilated, and attempted to apply the lessons learned from contemporary conflicts, emphasizing the complex relationship between the French-inspired military tradition that shaped Romanian doctrine and the emerging demands of industrialized warfare. Particular attention is devoted to the evolution of military organization, command structures, mobilization capacity, logistic support, operational doctrine, and the adaptation of tactical methods to the new realities of the modern battlefield, characterized by trench warfare, heavy artillery, machine guns, and increasingly sophisticated systems of communication and coordination. The analysis also highlights the limits of pre-war military thinking, the difficulties encountered during the 1916 campaign, and the process of institutional and operational adaptation that contributed to the Romanian Army's recovery and reorganization during the 1917 campaign.

## Keywords:

Romanian Army; Modern Warfare; the 1913 Military Campaign; the 1916 Military Campaign; the 1917 Military Campaign; Military Doctrine; Learned Lessons.

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## Introduction

The beginning of the twentieth century represented a period of accelerated transition for European armies, marked by technological, doctrinal, and organizational transformations that profoundly altered the character of warfare. The development of automatic weapons, the expansion of railway networks, the emergence of aviation, the growing importance of artillery, and the widespread use of field fortifications were among the key factors that transformed armed conflict into an industrialized form of warfare, characterized by total mobilization, attrition, and complex coordination.

In this context, the Romanian Army faced the challenge of adapting a military structure shaped by nineteenth-century models of warfare to the realities of modern conflict. The experiences gained during the campaigns of 1913, 1916, and 1917 constituted crucial stages in the process of doctrinal and operational maturation of the Romanian military institution.

The issue of the Romanian Army's adaptation to the demands of modern warfare constitutes one of the central themes in military historiography devoted to the early twentieth century. The technological and doctrinal transformations that took place in Europe following the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 profoundly altered the nature of armed conflict, leading to the emergence of a new form of warfare characterized by mass mobilization, the extensive employment of artillery and machine guns, the increasing importance of logistics, and the integration of national economies into the military effort (Keegan 1999, 54-61). Within this context, European armies were compelled to redefine their command structures, operational doctrines, and systems of military training.

For Romania, the beginning of the twentieth century coincided with a period of regional affirmation and the consolidation of the institutions of the modern state. The Romanian Army, regarded as one of the principal pillars of national independence and sovereignty following the military campaign of 1877-1878, underwent an extensive process of reorganization and modernization. The military reforms initiated at the end of the nineteenth century sought to adapt the Romanian military system to Western models, particularly the French one, which was perceived as the most advanced expression of contemporary military art (Otu 2014, 27-31). Nevertheless, the modernization of the army progressed unevenly, constrained by insufficient economic resources, underdeveloped infrastructure, and administrative shortcomings. In 1907, General Alexandru Iarca addressed a letter to Ion I. C. Brătianu, requesting his intervention with King Carol I to remedy several serious deficiencies within the Romanian Army. In his memorandum, Iarca criticized the excessive allocation of resources to the fortification system at the expense of the field army, the inadequate defense of the Danube in comparison with that of Bulgaria, the insufficient preparation of the General Staff, shortcomings in command and training, the continued use of the Mannlicher Model 1893 rifle, which he considered

obsolete, as well as significant shortages of equipment and transportation assets. ([Iarca 1922](#), 95-97).

The 1913 campaign during the Second Balkan War constituted the first major test of general mobilization for the Romanian Army since the War of Independence. Romania's intervention against Bulgaria took place within a favorable strategic context, and military operations did not involve large-scale combat engagements. Nevertheless, the campaign revealed numerous logistical shortcomings, particularly in the field of medical services, as well as organizational deficiencies, demonstrating that the military institution was not yet fully prepared to meet the demands of modern warfare ([AMNR, General Staff Collection](#), file 45/1913). The cholera epidemic, supply difficulties, and coordination problems among military formations represented the first serious indications of the vulnerabilities affecting the Romanian military system. These shortcomings highlighted the gap between the army's formal organizational structure and its actual operational capabilities, emphasizing the need for comprehensive reforms in preparation, administration, and logistical support.

Despite the conclusions drawn after 1913, many of the lessons of the campaign were only partially implemented. Romania's political and military leadership continued to display considerable optimism regarding the army's ability to cope with a large-scale European conflict. Furthermore, the influence of French military doctrine, particularly its emphasis on the decisive offensive, contributed to the persistence of tactical concepts that were insufficiently adapted to the new realities of the battlefield ([Fuller 1961](#), 143-149).

Romania's entry into the First World War on 27 August/9 September 1916 marked the decisive confrontation between traditional military concepts and the realities of modern industrial warfare. The military campaign of 1916 dramatically exposed the limitations of the Romanian Army's operational and logistical preparedness. Although the initial offensive in Transylvania achieved a number of local successes, the rapid response of the Central Powers and the inability of the Romanian leadership to manage a war on two fronts resulted in a series of defeats and ultimately forced the army and the state administration to retreat to Moldavia ([Torrey 1998](#), 112-118). The events of 1916 demonstrated that modern warfare required far more than courage and high morale. Success depended on strategic coordination, technological superiority, efficient infrastructure, and effective cooperation among different branches of the armed forces. Deficiencies within the command structure, the shortage of heavy artillery, inadequate ammunition supplies, and logistic vulnerabilities all contributed decisively to the failure of the campaign. Moreover, the experience revealed the growing importance of industrial capacity and sustained resource mobilization, factors that increasingly determined military effectiveness in the age of total war. The setbacks of 1916 thus underscored the urgent need for comprehensive military reform and adaptation to the operational demands of twentieth-century warfare.

However, the defeat of 1916 did not signify the complete collapse of the Romanian Army. During the winter of 1916-1917, under the influence of the French Military Mission led by General Henri Mathias Berthelot, the army underwent an extensive process of reorganization and modernization (Berthelot 1920, 301-317). Reforms in military training, improvements in infantry-artillery cooperation, the introduction of modern defensive methods, and the restoration of troop morale enabled the transformation of the army into a force capable of withstanding the offensives of the Central Powers.

The 1917 campaign, embodied in the battles of Mărăști, Mărășești, and Oituz, represented the culmination of the Romanian Army's adaptation to modern warfare. The Romanian Army demonstrated that the dramatic experiences of the previous year had been assimilated and transformed into valuable operational and tactical lessons (Torrey 2011, 156-172). The resistance displayed during the summer of 1917 carried not only military significance but also profound political and moral importance, contributing to the survival of the Romanian state and reinforcing the ideal of national unity.

The experiences of the campaigns of 1913, 1916, and 1917 represented successive stages in the Romanian Army's confrontation with the realities of modern warfare. Although differing in scale and strategic context, these campaigns highlighted both the persistence of structural shortcomings and the army's capacity to learn and adapt. Therefore, a comparative analysis of these three campaigns makes it possible to trace the transformation of the Romanian Army into a military institution capable of operating under the conditions of industrialized and total warfare.

The present study is based on the premise that the issue of the Romanian Army's adaptation to the realities of modern warfare during the period 1913-1917 has been addressed only fragmentarily in historiography, primarily through separate analyses of individual military campaigns or of the political and diplomatic context of the era. In most studies, the 1913 campaign is treated as a secondary episode within the history of the Balkan Wars, the 1916 campaign is examined predominantly from the perspective of military defeat, while the year 1917 is associated almost exclusively with the heroic resistance displayed at Mărășești, Mărăști, and Oituz.

The absence of a comparative and integrated approach to these military experiences creates a significant gap in understanding the process of transformation undergone by the Romanian Army in the context of modern industrial warfare. From this perspective, the present research seeks to highlight the vulnerabilities as well as the doctrinal and organizational changes that characterized the Romanian Army between 1913 and 1917.

The main objective of this study is to analyze how the Romanian Army confronted the challenges of modern warfare and succeeded in adapting to the military transformations that shaped the early twentieth century.

In order to achieve the proposed aim, the following objectives were established: identifying the prime characteristics of modern warfare; analyzing the structural

vulnerabilities of the Romanian Army during the 1913 campaign; assessing the impact of the 1916 campaign on the Romanian military system; highlighting the doctrinal and operational transformations manifested during the 1917 campaign; and conducting a comparative analysis of the three military campaigns.

The study seeks to examine the relationship between military modernization, the administrative and logistic capacity of the state, the evolution of military doctrine, and the operational and tactical experiences of the battlefield. At the same time, the research analyzes the way how the transformations of European warfare influenced Romanian military structures and their capacity for adaptation.

The study employs a predominantly qualitative approach, characteristic of historical and military-historical research. The qualitative nature of the research derives from the analysis and critical interpretation of historical sources, archival documents, memoirs, operational journals, and specialized scholarly works. The investigation seeks to understand historical processes, institutional mechanisms, and the relationship among doctrine, organization, and the experience of modern warfare. Quantitative elements relating to troop strength, casualties, or military organization are used only as complementary evidence to support historical interpretation.

