

The Defence and Security Environment of the Republic of Albania: **Strategic Orientation, Challenges, and Modernization**

(2024–2033)

Juxhina Gjoni, MSc



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List of Acronyms

AFA	<i>Armed Forces Academy</i>
AFRA	<i>Armed Forces of the Republic of Albania</i>
CBP	<i>Capability-based planning</i>
CBRN	<i>Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear</i>
CIMIC	<i>Civil Military Cooperation</i>
CFSP	<i>Common Foreign and Security Policy</i>
CNI	<i>Critical National Infrastructure</i>
COA	<i>Course of Action</i>
COE	<i>Centres of Excellence</i>
CSDP	<i>Common Security and Defence Policy</i>
CVE	<i>Countering Violent Extremism</i>
C2	<i>Command and Control</i>
C4ISR	<i>Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance</i>
DDA	<i>Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area</i>
EADRCC	<i>NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre</i>
EOD	<i>Explosive Ordnance Disposal</i>
EPF	<i>European Peace Facility</i>
ETEEE	<i>Education, Training, Exercise and Evaluation</i>
EU	<i>European Union</i>
GDP	<i>Gross domestic product</i>
GFP	<i>Global Firepower</i>
JFC	<i>Joint Force Command</i>
JOC	<i>Joint Operations Centre</i>
MS	<i>Military Strategy</i>
NATO	<i>North Atlantic Treaty Organisation</i>
NATO SFA CoE	<i>NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence</i>
NCO's	<i>Non-commissioned officers</i>
NDPP	<i>NATO Defence Planning Process</i>
NRF	<i>NATO Response Force</i>
NSS	<i>National Security Strategy</i>
NWCC	<i>NATO's Warfighting Capstone Concept</i>
OSCE	<i>Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe</i>
PAZH	<i>Long-Term Development Plan of the Armed Forces</i>
PMESII	<i>Political, Military, Economic, Security, Information, Infrastructure</i>
RF	<i>Russian Federation</i>
UN	<i>United Nation</i>
VJTF	<i>Very High Readiness Joint Task Force</i>

Part I

STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND FOUNDATIONS

1.1 Abstract

This study analyses the contemporary defence and security environment of the Republic of Albania within the framework of its Long-Term Development Plan of the Armed Forces 2024–2033 (PAZH), NATO commitments, and the evolving European security architecture. It explores Albania's strategic orientation, the main security threats and challenges it faces, emerging opportunities, and the country's growing regional and international role. It also examines major investments and initiatives in the defence sector, including modernization, infrastructure, and capability development. Through these analytical lenses, the study argues that Albania's defence transformation constitutes a strategic consolidation of its Euro-Atlantic identity, aligning national resilience with collective defence imperatives amid an increasingly complex geopolitical environment.

1.2 Executive Summary

This study is based upon the consolidated Albania's three highest strategic-defence documents — the *National Security Strategy 2024-2028*, the *Military Strategy 2024*, and the *Long-Term Development Plan of the Armed Forces 2024-2033*. Together they provide an interlocking framework for Albania's transition from a small military actor into a resilient NATO ally, that not only contributes to European security but is a firm undeniable stabilizer in the Western Balkans region.

The analysis shows Albania's security environment, shaped by hybrid threats, regional instability, and rapid technological change, which has prompted a fundamental reorientation of national defence policy. In response, the government has embraced a resilience approach combined with digital transformation, and strengthened international cooperation as core strategic priorities. This vision is supported by consistent defence spending, including the commitment to surpass the 2% of GDP up to the new commitment of 5 % GDP and 20% for modernization, as well as a long-term force-development programme designed to ensure sustained capability growth.

Introduction: Rationale for an Integrated Defence Architecture

Since joining NATO in 2009, Albania's security policy has matured from basic adaptation to full-spectrum integration. The 2024 cycle of strategies represents a synchronized triad:

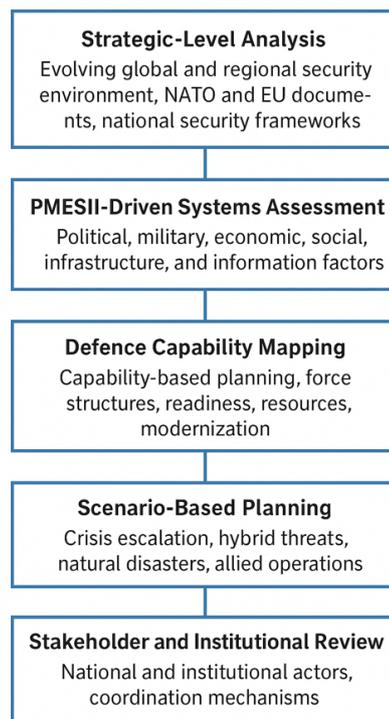
- the *National Security Strategy* (NSS) sets the national interests and security vision,
- the *Military Strategy* (MS) defines objectives, force structure, and doctrine¹, and
- the *Long-Term Development Plan* (PAZH) operationalizes capability and resource planning.

Together they respond to a deteriorating Euro-Atlantic environment shaped by the war in Ukraine, competition in the Adriatic-Ionian region, and the growing salience of cyber, energy, and information domains.

1.3 Methodology of the study

The methodological framework adopted in this assessment is grounded on a multi-layered analytical approach designed to produce a coherent and comprehensive understanding of Albania's defence capability-development needs. The process begins with a systematic review of the principal strategic documents—including the National Security Strategy 2024–2028, the Military Strategy 2024, and the PAZH 2024–2033 capability-development plan—to identify convergences in strategic priorities and potential discrepancies in implementation pathways. This comparative approach allows for the construction of a coherent baseline against which the current state of the Armed Forces can be evaluated.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK



*Table Nr.1
Multi-layered analytical approach.*

¹ Doctrine in this study will be framed under the AJP definitions. Doctrine is defined as: ‘fundamental principles by which military forces guide their actions in support of objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgment in application.’ It enhances the operational effectiveness of the Alliance by providing authoritative guidance relevant to preparing and employing military forces. It is based on the AJP-3.2 20 Edition B, version 1 common perspective from which to plan, train and conduct operations and represents what is taught, believed and advocated as best practice. It also provides insights gained from lessons learned and employing the military instrument of power on operations and exercises to achieve Alliance objectives. Education is based on existing doctrine and it is subsequently applied in training. Education is a core function for preparing headquarters and forces for current and future operations. Applied doctrine provides the foundation for adaptation, which, in turn, is essential for operational success. NATO standard ajp-3.2 allied joint doctrine for land operations Edition B, version 1 FEBRUARY 2022 https://www.coemed.org/files/stanags/01_AJP/AJP-3.2_EDB_V1_E_2288.pdf

This Table illustrates the multi-layered analytical approach design that is divided as follows:

a. Strategic-Level Analysis

At the strategic level, the study evaluates the evolving global and regional security environment, drawing on NATO's Strategic Concept (2022)², EU security documents, and national strategic frameworks such as the National Security Strategy and the Military Strategy. This layer identifies the principal threats, risks, and opportunities shaping Albania's long-term defence posture, with particular attention to hybrid challenges, technological disruption, and regional volatility.

"NATO Leaders approved a new Strategic Concept³ for the Alliance at the Madrid Summit on 29 June 2022, setting out NATO's priorities, core tasks and approaches for the next decade. It further sets out NATO's three core tasks of deterrence and defence; crisis prevention and management; and cooperative security"



b. PMESII- ASCOPE Driven Systems Assessment

The PMESII- ASCOPE methodology offers a comprehensive framework for organizing information in complex operational environments. Although, we are not analysing Albania's strategy and defence capabilities in a combat operation environment, this framework provides a systematic approach to managing vast amounts of information by organizing data across essential factors in a structured way with initial focus in: Politics, Military, Economics, Social, Information, and Infrastructure. "Originally centered on these six factors, the model was later expanded to include Technology and Environment due to their growing influence."⁴ Thus, it is important that such a comprehensive PMESII⁵ (Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure, Information) assessment is applied to examine the structural factors influencing Albania's defence transformation. This systems-based methodology enables a holistic examination of national resilience, state institutions, and societal vulnerabilities, providing a multi-domain perspective on capability requirements and external dependencies.