The research primarily employs an inductive line of reasoning. By examining specific military experiences – the campaigns of 1913, 1916, and 1917 – the study formulates broader conclusions regarding the Romanian Army's capacity to adapt to modern warfare. At the same time, the analysis makes selective use of deductive reasoning by relating the Romanian experience to the general characteristics of European warfare and to the doctrinal transformations of the period.

The research is structured around the following fundamental questions: To what extent was the Romanian Army prepared to meet the demands of modern warfare prior to the First World War? What structural vulnerabilities were revealed by the 1913 campaign? What were the main causes of the difficulties encountered during the 1916 campaign? Which doctrinal and operational transformations made it possible to achieve the defensive success in 1917? And to what extent do the campaigns under examination reflect the broader process of military and institutional modernization undertaken by the Romanian state?

The research is based on the critical analysis of historical sources and the application of the comparative method. The study draws upon archival documents, reports of the General Headquarters, military correspondence and memoirs, personal accounts, as well as scholarly studies and specialized works in the field of military history. The comparative method has enabled the identification of similarities and differences among the three campaigns, while also highlighting the evolution of Romanian military doctrine and organization. Furthermore, the historical and interpretative analysis seeks to place the experience of the Romanian Army within the broader context of the transformations that reshaped European warfare during the first decades of the twentieth century.

## Modern Warfare and the Challenges of the Early Twentieth Century

The transformations that occurred in the military sphere during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fundamentally altered the nature of armed conflict. Technological advancement, the industrialization of European economies, and the introduction of new combat equipment brought about a transition from the maneuver warfare characteristic of the nineteenth century to industrialized warfare of attrition, marked by total mobilization, massive resource consumption, and the involvement of entire societies in supporting the war effort (Keegan 1999, 45-63).

For small and medium-sized states such as Romania, these developments posed a major challenge. Adaptation to modern warfare required not only the modernization of weaponry but also the development of infrastructure, the reorganization of military institutions, and the integration of the national economy into the system of national defense (Stone 1998, 12-18).

Following the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, the major European powers initiated extensive military reform programs. Prussia's victory demonstrated the importance of rapid mobilization, the effective use of railway networks, and close coordination between the general staff and operational units (Dupuy 1977, 55-68). As a result, the German model of military organization became a significant point of reference for many European armies.

At the same time, technological progress transformed the conditions under which military operations were conducted. The introduction of repeating rifles, machine guns, and quick-firing artillery significantly increased the firepower of defensive positions (Fuller 1961, 140-156). Under these circumstances, traditional frontal assaults became increasingly costly in terms of both manpower and resources.

The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 represented another decisive moment in the evolution of modern military art. The conflict demonstrated the effectiveness of field fortifications, the importance of heavy artillery, and the critical role of logistics in sustaining a prolonged war (Stevenson 2005, 35-42). European military observers noted that the success of military operations depended increasingly on the state's capacity to provide material support and organizational efficiency for its armed forces. The Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 offered a realistic preview of the character of the future European conflict. The intensive use of artillery, the high casualty rates, and the persistent difficulties of supply demonstrated that modern warfare had surpassed the limitations of the traditional conflicts of the nineteenth century (Hall 2000, 119-138). These experiences underscored the growing importance of industrial resources, logistic planning, and operational coordination in determining military effectiveness on the battlefield.

Despite these lessons, many European states failed to fully implement the conclusions drawn from these conflicts. Military doctrines continued to place excessive emphasis

on offensive action and troop morale, while underestimating the strength of defensive positions and the growing importance of positional warfare. In France, the doctrine of the offensive à outrance (“offensive at all costs”) promoted the belief that offensive spirit and determination could compensate for the technical superiority of defensive firepower (Strachan 2001, 162-170). This concept also exerted a significant influence on the Romanian Army.

Prior to 1914, most European states developed mobilization systems based on compulsory military service. Standing armies were reinforced by large reserve forces, enabling the mobilization of substantial numbers of troops (van Creveld 1977, 201-214). However, this expansion of military manpower generated new logistic and administrative challenges. At the same time, the growth of the armaments industry and the increasing consumption of ammunition highlighted the dependence of modern warfare on the economic capacity of the state. Military conflict thus became not merely a confrontation between armies, but also a contest between industrial and administrative systems.

The Romanian military system was organized based on compulsory military service and general mobilization. The model adopted closely followed the structure of the French Army, both in terms of unit organization and in its tactical concepts and officer training system (Otu 2014, 27-35). Nevertheless, the modernization of the military institution progressed unevenly. Romania possessed limited economic resources, while its domestic armaments industry remained underdeveloped. Consequently, the army relied heavily on imports of weapons and ammunition (Hitchins 2013, 255-263).

One of the main weaknesses of the Romanian military system was its insufficiently developed infrastructure. The railway network was relatively sparse compared to those of Western European states, and modern roads were limited in number, particularly in frontier regions. These deficiencies adversely affected the army’s capacity for mobilization and supply (Torrey 1998, 51-57). Furthermore, both the logistic and medical support systems exhibited numerous vulnerabilities. Military exercises and maneuvers conducted before 1914 revealed significant difficulties related to troop transportation, ammunition distribution, and the organization of medical services (RNMA, Ministry of War Collection, file 212/1912).

The Focșani-Nămoloasa-Galați (F.N.G.) fortification system represented one of the most important components of Romania’s defensive strategy at the end of the nineteenth century. Conceived in the context of the geopolitical transformations that followed the achievement of independence, this defensive complex was intended to block the main strategic corridor linking Eastern Europe with the interior of Romanian territory, commonly known as the “Focșani Gate.” The construction of the fortifications reflected the concern of Romania’s political and military leadership to adapt the army to the requirements of modern warfare and to strengthen the

state's defensive capabilities. Through the scale of the works, the complexity of its infrastructure, and the integration of artillery into the defensive system, the F.N.G. line corresponded to the broader European trends of the period regarding the organization of permanent defenses. At the same time, the rapid evolution of military technology and the development of heavy artillery reduced the strategic effectiveness of permanent fortifications at the beginning of the twentieth century (Pascu et al. 1988, 214-222). General Alexandru Iarca, in his capacity as Deputy Inspector General of the Romanian Army, argued – contrary to the views of King Carol I – that the fortification systems around Bucharest and along the F.N.G. line were of limited military value. In his opinion, these works required enormous financial expenditures, exceeding 100 million lei, without providing a genuine strategic advantage in relation to the most probable war scenarios facing Romania (Iarca 1922, 10-11).

At the doctrinal level, the Romanian Army was strongly influenced by French concepts emphasizing offensive action. Military regulations placed considerable emphasis on rapid attacks and troop morale, while assigning relatively limited importance to defensive organization and combined-arms cooperation (Ionescu 2002, 71-84). This doctrinal orientation would later have a negative impact on the conduct of the 1916 campaign. The officer corps was characterized by significant disparities in professional training and military education. A number of officers had pursued studies in France, Germany, or Austria-Hungary and were therefore familiar with the latest developments in European military doctrine (Rosetti 1926, 94-103). At the same time, however, many commanders had been shaped by a conservative military culture marked by formalism, rigidity, and adherence to traditional concepts of warfare. This coexistence of progressive and conservative tendencies within the officer corps limited the army's ability to develop a coherent and fully modern operational doctrine.

In 1903, there was a significant gap between Romania and the major European powers with regard to investments allocated to the maintenance and training of individual soldiers. The relatively low level of military expenditure reflected both the limited economic capabilities of the Romanian state and the difficulty of sustaining a comprehensive modernization process within a European environment increasingly characterized by military competition and an intensifying arms race. In countries such as Germany and France, the funds allocated per soldier were substantially higher, allowing for the development of modern military infrastructure, more effective training systems, and superior technical equipment. By contrast, the Romanian Army was compelled to operate under severe budgetary constraints, a situation that affected the pace of weapons procurement, the quality of military equipment, and the logistic capabilities of its forces. Although the political and military leadership initiated important reforms following the War of Independence, insufficient financial resources limited their overall effectiveness. Consequently, the disparity in financial expenditure per soldier reflected not only an economic imbalance but also

Romania's strategic vulnerability in comparison with the highly industrialized states of Europe. The problem of modernizing the Romanian Army cannot be interpreted solely from a military perspective; rather, it must be understood in relation to the general level of Romania's economic development at the beginning of the twentieth century. The limited capacity to finance the armed forces reflected the constraints of the national economy and the dependence of military reforms on the budgetary resources available to the state ([Pascu et al. 1988](#), 223-224).

Despite these limitations, the Romanian Army possessed several important advantages. Troop morale was high, and the military institution enjoyed considerable social prestige as well as strong political support. Moreover, the experiences of the Balkan Wars and observations of contemporary conflicts contributed to a growing awareness of the need for reform. The fundamental problem, however, lay in the insufficient pace of modernization. A significant gap existed between the technological evolution of European warfare and the capacity of Romanian institutions to adapt to these changes. The campaigns of 1913 and 1916 would later demonstrate, in dramatic fashion, the consequences of this disparity.

### **The 1913 Campaign: Between Political Success and Military Limitations**

Romania's participation in the Second Balkan War constituted the first major test of the Romanian Army in the context of the military transformations taking place at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although the 1913 campaign unfolded within a favorable strategic environment and did not involve large-scale engagements with the Bulgarian Army, the experience nevertheless revealed significant shortcomings within the Romanian military system, particularly in the fields of logistics, medical services, and organization ([Torrey 1998](#), 44-49).

From a political perspective, Romania's intervention aimed to preserve the balance of power in the Balkan Peninsula and to prevent Bulgaria from emerging as the dominant regional power. Following the victory of the Balkan League over the Ottoman Empire in the First Balkan War (1912-1913), tensions among the former allies regarding the partition of Macedonia led to the outbreak of a new conflict during the summer of 1913 ([Hall 2000](#), 97-115). Romania took advantage of Bulgaria's diplomatic isolation and decided to intervene militarily in order to strengthen its strategic position and secure the acquisition of Southern Dobruja (the Quadrilateral) ([Hitchins 2013](#), 269-273).

The general mobilization of June 1913 represented the largest Romanian military concentration since the War of Independence. Within a relatively short period, approximately 400,000 soldiers were mobilized, demonstrating the administrative capacity of the Romanian state to rapidly organize substantial military forces ([Scurtu 2004](#), 60-64). The success of the mobilization was largely attributable to the

widespread popular enthusiasm and patriotic spirit displayed by the population in the context of Romania's participation in the Second Balkan War. At the same time, the mobilization served as a confirmation of the military reforms undertaken after the War of Independence and of the effectiveness of the army's recruitment and territorial organization system. However, the experience of 1913 also created the impression that the Romanian Army possessed a high degree of operational responsiveness and command efficiency. This perception significantly influenced both political and military assessments in the years preceding Romania's entry into the First World War, fostering a confidence that was not always fully supported by the army's actual operational and logistic capabilities ([Pascu et al. 1988](#), 331-333).

Despite its apparent success, the mobilization revealed numerous structural deficiencies. The railway transportation capacity was insufficient, and the concentration of military units was carried out with considerable difficulty. The lack of a modern transportation infrastructure adversely affected both the pace of troop movements and the supply of military formations ([RNMA, General Staff Collection](#), file 45/1913). Documents of the General Staff reveal significant problems related to the organization of transport convoys, the distribution of ammunition, and the coordination of transportation networks ([RNMA, General Staff Collection](#), file 45/1913). In many cases, units lacked adequate means for transporting food supplies and equipment, while provisioning efforts were delayed by the poor condition of roads and the limited capacity of the railway system. These shortcomings highlighted the gap between the army's ability to mobilize large numbers of troops and its capacity to sustain them effectively in the field, a vulnerability that would become even more evident during the campaigns of the First World War.

Military operations commenced with the crossing of the Danube and the rapid advance into Bulgarian territory. The absence of organized Bulgarian resistance enabled Romanian troops to advance to the vicinity of Sofia without engaging in any major battles ([Kirițescu 1989](#), 39-41). From a strategic perspective, the campaign was a success, contributing to the enhancement of Romania's regional prestige and facilitating the conclusion of the Treaty of Bucharest in August 1913 ([Brătianu 1940](#), 22-27). At the same time, the military communications system remained insufficiently developed. The transmission of orders was often slow, adversely affecting coordination between units and limiting the command's ability to exercise effective control over military operations ([Otu 2014](#), 31-36). These shortcomings highlighted the gap between the evolving requirements of modern warfare and the level of development of Romania's military infrastructure. In the context of a large-scale European conflict, such vulnerabilities could have had serious operational consequences.

The rapid success of operations created the impression that the Romanian Army possessed a high degree of efficiency. In reality, the absence of major engagements concealed numerous dysfunctions that would become far more apparent in

subsequent campaigns. The 1913 campaign demonstrated that the Romanian Army encountered serious difficulties in sustaining operations in the field. Even under conditions of limited enemy resistance, the supply of troops proved problematic (Ionescu 2002, 82-89).

The most serious problem of the 1913 campaign was the cholera epidemic that broke out among Romanian troops. Poor sanitary conditions, the lack of potable water, and inadequate hygiene measures facilitated the rapid spread of the disease (RNMA, Ministry of War Collection, file 212/1913).

The losses caused by the epidemic far exceeded those resulting from military engagements. This situation revealed the vulnerability of the military medical system and the inadequacy of logistic preparations for a large-scale campaign (Hitchins 2013, 274-276).

Medical reports drafted after the campaign highlighted the shortage of medical personnel, the lack of medical supplies, the inefficient organization of the evacuation of sick soldiers, and the inadequate conditions prevailing in military camps (RNMA, Army Medical Service Collection, file 18/1913). These findings underscored the fact that the Romanian Army's preparedness for modern warfare depended not only on combat capabilities but also on the effectiveness of its medical and logistic support systems, areas in which significant deficiencies remained evident.

General Alexandru Averescu emphasized in a report submitted to the Ministry of War that, although the army possessed substantial manpower and maintained a high level of morale, its infrastructure and the organization of its auxiliary services did not meet the requirements of a modern conflict (Averescu 1991, 43-45).

Constantin Hârjeu, Minister of War between 1912 and 1914, was regarded as one of the principal figures responsible for the dysfunctions manifested during the 1913 campaign. General Alexandru Iarca highlighted the inadequacies of the Romanian Army's medical service, stressing the shortage of medication and the absence of effective measures to combat cholera during the Bulgarian campaign, despite the fact that the danger of an epidemic had been recognized before the commencement of military operations. Although sufficient time had been available for preparation, the necessary preventive measures were not implemented adequately. Furthermore, Hârjeu was criticized for advocating the practice of retaining the most capable officers in troop command positions rather than integrating them into staff structures, a policy that ran counter to the modern practices adopted by the leading European armies of the period (Iarca 1922, 73-75). This approach limited the development of a highly professional General Staff and hindered the army's ability to improve operational planning and command efficiency, areas that would prove crucial in the conflicts that followed.

The 1913 campaign also exposed the limitations of the Romanian military command system. Although mobilization was carried out relatively rapidly, coordination between major formations and command structures was frequently deficient (Ionescu 2002, 86-91). The absence of modern communications systems hindered

the transmission of orders and the exchange of information between headquarters. Moreover, the military exercises conducted prior to 1913 had not adequately prepared the army for large-scale operations ([Otu 2014](#), 34-36).

At the doctrinal level, the Romanian Army continued to be strongly influenced by French concepts emphasizing rapid offensive action and the offensive spirit of troops. Military regulations devoted relatively limited attention to logistic issues and combined-arms cooperation ([Fuller 1961](#), 149-153).

Differences in the professional training of officers were also evident. While part of the officer corps was familiar with the latest developments in modern European military doctrine, many commanders remained attached to traditional concepts characterized by formalism and rigidity ([Rosetti 1926](#), 94-103).

The absence of decisive military engagements contributed to the emergence of an overly optimistic perception of the Romanian Army's ability to cope with a major European conflict. In reality, the 1913 campaign had already revealed the existence of significant structural weaknesses. The apparent success of the operation tended to obscure these deficiencies, leading both political and military leaders to overestimate the army's level of preparedness. As subsequent events would demonstrate, many of the vulnerabilities identified in 1913 remained unresolved and would have serious consequences during the First World War.

Following the conclusion of military operations and the signing of the Treaty of Bucharest, the Romanian military leadership produced several reports assessing the experience of the campaign ([RNMA, Ministry of War Collection](#), file 212/1913). These documents emphasized the need for the accelerated modernization of the army and put forward recommendations concerning the development of railway infrastructure, the modernization of the military medical service, improvements in logistics, the expansion of modern artillery, the reorganization of the command system, and the enhancement of military communications ([RNMA, Ministry of War Collection](#), file 212/1913).

Nevertheless, many of the proposed reforms were implemented only partially. The rapid success of the campaign contributed to the persistence of a favorable perception regarding the overall effectiveness of the Romanian Army ([Torrey 1998](#), 49-52). Moreover, economic constraints and the absence of a modern domestic armaments industry limited the pace of modernization. A particularly significant issue was the continued adherence to a predominantly offensive doctrine inspired by the French model. The lessons concerning the importance of defense, artillery firepower, and logistics were insufficiently incorporated into Romanian military regulations and doctrine ([Fuller 1961](#), 154-158).