The ASCOPE framework, acronyms for: Areas, Structures, Capabilities, Organizations, People, and Events, provides a detailed, mission-focused understanding of the civil dimension that shapes Albania's defence posture and national resilience. When integrated with PMESII, it enables a granular assessment of how societal and institutional factors influence operational planning, crisis response, and capability development. Throughout this study it will be used also ASCOPE to dissect the human terrain, institutional arrangements, and socio-economic patterns that interact with defence structures, thereby ensuring that capability planning responds to real operational demands rather than abstract strategic assumptions.

That said, from an *Areas* perspective, Albania's geography and demographic distribution generate both opportunities and constraints. Mountainous terrain, seismic topology, and flood-prone river basins define mobility corridors and shape military mobility, disaster-response needs, and host-nation support requirements.

² NATO Strategic Concept 2022. Madrid Summit, Spain. <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/strategic-concepts/nato-2022-strategic-concept>

³ Strategic Concepts equip the Alliance to respond to current security threats and challenges and guide its political and military development so that it is equally prepared to face the threats and challenges of tomorrow. They reiterate NATO's enduring purpose and nature, and its fundamental security tasks. They are renewed to address changes in the global security environment and to ensure that NATO can continue to fulfil its key purpose and execute its core tasks, making growth and adaptation permanent features of the Alliance. The current *Strategic Concept (2022)* reaffirms that NATO's key purpose is to ensure the collective defence of its members, based on a 360-degree approach, and outlines three essential core tasks – deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security. Over time, the Alliance and the wider world have developed in ways that NATO's founders could not have envisaged, and these changes have been reflected in each and every strategic document that NATO has ever produced. For more Strategic Concepts refer to the link: <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/strategic-concepts>

⁴ AM 86-1-1 civic tactics techniques and procedures. PMESII- ASCOPE. <https://www.cimic-coe.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/TTPs.pdf>

⁵ The PMESII-ASCOPE framework is a methodology used by NATO for analyzing the civil factors of the operating environment to support military planning and decision-making. It provides a systematic way to manage and organize vast amounts of data about the complex, interrelated systems within a mission context. This framework is used to analyze the key variables of an operational environment. Political: The total political power and government structures. Military: The military aspects of the environment. Economic: Production, distribution, and consumption of resources. Social: Religious, cultural, and ethnic composition. Information: The systems and characteristics of information flow and its effects. Infrastructure: The facilities and services essential for a society to function CIMIC Handbook. NATO CIMIC Centre of Excellence. <https://www.cimic-coe.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/8.4.9.-pemesii-and-te-factors.pdf>

Urban areas such as Tirana, Durrës, and Shkodër function as critical hubs not only for governance and logistics, but as well for crisis management coordination, while remote regions continue to face accessibility challenges that complicate both civilian and military interventions.

The country's *Structures*: including transport networks, energy grids, ports, airports, telecom nodes, and health infrastructure, serve as the backbone of national continuity and military readiness. Several of these structures remain vulnerable to natural hazards, cyber threats, or capacity shortfalls. The modernization of Kuçova Air Base, the expansion of the Port of Durrës, and ongoing upgrades in energy networks represent strategic investments that improve both national resilience and NATO interoperability.

Capabilities within civilian institutions vary significantly. While the National Civil Protection Agency (NCPA⁶) has grown into a central coordinating authority, municipal capacities differ widely, creating uneven preparedness levels across regions. Firefighting assets, medical response capabilities, communication systems, and emergency-management tools range from modern and EU-aligned in some municipalities to outdated in others. This asymmetry affects Albania's ability to absorb shocks and maintain operational continuity during large-scale crises.

Organizations, include a range of which starting from national ministries and agencies to local governments, NGOs, private operators, and international partners. This constitutes the institutional ecosystem supporting national resilience strategy. Besides, its NATO membership and EU aspiration, Albania's integration into EUCPM, cooperation with NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC), and participation in UN-led frameworks strengthens interagency synergies. However, coordination mechanisms across ministries remain dependent on individual competencies rather than standardized, institutionalized protocols.