From a historical perspective, the 1913 campaign may be regarded as a transitional stage between the traditional wars of the nineteenth century and the total industrial

conflict of the 1914-1918 period. For the Romanian Army, the Balkan experience represented both a confirmation of Romania's regional status and a warning regarding the necessity of modernizing the military institution.

Paradoxically, it was precisely the absence of decisive military engagements that contributed to an underestimation of the true challenges posed by modern warfare. The logistic, medical, and organizational vulnerabilities observed in 1913 would reappear in a much more severe form during the 1916 campaign.

### **The 1916 Campaign: Confrontation with Industrial Warfare**

Romania's entry into the First World War on 27 August/9 September 1916 marked the decisive moment of confrontation between the Romanian Army and the realities of modern industrial warfare. While the experience of the 1913 campaign had provided only limited indications of the vulnerabilities within the Romanian military system, the campaign of 1916 dramatically demonstrated the incompatibility between the traditional concepts embraced by the military leadership and the total character of the European conflict ([Torrey 1998](#), 112-118).

Modern warfare required economic mobilization, technological superiority, combined-arms coordination, and extensive logistic capabilities. Under these conditions, the Romanian Army, still undergoing an incomplete process of modernization, faced major difficulties in conducting large-scale operations against opponents who were more experienced, better organized, and more effectively equipped ([Keegan 1999](#), 198-205).

The 1916 campaign exposed structural weaknesses at the levels of command, logistics, equipment, and operational doctrine. At the same time, the dramatic experience of the retreat into Moldavia created the conditions for the subsequent reorganization of the army and its adaptation to the new realities of industrial warfare.

Romania's neutrality between 1914 and 1916 was determined by the complexity of the international situation and by the need for military and diplomatic preparation on the part of the state ([Hitchins 2013](#), 280-287). Within political and military circles, divergent opinions existed regarding both the desirability of entering the war and the strategic orientation that Romania should adopt.

General Alexandru Iarca argued that Romania lacked the material and human resources necessary to sustain a prolonged conflict and to replace the inevitable losses that such a war would entail. In light of the country's financial and geographical limitations, he believed that Romania's entry into the First World War should be postponed for as long as possible in order to avoid strategic isolation and the concentration of superior enemy forces against the country. In support of this assessment, Iarca referred to plans developed by the Central Powers for potential attacks against Romania during 1915-1916. At the same time, he maintained that he had consistently advised Ion I. C. Brătianu to avoid premature intervention until the

launch of a general Allied offensive. Nevertheless, Iarca considered that once such an Allied offensive had begun, Romania was obliged to enter the war regardless of its own level of preparedness, accepting even the possibility of major sacrifices in pursuit of its national objectives (Iarca 1922, 140-141).

The political and military convention signed with the Entente in August 1916 formalized Romania's entry into the war against Austria-Hungary in exchange for the recognition of Romanian claims to Transylvania, the Banat, and Bukovina (Brătianu 1940, 45-59). The Romanian political leadership considered the moment favorable, given the difficulties encountered by the Central Powers on other fronts.

The campaign plan developed by the Romanian General Headquarters envisaged a main offensive in Transylvania while maintaining a defensive posture on the southern front (Kirițescu 1989, 126-141). Romanian strategy was based on the concept of a rapid advance through the Carpathian passes and the occupation of key objectives before the Central Powers could concentrate sufficient forces for a counteroffensive. Romanian strategic thinking was strongly influenced by the French doctrine of the decisive offensive. It was believed that the offensive spirit of the troops and the speed of operations could compensate for material and organizational shortcomings (Fuller 1961, 149-163). In reality, however, the European war had already demonstrated the effectiveness of organized defense, artillery firepower, and modern defensive systems. The experience of the Western and Eastern Fronts showed that success increasingly depended on sustained logistic support, coordination among different arms of service, and the ability to concentrate overwhelming firepower rather than on offensive determination alone. Consequently, some of the assumptions underlying Romanian strategic planning in 1916 were already out of step with the evolving realities of industrial warfare.

The Romanian plan failed to fully take into account the challenges of fighting a war on two fronts and underestimated the Central Powers' capacity for rapid reaction and force concentration. Furthermore, cooperation with the Russian Army was constrained by divergent strategic objectives and persistent difficulties in achieving effective coordination between the allied commands (Stone 1998, 217-225).

The 1916 campaign exposed numerous structural vulnerabilities within the Romanian Army, stemming from the incomplete modernization of the military institution and the limited resources available to the Romanian state (Ionescu 2002, 98-112). These weaknesses became evident at every level of military activity, from strategic planning and command organization to logistics, communications, and battlefield support. The campaign demonstrated that, despite the reforms undertaken in previous decades, the Romanian military system remained insufficiently prepared to meet the demands of a large-scale industrial war against well-equipped and experienced opponents.

- **Insufficient Equipment.** One of the most serious problems was the shortage of modern weaponry. The Romanian Army possessed a relatively small number of

machine guns and heavy artillery pieces compared to the armies of the Central Powers (Stroea and Băjenaru 2010, 92-103). Ammunition stocks were inadequate for sustaining a prolonged conflict, while domestic arms production was incapable of meeting the requirements of military operations. Numerous units entered combat with incomplete equipment and limited ammunition reserves (AMNR, General Headquarters Collection, file 178/1916). Furthermore, Romanian military aviation was still at an early stage of development, and modern communications equipment remained insufficient. In the context of industrial warfare, these deficiencies significantly reduced operational effectiveness and limited the army's capacity for coordination and command. The costs associated with the reorganization and re-equipment of the Romanian Army for the 1917 campaign, estimated at approximately 1.6 billion lei, exceeded by more than three times Romania's total annual state budget for the years 1913-1914, which amounted to roughly 500 million lei (Pascu et al. 1988, 500-502). This disparity illustrates the economic limitations of the Romanian state and helps explain the major difficulties encountered during the 1916 campaign. Under these circumstances, the deficiencies in armaments, ammunition, equipment, and logistics cannot be interpreted solely as the result of command failures. They must also be understood as manifestations of the Romanian state's limited capacity to sustain the material and financial demands of modern industrial warfare.

- **Logistic Vulnerability.** Logistics constituted one of the most significant weaknesses of the Romanian Army. The inadequately developed railway network and the poor state of road infrastructure severely hindered both the supply system and the rapid movement of troops (van Creveld 1977, 201-214). The transportation of artillery and ammunition was carried out with considerable difficulty, while the absence of modern storage facilities disrupted the continuity of supply operations. In many instances, frontline units did not receive ammunition, food, or equipment in a timely manner (RNMA, General Staff Collection, file 221/1916). These logistical deficiencies became even more pronounced in the context of simultaneous military operations conducted in Transylvania and Dobruja. The Romanian Army lacked the resources necessary to sustain an effective war effort on two fronts.

- **Command and Coordination Problems.** The command structure proved insufficiently adapted to the conditions of modern warfare. Coordination between armies and army corps was frequently deficient, while the transmission of orders was often slow and inefficient (Otu 2017, 74-83). The absence of an effective unity of command and the difficulties associated with the flow of information reduced the operational leadership's ability to respond rapidly to changes in the tactical situation. Furthermore, disparities in the professional competence and training of commanders negatively affected the coherence of military operations. Differences in experience, doctrinal outlook, and decision-making often resulted in inconsistent execution of operational plans and hindered effective cooperation between formations. General Constantin Prezan later observed that one of the main weaknesses of the Romanian Army in 1916 was the inability of its command structure to adapt initial plans to the rapidly evolving operational situation (Prezan 1995, 74-79).

- **The Limitations of Offensive Doctrine.** The Romanian military leadership continued to be strongly influenced by French doctrinal concepts emphasizing rapid offensive action and the morale of troops (Strachan 2001, 162-170). Military regulations devoted insufficient attention to organized defense, combined-arms cooperation, and the systematic employment of artillery fire. The experience of the Western Front had already demonstrated that frontal assaults against well-prepared defensive positions resulted in enormous casualties. The growing effectiveness of machine guns, heavy artillery, and entrenched defensive systems had fundamentally altered the balance between offense and defense. Nevertheless, the Romanian Army failed to fully incorporate the lessons of modern warfare into its doctrine, training, and operational planning.

During the first weeks of the campaign, Romanian troops achieved a number of local successes in Transylvania. The advance through the Carpathian passes proceeded relatively rapidly, and the Romanian population of the province welcomed the army favorably (Torrey 2011, 71-86). However, the Romanian offensive was gradually slowed down by logistic difficulties and the lack of sufficient reserves to sustain continued operations. At the same time, the German High Command reacted swiftly by transferring experienced troops under the command of General Erich von Falkenhayn (Dupuy 1977, 187-194). Simultaneously, Field Marshal August von Mackensen organized the German-Bulgarian offensive in Dobruja. The attack on Turtucaia resulted in a severe defeat for the Romanian Army and had a profound impact on both troop morale and public opinion (Kiritescu 1989, 214-223). The defeat at Turtucaia demonstrated the vulnerability of the Romanian defensive system and the absence of effective coordination between the different fronts. Moreover, it compelled the Romanian military leadership to transfer substantial forces from Transylvania to the southern front, thereby reducing the strength and momentum of the main offensive. This strategic diversion of resources contributed significantly to the loss of the initiative and facilitated the subsequent counteroffensives launched by the Central Powers.

General Alexandru Iarca argued that the fortified positions at Turtucaia and Silistra should not have been defended during the 1916 campaign, maintaining that the preservation of such fortifications could not justify weakening the field army. In his view, these positions possessed limited strategic value and, because of their exposed and peripheral location, could not be effectively integrated into the army's overall operational maneuver. Iarca further contended that the relatively small garrisons stationed there lacked the capacity to conduct significant offensive actions against enemy lines of communication. Drawing upon military experience, he emphasized that troops confined within fortifications risked being surrounded and destroyed, as had occurred at Turtucaia. He also believed that subordinating the maneuver of the field army to the defense of fixed positions restricted the freedom of action of the high command and imposed rigidity upon the operational deployment of forces. According to Iarca, the supply and transportation of troops across the Danube could

have been organized through alternative logistic centers, such as Cernavodă, without the need to maintain these bridgeheads. Given that Romania's main strategic effort was concentrated in Transylvania, he argued that the forces deployed in Dobruja should have been reduced to the minimum necessary level. In his assessment, the immobilization of substantial numbers of troops in the garrisons of Turtucaia and Silistra contributed directly to the weakening of the Romanian field army. Iarca ultimately concluded that the abandonment of the original plan to withdraw from Dobruja and the adoption of a predominantly defensive strategy facilitated the disaster at Turtucaia. The defeat resulted in considerable human and material losses, undermined the morale of the army, and diminished Romania's military prestige (Iarca 1922, 153-157).

In the autumn of 1916, the offensive launched by the Central Powers forced the gradual withdrawal of the Romanian Army from Transylvania and Wallachia (Hitchins 2013, 288-295). The enemy's technical and organizational superiority, combined with the Romanian Army's logistic and command deficiencies, contributed to the rapid deterioration of the strategic situation. Bucharest was occupied on 6 December 1916, and the government, the royal family, and a large part of the state administration withdrew to Moldavia (Scurtu 2004, 71-79). The situation of the Romanian state had become critical, while the army faced heavy losses, material shortages, and declining morale.

The retreat highlighted the difficulties of conducting a modern war in a state with insufficiently developed infrastructure. Congested roads, the shortage of transportation assets, and adverse weather conditions severely affected the movement of both troops and civilians (AMNR, General Headquarters Collection, file 245/1916). These challenges demonstrated the extent to which military operations in the age of industrial warfare depended upon efficient transportation networks and administrative capacity. Nevertheless, the Romanian Army did not collapse completely. The core of its combat forces succeeded in withdrawing to Moldavia and preserving the continuity of military resistance. This capacity for institutional survival proved crucial, as it created the conditions necessary for the subsequent reorganization of the army in 1917. Despite the severity of the defeats suffered during the campaign, the preservation of a functioning military structure enabled Romania to remain in the war and laid the foundation for the military recovery that would follow.

General Alexandru Iarca explained the disaster of the 1916 campaign through a series of structural deficiencies within the Romanian Army, placing at the center of his analysis the absence of clear strategic foresight and a coherent war objective. In his view, this fundamental weakness was reflected in a flawed military organization and in a command structure incapable of effectively coordinating military operations. Iarca also criticized the unrealistic character of Romania's war plans and the inadequate level of troop training, particularly among reserve formations,

which were insufficiently prepared for the demands of modern warfare. In his assessment, tactical factors and material shortages were of secondary importance when compared to deficiencies in military strategy and leadership. Referring, among others, to views associated with General Alexandru Averescu, Iarca argued that the “new tactics” of modern warfare had not yet been fully defined and that shortages of modern equipment alone could not explain the scale of the defeat. He therefore concluded that the failure of the Romanian Campaign of 1916 resulted primarily from fundamental shortcomings in organization, training, and command. These deficiencies severely undermined the Romanian Army’s ability to conduct effective operations and to respond adequately to the challenges posed by industrial warfare (Iarca 1922, 230).

The 1916 campaign represented the most dramatic military experience in Romania’s history up to that point. It demonstrated that modern warfare required not only military mobilization but also economic capacity, administrative organization, and doctrinal adaptation (Stevenson 2005, 421-429).

The defeats suffered during the campaign exposed the limitations of the Romanian state’s incomplete modernization and highlighted the incompatibility between traditional military concepts and the realities of industrial warfare. At the same time, however, the experience of 1916 created the conditions necessary for the subsequent transformation of the Romanian Army.

From a historiographical perspective, the 1916 campaign should be interpreted not merely as a sequence of military defeats, but also as the decisive moment in the confrontation between the institutions of the Romanian state and the demands of modern warfare. The lessons derived from this experience would profoundly influence the reorganization of the army and the evolution of Romanian military doctrine in the following year.

### **The Reorganization of the Romanian Army and the 1917 Campaign**

The defeats suffered by the Romanian Army during the 1916 campaign revealed the limitations of the Romanian military system when confronted with the realities of modern industrial warfare. Nevertheless, the retreat into Moldavia and the preservation of the army’s principal combat nucleus created the conditions for an extensive military reorganization carried out during the winter of 1916-1917 (Torrey 2011, 145-156).

The process of rebuilding the Romanian Army took place under extremely difficult circumstances. A large portion of the national territory was occupied by the Central Powers, the economy was in a critical condition, and the civilian population was affected by displacement, famine, and epidemics (Hitchins 2013, 295-302). Despite these challenges, the political and military leadership, with the support of the Western Allies, succeeded in reorganizing the army and transforming it into

a force capable of resisting the German and Austro-Hungarian offensives of the summer of 1917.

The 1917 campaign represented the culmination of the Romanian Army's adaptation to the realities of modern warfare. The defensive victories at Mărăști, Mărășești, and Oituz demonstrated that the painful lessons of 1916 had been assimilated and transformed into valuable doctrinal and operational experience ([Kirițescu 1989](#), 233-267). These successes reflected not only improvements in military organization and training but also a broader institutional capacity to learn from defeat and adapt to the demands of industrialized conflict.

Following the occupation of Bucharest and the retreat into Moldavia, the Romanian state faced one of the most severe crises in its modern history. Approximately two-thirds of the national territory was under enemy occupation, while the administration, industry, and economic resources had been profoundly disrupted ([Scurtu 2004](#), 80-85). Under these circumstances, the reconstruction of the army became an essential prerequisite for the survival of the Romanian state. The process of military reorganization was coordinated by the Romanian General Headquarters under the leadership of General Constantin Prezan and benefited from the direct support of the French Military Mission headed by General Henri Mathias Berthelot ([Prezan 1995](#), 91-102).

The main objectives of the reorganization were the restoration of combat strength, the modernization of military training, the restructuring of the command system, the improvement of cooperation among the different branches of the armed forces, the re-equipment of the army with modern weaponry, and the enhancement of the defensive capabilities of the Moldavian front ([Otu 2017](#), 104-119). These measures sought not merely to replace the losses suffered in 1916 but to create a more effective and adaptable military force capable of meeting the operational requirements of modern industrial warfare.

The reorganization process was carried out simultaneously with efforts to restore troop morale and to rebuild the army's logistic and medical support systems. A decisive role in the reorganization of the Romanian Army was played by the French Military Mission, which arrived in Romania at the end of 1916. General Henri Berthelot and his collaborators contributed significantly to the modernization of military training and to the adaptation of Romanian doctrine in accordance with the lessons of the Western Front. French officers participated in the reorganization of major formations, the development of new training programs, the instruction of Romanian officers, the restructuring of the artillery arm, and the improvement of medical and logistic services ([Cristescu 2010](#), 201-219).

The French Military Mission placed particular emphasis on cooperation between infantry and artillery, the organization of defense in depth, and the effective employment of artillery fire. These principles represented a significant departure

from the predominantly offensive doctrine that had influenced the Romanian Army before 1916. At the same time, France and the other Allied powers supplied Romania with modern weapons, ammunition, and equipment, thereby contributing to the restoration of the army's combat effectiveness ([RNMA, General Headquarters Collection](#), file 312/1917). General Henri Berthelot later observed that one of the major strengths of the Romanian soldier was his remarkable capacity for endurance and adaptation under difficult conditions ([Berthelot 1920](#), 328-331). This resilience, combined with the organizational and doctrinal reforms implemented during the winter of 1916-1917, became a crucial factor in the recovery of the Romanian Army and its subsequent performance during the campaigns of 1917.