The *People* dimension highlights the social fabric and human capital critical to defence, security and civil protection. Population density, migration trends, community trust levels, and public awareness of emergencies directly shape response effectiveness. Youth emigration has created skill gaps in technical fields, while community-level volunteer networks remain underdeveloped compared to NATO best practices. Still, public willingness to support national resilience initiatives is high, particularly after the 2019 earthquake and recent flood emergencies.

Finally, *Events*, (both recurrent and emergent), play a decisive role in shaping Albania's defence and security priorities. Seasonal floods, seismic activity, wildfires, cyber intrusions, and geopolitical tensions in the Western Balkans act as catalysts for policy changes, capability upgrades, and interagency reforms. The lessons learned from crises such as the 2010 floods or the 2019 earthquake underscore the necessity of integrating ASCOPE into long-term defence planning, ensuring that Albania's capability development is driven by empirical experience and operational realities.

By applying ASCOPE in a systematic manner, the study demonstrates how societal conditions directly shape military capability requirements. The analysis shows that the civil environment influences doctrine, force structure, crisis-management arrangements, and national resilience. When integrated with the PMESII framework, ASCOPE adds the necessary micro-level granularity to align capability development with NATO standards and with the practical realities of Albania's strategic environment.

This study introduces an integrated analytical model that combines the macro-strategic PMESII framework with the micro-contextual precision of ASCOPE as an approach not previously applied systematically within Albanian security and defence scholarship. By merging these two levels of analysis, the table below offers a holistic and operationally relevant understanding of Albania's security environment, enabling far more accurate assessments of capability requirements, crisis-management needs, and interoperability priorities. This integrated model represents an important methodological innovation for national researchers, defence planners, civil-protection authorities, and allied partners, providing a comprehensive, multi-dimensional tool for analysing the operational environment through both strategic and societal lenses. As such, it contributes a

6 The greatest progress from the government is: The National Civil Defence Agency (AKMC) that was created and operates based on Law no. 45, dated 18.7.2019 "For Civil Protection", VKM no. 747, dated 20.11.2019 "On the organization and operation of the National Civil Protection Agency", as well as Prime Minister's Order no. 27, dated 3.2.2020 "On the approval of the structure and organization of the National Agency of Civil Protection", as a structure responsible for reducing the risk from disasters and civil protection, throughout the territory of the Republic of Albania. English <https://akmc.gov.al/>