The experiences of the 1916 campaign brought about significant changes in the doctrine and training system of the Romanian Army. The lessons of modern warfare highlighted the necessity of abandoning concepts based exclusively on frontal offensives and the offensive spirit of the troops ([Strachan 2001](#), 241-248). The new regulations and training programs emphasized combined-arms cooperation, the effective employment of artillery, the defensive organization of terrain, the construction of field fortifications, the use of concentrated firepower, and the tactical flexibility of military units ([Ionescu 2002](#), 121-133).

The training of both soldiers and officers became more realistic and better adapted to the conditions of the modern battlefield. Tactical exercises focused on coordination among different branches of the armed forces and on preparing troops for the defense of fortified positions. Greater attention was also devoted to communications and military intelligence systems. The Romanian command increasingly recognized that the success of military operations depended to a large extent on the speed of information transmission and on effective coordination between units ([RNMA, General Staff Collection](#), file 355/1917).

The reorganization of the army was not limited to technical and organizational measures; it also possessed an important moral and psychological dimension. The defeats of 1916 had profoundly affected the morale of both the troops and the civilian population ([Torrey 1998](#), 173-181). Consequently, the military and political leadership sought to restore the fighting spirit of the nation through improved supply conditions, strengthened discipline, intensified patriotic propaganda, and the promotion of the ideals of national defense and state survival ([Hitchins 2013](#), 303-307).

The presence of King Ferdinand I and Queen Marie near the front lines had a significant positive impact on the morale of the army. Their visible commitment to the national cause served as a source of encouragement for both soldiers and civilians during one of the most critical periods in Romania's history. Furthermore, promises concerning agrarian reform and the extension of political rights contributed to strengthening the loyalty and motivation of the soldiers, many of whom viewed the war not only as a struggle for national survival, but also as a means of achieving important social and political reforms ([Marie, Queen of Romania 2014](#), 92-105).

The Mărăști Offensive, conducted in July 1917, represented the first major success of the reorganized Romanian Army (Kirițescu 1989, 268-289). The operation, coordinated by General Alexandru Averescu, aimed to break through the Austro-Hungarian front and improve the strategic position of the Romanian and Russian forces. The preparation of the offensive demonstrated the progress achieved in operational planning and combined-arms cooperation. Artillery was employed systematically to destroy enemy positions and to support the advance of the infantry, reflecting the doctrinal and tactical lessons learned from the previous year's campaign (Averescu 1991, 167-182). Careful coordination between different branches of the armed forces and the concentration of firepower played a crucial role in the success of the operation. The victory at Mărăști possessed both significant military and psychological importance. It demonstrated that the Romanian Army had become capable of conducting modern military operations and of effectively applying the experience gained during the difficult campaign of 1916. Moreover, the success strengthened the confidence of both the troops and the military leadership, providing tangible evidence that the reforms implemented during the winter of 1916-1917 had substantially improved the army's combat effectiveness.

The Battle of Mărășești, fought between July and August 1917, was the most important military engagement undertaken by the Romanian Army during the First World War (Torrey 2011, 187-209). The offensive launched by the Central Powers aimed at destroying the Romanian and Russian forces in Moldavia and permanently eliminating Romania from the war. Under these circumstances, the defense of the Mărășești front acquired decisive strategic importance (Stone 1998, 287-296). The Romanian Army made effective use of defense in depth, field fortifications, infantry-artillery cooperation, local counterattacks, and the mobility of tactical reserves (Otu 2017, 132-141).

Simultaneously with the fighting at Mărășești, Romanian troops repelled the Austro-Hungarian offensive in the Oituz sector. The mountainous terrain and difficult combat conditions tested the army's capacity for endurance and adaptation. The defense at Oituz highlighted the importance of the initiative displayed by local commanders and the effectiveness of defensive organization. Romanian troops utilized fortified positions and rugged terrain to block the enemy's advance (RNMA, Second Army Collection, file 88/1917). The resistance at Oituz contributed decisively to the preservation of the Moldavian front and prevented the occupation of the last unoccupied part of Romanian territory.

Despite these defensive successes, the reorganization of the Romanian Army did not eliminate all the structural problems that had existed before the war. Romania continued to depend on Allied support for weapons and ammunition, while the national economy remained severely affected by the occupation of much of the country by the Central Powers (Hitchins 2013, 308-312). At the same time, the international situation became increasingly difficult following the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the collapse of the Eastern Front. Under these circumstances, Romania found itself strategically isolated (Stevenson 2005, 501-514).

Nevertheless, the 1917 campaign demonstrated the Romanian Army's capacity to learn from experience and adapt to the realities of industrial warfare. The contrast between the army's performance in 1916 and its achievements in 1917 highlighted the importance of doctrinal, logistic, and operational reorganization.

From a historical perspective, the 1917 campaign represents the moment at which the Romanian Army succeeded, at least partially, in overcoming the structural limitations that had been revealed in 1913 and 1916. The resistance in Moldavia possessed fundamental military, political, and symbolic significance for the survival of the Romanian state and for the subsequent realization of Greater Romania. It demonstrated that, despite severe setbacks and material constraints, the Romanian military institution was capable of adapting to the demands of modern warfare and preserving the conditions necessary for the achievement of the nation's political objectives.

The Armistice of Focșani, signed on 26 November/9 December 1917, must be understood within the context of the radical transformations that occurred on the Eastern Front following the Bolshevik coup in Petrograd on 25 October/7 November 1917. The seizure of power by the Bolsheviks under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin, together with the new regime's determination to conclude a separate peace with the Central Powers, led to the disintegration of the Russian Front and the strategic isolation of Romania. Under these circumstances, the continuation of the war became extremely difficult from both a military and a logistic perspective. In his memoirs, General Alexandru Averescu recounted that, following the Crown Council of 18 February 1918, during which King Ferdinand I read the declaration accepting peace, he convened a meeting with the Council of Ministers attended by Generals Constantin Prezan, Artur Văitoianu, Eremia Grigorescu, and Constantin Zaharia to examine the possibility of resuming military operations. Although Generals Eremia Grigorescu and Artur Văitoianu argued in favor of continuing armed resistance, the decisive assessment was provided by General Constantin Zaharia, who, after evaluating the logistic situation, concluded that "resistance is a utopia" (Averescu 1937, 298-299). This assessment highlights the decisive role played by logistics in shaping the political and military decisions of the Romanian leadership. Consequently, Romania's temporary withdrawal from the war cannot be interpreted solely as a consequence of the operational situation on the battlefield. Rather, it must be understood in relation to the collapse of the Allied system in the East and the material impossibility for the Romanian Army to sustain a prolonged conflict under conditions of strategic isolation.

The armistice with the Central Powers, signed at Focșani on 26 November/9 December 1917, generated mixed reactions among the Entente powers, many of which refused to accept the arguments advanced by Romania to justify the suspension of hostilities. Although the decision of the Romanian authorities was dictated by the extremely difficult military and political circumstances created by the disintegration of the Russian Army and Romania's isolation on the Eastern Front, the Western Allies viewed the armistice with considerable reservation, regarding it as a weakening of the common front against the Central Powers.

## Comparative Analysis of the Military Campaigns of 1913, 1916, and 1917

The comparative analysis of the military campaigns conducted by the Romanian Army in 1913, 1916, and 1917 makes it possible to highlight the transformations that occurred in the structure, doctrine, and operational capabilities of the Romanian military institution in the context of modern warfare. Although these campaigns took place under different political and military circumstances, they reveal both elements of continuity and significant differences with regard to army organization, the conduct of operations, and the degree of adaptation to the realities of industrial warfare (Torrey 1998, 41-52).

The 1913 campaign constituted the first major test of the Romanian military system since the War of Independence; however, the absence of decisive military engagements limited the operational significance of the experience. While the campaign exposed the structural vulnerabilities of the Romanian Army, the events of 1917 demonstrated the institution's capacity for reorganization and adaptation (Otu 2017, 65-83).

A comparison of these three military experiences allows for a deeper understanding of the gradual process through which the Romanian Army evolved from the traditional concepts of nineteenth-century warfare toward forms of organization and military action more characteristic of modern industrial conflict.

• **Persistence of Logistic Problems.** One of the most significant continuities among the three campaigns was the logistic vulnerability of the Romanian Army. In each case, the inadequately developed infrastructure and the limited capacity of the railway network adversely affected mobilization, troop movements, and supply operations (van Creveld 1977, 201-214). In 1913, difficulties related to transportation and the organization of supply convoys hampered operations in Bulgaria, even in the absence of major combat engagements (RNMA, General Staff Collection, file 45/1913). In 1916, these problems manifested themselves in a far more severe form, undermining the army's ability to sustain simultaneous operations in Transylvania and Dobruja (Kirițescu 1989, 214-223). Although the reorganization of 1917 brought partial improvements to the logistic system, difficulties concerning the supply of ammunition, equipment, and food continued to exist. Romania remained dependent on Allied assistance and on the limited infrastructure available in Moldavia (Hitchins 2013, 303-307). The persistence of these logistic shortcomings demonstrates that military modernization could not be separated from the broader economic and administrative development of the Romanian state.