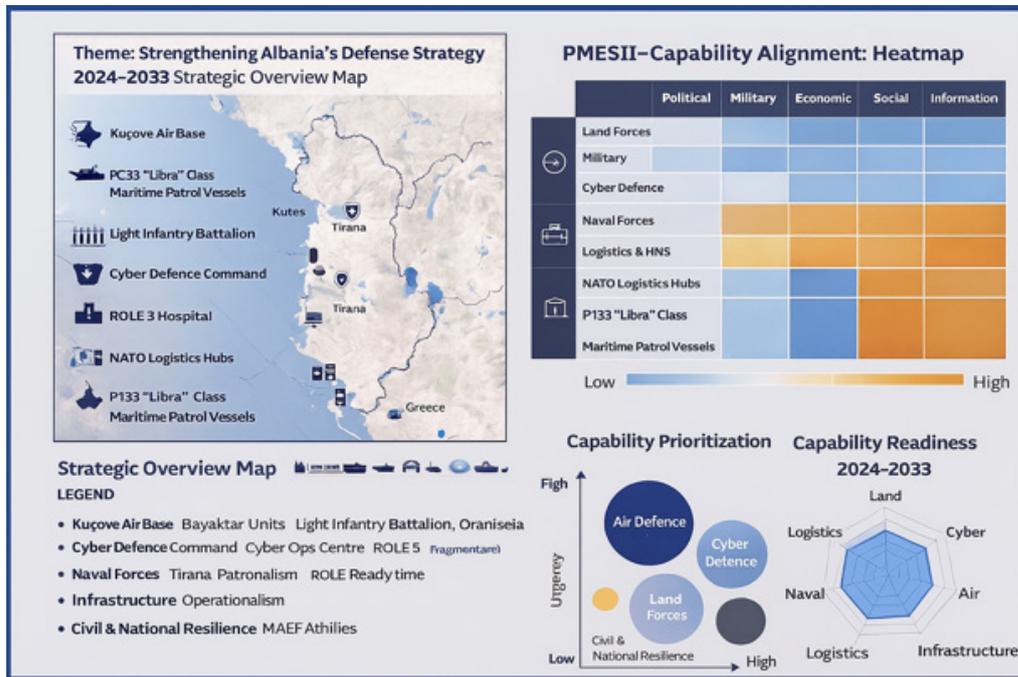
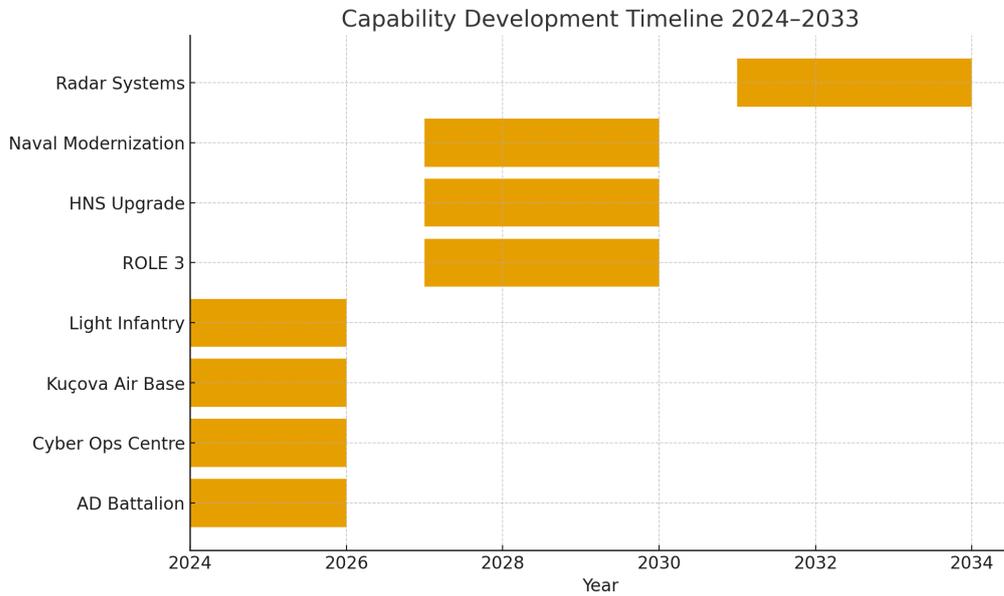
new standard for how security and defence studies can be conducted in Albania, aligning academic practice with contemporary NATO analytical methodologies.

Domain	Key Factors / Observations	ASCOPE Link	Operational Implications
Political	Stable democratic institutions; Western Balkan integration efforts; corruption remains a concern; EU accession negotiations ongoing	Organizations, People	Supports civil-military coordination; need for transparency in decision-making; enables NATO/EU interoperability
Military	Small but modernizing Armed Forces (FARSH); modernization ongoing (AD, UAVs, cyber, naval); participation in NATO operations	Structures, Capabilities	Force development priorities aligned with NATO standards; readiness for crisis response and coalition missions
Economic	Moderate GDP growth; energy dependence on hydropower; impact of migration on workforce	Areas, Capabilities	Critical infrastructure protection; planning for energy security; assessment of logistics hubs for contingency operations
Social	Emigration trends; uneven social resilience; population concentrated in urban areas	People, Events	Influence on manpower availability, civil-military cooperation, and disaster-response effectiveness
Information	Growing cyber threats, hybrid influence operations, misinformation campaigns	Events, Organizations	Necessitates Cyber Defence integration; public awareness campaigns; interagency coordination with media and intelligence
Infrastructure	Ports, airports, road and rail networks; energy grid; limited redundancy in remote regions	Structures, Areas	Infrastructure protection priorities; HNS planning; disaster mitigation and rapid deployment capacity
Areas (ASCOPE)	Urban hubs, mountain corridors, flood-prone zones, strategic energy sites	Areas	Guides operational planning and mobility; prioritizes access routes for response forces
Structures (ASCOPE)	Bases (Kuçova), hospitals, schools, power stations, bridges	Structures	Targets modernization and protection; supports joint operations with NATO/EU
Capabilities (ASCOPE)	Civil protection, disaster management, emergency medical services, cyber operations	Capabilities	Identifies capability gaps; drives training and procurement priorities
Organizations (ASCOPE)	NCPA, Ministries, Municipalities, NGOs, EUCPM, NATO, UN	Organizations	Enhances interagency cooperation; ensures coordination in multi-domain operations
People (ASCOPE)	Military personnel, civil servants, volunteers, general population	People	Influences recruitment, mobilization, and community resilience programs
Events (ASCOPE)	Earthquakes, floods, wildfires, cyber incidents, geopolitical tensions	Events	Shapes contingency planning; informs scenario-based exercises and operational readiness

TABLE Nr. 2 PMESII - ASCOPE Albanian Strategic Environment

c. Defence Capability Mapping

This layer uses a capability-based planning (CBP) approach aligned with NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) principles. It assesses existing force structures, readiness levels, human resources, logistics, and modernization projects. Comparative benchmarking with regional Allies provides insight into niche⁷ specialization opportunities and areas where Albania can contribute meaningfully to collective defence and resilience. Timelines are also framed under both strategies: the national and military ones as follow:



⁷ Niche capabilities are highly military or security capabilities that a country develops to fill a specific operational gap. Either within its own force structure or within an alliance such as NATO. They are called "Niche" because they do not require a full spectrum military; instead, they allow a state to contribute unique, high- value expertise or assets that complement the broader capabilities of allies. Examples include: Highly specialised units such as Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams, Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear (CBRN) response units, Mountain warfare troops; Technical and Cyber Capabilities; Enablers and Support Functions, Maritime or Air Niche Roles. This way, NATO encourages them to develop specific, high- impact capabilities that can strengthen interoperability, fill alliance's gaps and provide mission ready contributions.

d. Scenario-Based Planning

To account for uncertainty, the study employs scenario-based planning to test how Albania's force structure and capability priorities perform under different strategic conditions. These scenarios include regional crisis escalation, hybrid destabilization, major natural disasters, and collective defence contingencies under Article 5. As stated above, it is not a combat operation analysis but Albania has been actively part of military exercises, which will be an integrated part of this study. The aim is to ensure that recommended capabilities are flexible, interoperable, and resilient across multiple operational contexts.

"Defender Europe 25" led by the United States European Command (USEUCOM), is one of the largest and most complex military exercises in recent decades in Europe and Africa. This exercise, aims to increase readiness, interoperability and the ability to operate in a coordinated manner between US, NATO and partner nations forces.⁸



e. Stakeholder and Institutional Review

An institutional review examines the roles, mandates, and coordination mechanisms of key national actors, including the Ministry of Defence, Armed Forces structures, intelligence agencies, and civil emergency institutions. Where relevant, the analysis integrates insights from NATO Centres of Excellence, EU institutions, and international partners to ensure the recommendations reflect best practices and emerging standards.

f. Data Triangulation and Validation

The findings of each analytical layer are triangulated through primary and secondary data sources—such as doctrinal documents, official statistics, interviews, and international assessments—to ensure accuracy and analytical coherence. This process strengthens the validity of conclusions and supports a transparent, evidence-based recommendation process.