• **The Influence of Political Factors on Military Decision-Making.** In all three campaigns, military decisions were strongly influenced by political and diplomatic considerations (Brătianu 1940, 22-59). In 1913, Romania's intervention against Bulgaria was primarily intended to strengthen the country's regional position and

secure the acquisition of Southern Dobruja (the Quadrilateral) (Hall 2000, 119-138). As a result, the campaign possessed a predominantly political and strategic character rather than a purely military one. In 1916, Romania's entry into the war on the side of the Entente was determined both by national objectives related to the unification of Transylvania with Romania and by the pressures of the international context (Torrey 2011, 71-86). The Romanian political leadership considered the moment favorable for achieving the national ideal, despite the fact that the army was not fully prepared for a large-scale conflict. In 1917, the resistance in Moldavia carried not only military significance but also profound political and symbolic importance. The preservation of the front was essential for the survival of the Romanian state and for maintaining the political legitimacy of both the government and the monarchy (Scurtu 2004, 80-92). Thus, in all three campaigns, political considerations exerted a substantial influence on the planning and conduct of military operations.

- **Command and Coordination Deficiencies.** Problems related to command and coordination constituted another recurring feature of the Romanian military experience between 1913 and 1917 (Ionescu 2002, 82-133). During the 1913 campaign, the absence of modern communications systems and the difficulties encountered in coordinating major formations revealed significant limitations in operational leadership (RNMA, Ministry of War Collection, file 212/1913). In 1916, these deficiencies produced far more serious consequences. The lack of effective coordination among Romanian armies and the inability of the command structure to adapt rapidly to the changing operational situation contributed significantly to the failure of the campaign (Prezan 1995, 74-79). Weaknesses in planning, communication, and decision-making reduced the army's capacity to respond effectively to the initiatives of the Central Powers. Although Romanian military leadership improved considerably in 1917, problems concerning the transmission of orders and inter-service coordination did not disappear entirely (RNMA, General Headquarters Collection, file 312/1917). Nevertheless, the experience accumulated during the previous campaigns, together with the assistance provided by the French Military Mission, enabled the Romanian Army to mitigate many of these vulnerabilities.

- **Morale and Endurance.** Throughout all three campaigns, the morale and endurance of the Romanian soldier constituted essential factors in military effectiveness. In 1913, the army demonstrated discipline and a capacity for rapid mobilization. In 1916, although the campaign ended in retreat and substantial losses, the army did not collapse completely and succeeded in preserving the continuity of military resistance. In 1917, the morale of the reorganized troops became one of the principal factors behind the defensive successes achieved at Mărășești and Oituz (Averescu 1991, 167-182). This continuity highlights the fact that, despite the structural deficiencies of the military institution, the Romanian soldier possessed a remarkable capacity for adaptation and endurance under difficult conditions.

- **Intensity of the Conflict.** The most evident difference among the three campaigns lies in the scale and intensity of the conflict. The 1913 campaign took place in a strategic environment favorable to Romania and did not involve major military engagements. Operations were limited in scope, and success was achieved rapidly with relatively modest military effort. By contrast, the campaigns of 1916 and 1917 were conducted within the broader context of the First World War, a conflict characterized by total mobilization, the massive employment of artillery, and extremely high human losses ([Stevenson 2005](#), 421-429). The operational environment was considerably more complex, requiring sustained logistic support, large-scale coordination, and the effective integration of modern weapons systems. If 1916 represented Romania's first direct confrontation with the realities of industrial warfare, 1917 demonstrated the Romanian Army's capacity to operate effectively within a modern, high-intensity conflict.

- **Doctrinal Adaptation.** The differences among the three campaigns also reflect the evolution of Romanian military doctrine. In 1913, the army remained strongly influenced by the traditional concepts of maneuver warfare and rapid offensive action. The absence of decisive engagements prevented a full understanding of the lessons of modern warfare ([Otu 2014](#), 31-36). In 1916, the predominantly offensive doctrine proved insufficiently adapted to the conditions of industrial warfare. The Romanian Army had not yet fully incorporated the lessons emerging from the Western Front concerning the importance of artillery, field fortifications, and defense in depth. As a result, many operational concepts remained rooted in pre-war assumptions that underestimated the growing significance of firepower and defensive organization. By contrast, 1917 witnessed a significant doctrinal transformation. The reorganization of the army and the influence of the French Military Mission encouraged the development of combined-arms cooperation and the adaptation of defensive tactics to the realities of modern conflict ([Cristescu 2010](#), 201-219).

- **Quality of Command.** Another important point of differentiation is the evolution of the army's operational leadership. In 1913, the limitations of the command structure did not produce serious consequences because of the limited nature of the military engagements. In 1916, however, difficulties in operational coordination and the inability to adapt rapidly to enemy initiatives contributed decisively to Romania's defeat ([Kirițescu 1989](#), 214-223). By 1917, the experience gained during the previous campaign and the reorganization of the command system had enabled a far more effective form of military leadership. Generals Constantin Prezan, Alexandru Averescu, and Eremia Grigorescu demonstrated a superior capacity for coordination, decision-making, and adaptation to the evolving conditions of the battlefield.

- **The Army and Society.** The campaigns under analysis also highlight the evolution of the relationship between the army and Romanian society. In 1913, the war had only a limited impact on the civilian population, and military operations were

perceived primarily as an affirmation of Romania's regional prestige (Scurtu 2004, 60-64). The conflict remained largely confined to the military sphere and did not fundamentally alter the everyday life of most citizens. In contrast, the campaigns of 1916 and 1917 involved the mobilization of society as a whole. The occupation of a large part of the country, the withdrawal of the government and administration to Moldavia, the economic crisis, and the heavy human losses transformed the war into a profound collective experience (Marie, *Queen of Romania* 2014, 92-105). The distinction between the military and civilian spheres became increasingly blurred as the demands of total war affected every aspect of national life. At the same time, the army emerged as the principal symbol of national resistance and of the hope for achieving political and territorial unity.

Viewed comparatively, the campaigns of 1913, 1916, and 1917 illustrate the broader process through which the Romanian Army adapted to the requirements of modern warfare. The 1913 campaign served as a warning – insufficiently understood at the time – regarding the logistic and organizational vulnerabilities of the Romanian military system. The campaign of 1916 exposed the limitations of incomplete modernization and the shortcomings of traditional military doctrine. By contrast, the experience of 1917 confirmed the capacity of the Romanian military institution to learn, adapt, and transform itself in response to the challenges of industrial warfare. Accordingly, these three campaigns should be analyzed as interdependent stages in the process of military modernization and Romania's integration into the paradigm of European industrial warfare. Taken together, they reveal a gradual evolution from a military system shaped by nineteenth-century assumptions toward one increasingly capable of operating within the complex realities of twentieth-century total war.

The analysis of the Romanian Army's confrontation with the realities of modern warfare between 1913 and 1917 extends beyond a strictly historical dimension and offers a number of conclusions relevant to the understanding of contemporary operational challenges. The military transformations that occurred during the period under examination present numerous parallels with the changes currently generated by technological innovation, new forms of conflict, and the multidimensional character of modern warfare.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the emergence of modern artillery, machine guns, and the mobilization of industrial resources fundamentally transformed the character of armed conflict. Similarly, today's strategic environment is shaped by the development of drones, cyber warfare, autonomous systems, and artificial intelligence, all of which are profoundly changing the conduct of military operations (Freedman 2017, 311-340).

The experience of the Romanian Army between 1913 and 1917 demonstrates that one of the greatest vulnerabilities of a military institution arises when doctrine, organization, and infrastructure fail to evolve at the same pace as the changing nature

of warfare. In 1916, the Romanian Army entered a modern industrial conflict while still relying on structures and tactical concepts largely influenced by nineteenth-century models of warfare. In a similar manner, contemporary armed forces may encounter significant difficulties if technological modernization is not accompanied by corresponding doctrinal and organizational adaptation. Technological superiority alone does not automatically guarantee military success in the absence of a flexible doctrine and a rapid capacity for operational learning. The Romanian experience illustrates that effective adaptation requires not only the acquisition of new technologies but also the development of institutional mechanisms capable of integrating innovation into military planning, training, and operational practice.