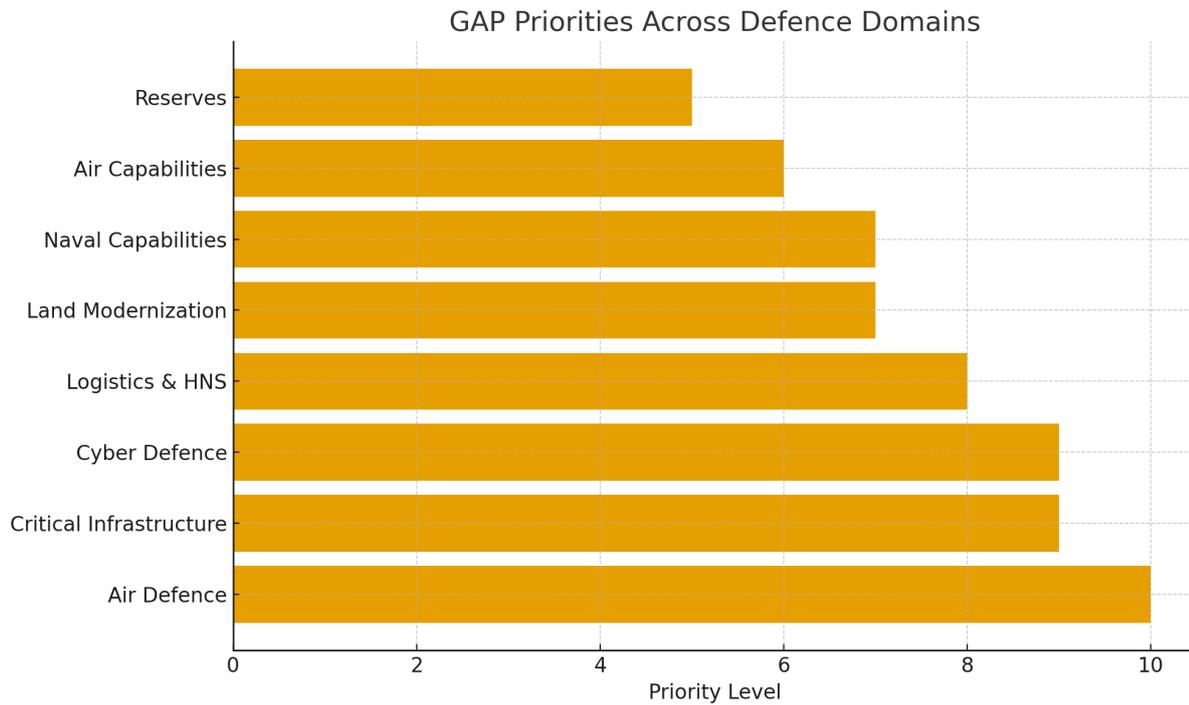
The subsequent phase of the methodology focuses on a comprehensive diagnosis of existing force capacities, covering structural organization, human resources, logistics, infrastructure, technological systems, and doctrinal readiness. Special emphasis is placed on the identification of capability gaps using quantitative and qualitative indicators, which are then categorised by urgency and strategic relevance. The result is a capability GAP Matrix that supports evidence-based prioritisation and ensures that development efforts remain aligned with Albania's national-security objectives and NATO's planning frameworks.

Across the analysed strategic documents, several consistent priorities emerge. The Military Strategy 2024 underscores the need to reinforce air defence, develop unmanned and counter-unmanned systems, modernize land platforms, strengthen maritime surveillance, and institutionalize cyber defence as a core operational domain. PAZH 2024–2033 builds on these objectives through a phased development model. In the short term (2024–2026), emphasis is placed on standing up the Light Infantry Battalion, the Air Defence Battalion, and the Cyber Defence Centre, as well as rendering Kuçova Air Base fully operational. The medium term (2027–2030) prioritizes medical support capabilities (ROLE 3), host-nation support, and further modernization of naval and air assets. The long term (2031–2033) envisions the consolidation of radar coverage, the enhancement of multi-domain operations, and the full operationalization of advanced weapon systems and platforms. Complementing these military objectives, the National Security Strategy stresses resilience, critical-infrastructure protection, civil emergency management, and hybrid-threat mitigation, linking military preparedness to broader societal and institutional readiness.