The campaigns of 1913 and 1916 demonstrated that logistic deficiencies can decisively affect military effectiveness, regardless of troop morale or the level of preparation of military structures. Difficulties related to supply, mobility, and transportation infrastructure had a negative impact on the Romanian Army's ability to sustain large-scale operations. The realities of contemporary conflicts confirm this conclusion. The war in Ukraine has highlighted the importance of logistics, the protection of lines of communication, and the resilience of both military and civilian infrastructure (Strachan 2013, 97-114). Operational success depends not only on the performance of military equipment, but also on the capacity of the state to sustain a prolonged military effort.

Consequently, one of the fundamental lessons derived from this experience is that the adaptation of armed forces must include the development of logistic infrastructure, the enhancement of mobilization capacity, the protection of critical infrastructure, and the strengthening of institutional and economic resilience (Kilcullen 2020, 184-201). Contemporary conflicts also demonstrate that armed forces must be prepared for hybrid warfare, multidomain operations, information and cyber confrontations, and the simultaneous employment of conventional and unconventional means (Hoffman 2009, 34-39). In this respect, the experience of the Romanian Army between 1916 and 1917 underscores the importance of an institution's ability to adapt rapidly to changes in the character of warfare.

The 1917 campaign highlighted the decisive role of cooperation between infantry and artillery, as well as the importance of effective coordination between command structures and combat units (Otu 2017, 132-141). Today, this lesson is reflected in the concept of multidomain operations, which requires the integration of land, air, maritime, cyber, and information activities within a unified command-and-control system (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command 2018, 7-18).

Historical experience has demonstrated that military success depends on the interoperability of force structures, the integration of modern technologies, the speed of information flow, and the capacity for operational coordination (Stevenson 2005, 421-429). The Romanian Army's performance in 1917 showed how improvements in coordination, communication, and combined-arms cooperation could significantly enhance combat effectiveness, even under conditions of limited resources.

The experiences of the period 1913-1917 underscored the fact that military effectiveness depends directly on the capacity of the state and society to sustain the war effort. During the First World War, Romania's ability to resist was influenced not only by the performance of its armed forces but also by the mobilization of the economic, administrative, and moral resources of society. In this context, the present research highlights the fact that the adaptation of armed forces cannot be separated from the strengthening of the state's overall resilience.

The contrast between the performance of the Romanian Army in 1916 and that of 1917 demonstrates the importance of institutional learning and adaptive capacity. The rapid reorganization of the army, the modernization of training, and the incorporation of lessons derived from battlefield experience enabled the transformation of a military force in crisis into one capable of resisting the offensives of the Central Powers. This conclusion carries significant relevance for contemporary armed forces. In a strategic environment characterized by rapid change and uncertainty, the capacity for organizational learning becomes one of the most important prerequisites for operational effectiveness (Farrell, Osinga, and Russell 2013, 11-27).

The comparative analysis between the experiences of the Romanian Army during the period 1913-1917 and contemporary operational realities highlights the enduring nature of several fundamental problems of warfare: the importance of logistics, the necessity of doctrinal adaptation, the role of combined-arms cooperation, and the relationship between military capability and the state's capacity to sustain military operations.

Historical experience accentuates that military success depends not exclusively on technology or numerical superiority, but also on institutional adaptability, doctrinal flexibility, and societal resilience. The Romanian Army's evolution from the setbacks of 1916 to the defensive successes of 1917 illustrates how the ability to learn, reorganize, and adapt can significantly influence the outcome of military operations.

Consequently, the lessons derived from the Romanian Army's confrontation with modern industrial warfare can provide valuable insights for understanding contemporary challenges and supporting the ongoing process of military transformation and adaptation. These lessons remain relevant in an era characterized by rapid technological change, multidomain operations, and increasingly complex security environments, reaffirming the importance of organizational learning, operational flexibility, and the integration of military capabilities within the broader framework of national resilience.

## Conclusions

The analysis of the Romanian Army's confrontation with the realities of modern warfare during the campaigns of 1913, 1916, and 1917 highlights the complex nature of the Romanian state's process of military adaptation at the beginning of the

twentieth century. The evolution of the military institution during this period reflects both the limitations of Romania's political and economic modernization and the army's capacity to learn from the dramatic experiences of contemporary conflicts.

The findings of this research demonstrate that, between 1913 and 1917, the Romanian Army underwent an accelerated and often contradictory process of adaptation to modern warfare. The 1913 campaign revealed the existence of significant logistic, medical, and organizational vulnerabilities; however, the lessons derived from this experience were only partially implemented before Romania's entry into the First World War. The cholera epidemic, supply difficulties, and infrastructural shortcomings demonstrated that the army was not fully prepared for the demands of a large-scale modern conflict. The political and military leadership continued to display excessive optimism regarding the Romanian Army's ability to cope with a major European war. The influence of the French doctrine of the decisive offensive, combined with an underestimation of the importance of logistics and positional warfare, contributed to the persistence of tactical concepts that were insufficiently adapted to the new realities of the battlefield.

The 1916 campaign revealed the limitations of the incomplete modernization of the military institution and the difficulties involved in adapting to modern industrial warfare. Romania entered the First World War with a military establishment that remained only partially modernized, dependent on external resources, and burdened by logistic and organizational deficiencies. The defeats suffered in Transylvania, Dobruja, and Wallachia demonstrated the limitations of the Romanian military system when compared with the modern armies of the Central Powers. The lack of heavy artillery, insufficient ammunition supplies, difficulties in operational coordination, and the vulnerability of the country's infrastructure all contributed decisively to the failure of the campaign. At the same time, the experience of 1916 highlighted the inability of a predominantly offensive doctrine to respond effectively to the conditions of attritional warfare and the realities of the industrialized battlefield.

Nevertheless, the 1916 campaign should not be viewed merely as a succession of military defeats. It also marked the beginning of an accelerated process of institutional transformation. The retreat into Moldavia and the preservation of the army's principal combat nucleus created the conditions necessary for the subsequent reorganization of the Romanian armed forces.

At the same time, the research demonstrates that the reorganization of 1917 represented a decisive moment in the transformation of the Romanian Army. Under the influence of the French Military Mission led by General Henri Berthelot, the army underwent an extensive process of doctrinal, organizational, and technical reconstruction. The reform of military training, the development of combined-arms cooperation, the modernization of artillery employment, and the reorganization of the defensive system enabled the army to adapt to the conditions of modern warfare. The victories at Mărăști, Mărășești, and Oituz demonstrated the effectiveness of the

transformations implemented in 1917. The reorganized Romanian Army succeeded in offering effective resistance to the offensives of the Central Powers and in preserving the existence of the Romanian state under extremely difficult strategic circumstances.

The analysis of the campaigns of 1913, 1916, and 1917 also highlights the existence of important structural continuities. Logistic problems, the influence of political factors on military decision-making, and deficiencies within the command system persisted throughout the entire period under examination. At the same time, however, the successive experiences of war generated significant doctrinal and organizational changes. The Romanian Army gradually evolved from a force largely shaped by nineteenth-century military concepts into an institution increasingly capable of operating under the conditions of modern industrial warfare.

The difference between the army's performance in 1916 and that of 1917 demonstrates the capacity of the Romanian military institution to learn and adapt within a relatively short period of time. In this respect, the experience of war played an essential role in accelerating doctrinal modernization and in the professionalization of operational leadership.

From a historical perspective, the Romanian Army's confrontation with modern warfare must be analyzed in close connection with the broader process of modernization of the Romanian state. The limitations of the army largely reflected the economic, administrative, and industrial constraints of Romania at the beginning of the twentieth century. Modern warfare required the comprehensive mobilization of society's resources, and military capability became inseparable from the economic and institutional infrastructure of the state. Consequently, the effectiveness of the armed forces depended not only on military organization and combat readiness but also on the state's capacity to generate, sustain, and coordinate the resources necessary for prolonged military operations.

At the same time, the experiences of the period 1913-1917 had important consequences for the subsequent development of the Romanian Army. The lessons concerning the role of logistics, artillery, combined-arms cooperation, and operational command significantly influenced the process of military reorganization during the interwar period.

Furthermore, the campaigns under examination contributed to strengthening the role of the army within Romanian society and to legitimizing it as the principal instrument for the achievement of national unity. The resistance of 1917 became a central element of collective memory and of the broader narrative concerning the Romanian Army's contribution to the creation of Greater Romania.

The Romanian Army's confrontation with the realities of modern warfare between 1913 and 1917 represents a process of transition from the traditional nineteenth-century military model to the demands of European industrial warfare. The experiences of these campaigns demonstrate that adaptation to modern warfare

depended not exclusively on the courage of soldiers or the competence of military commanders, but also on the capacity of the state to integrate technological, organizational, and doctrinal progress into its military and administrative structures. Therefore, this study confirms that the military experiences of the period 1913-1917 should be interpreted as successive stages in the process of Romania's military and institutional modernization within the broader context of European industrial warfare. These campaigns collectively illustrate the challenges, limitations, and achievements of a state and military institution undergoing profound transformation in response to the rapidly changing nature of modern conflict.

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