The GAP analysis identifies several capability deficiencies that constrain Albania's defence posture. Air defence remains the most acute gap, given the obsolescence of existing systems and the fragmentation of radar-sensor networks. Cyber defence requires accelerated investment to ensure full operational functionality and enhanced protection of national critical infrastructure. The Land Force faces shortfalls in mobility and precision-strike capacity due to outdated vehicles and insufficient anti-armour capabilities. The Air Force,

⁸ Military exercise: Defender Europe May- June 2025. Link at: <https://www.mod.gov.al/newsroom-2/7191-nis-me-25-majnga-shqipëria-stervitja-defender-europe-25>

meanwhile, is engaged in an overdue modernization cycle that must transition from legacy helicopters to digitally enabled platforms and incorporate UAV systems into regular operations. The Naval Force encounters comparable challenges, particularly in maritime domain awareness and patrol endurance.



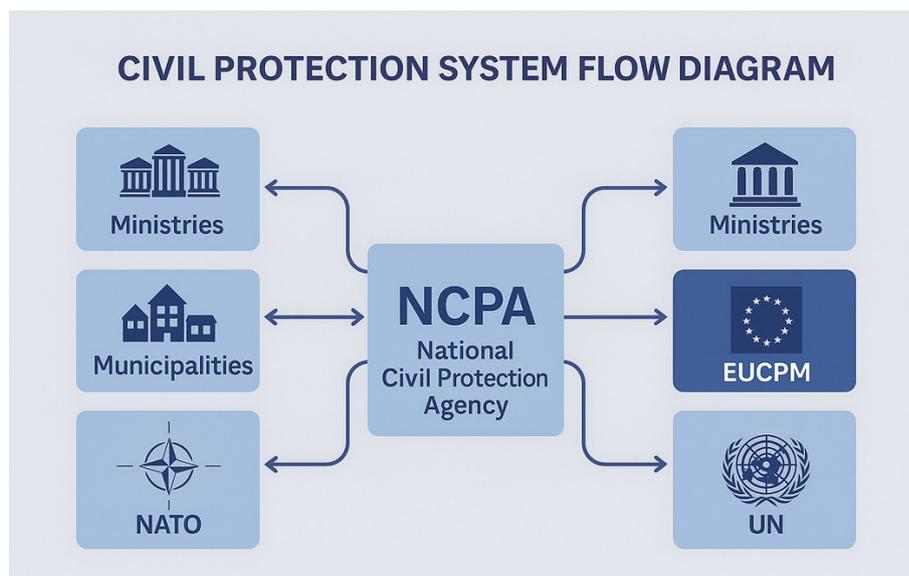
The following table illustrates a whole- comprehensive picture of timelines, priority areas, gap description and required actions.

Time Period	Priority Area	GAP Description	Required Action
2024–2026	Air Defence	Outdated systems, insufficient coverage	Accelerated procurement & radar integration
	Cyber Defence	Fragmented cyber architecture	Establish full Cyber Defence Command
	Logistics & HNS	Ageing depots, limited HNS	Rebuild logistics hubs; NATO-standard mobility
	Critical Infrastructure Protection	Vulnerable energy/ICT networks	Joint NATO–EU frameworks
2027–2030	Land Modernization	Weak mobility & anti-armour	New IFVs, anti-tank platforms
	Naval Modernization	Old patrol fleet	Maritime surveillance upgrade
	Radar Systems	Partial coverage	Full-spectrum radar network
	Reserve Force	Structural gaps	Doctrinal reform & training
2031–2033	Multi-Domain Capabilities	Integration challenges	Joint ISR systems
	Role 3 Medical	Not NATO-compliant	Infrastructure & staff expansion
	UAV/C-UAV	Limited	Full operationalization

TABLE 3. Capability GAP Priority Table (Short, Medium, Long Term)

Beyond combat capabilities, support functions reveal structural vulnerabilities. Logistics infrastructure is ageing, host-nation support remains limited, and medical support capabilities are not yet aligned with NATO standards. The reserve-force system, which is critical for crisis response and national mobilization, requires doctrinal reform and sustained training investment. Many of the high-technology capabilities expected in the 2031–2033 development horizon (such as advanced radars, integrated air defence, and multi-domain sensors) will also impose new demands on training, sustainment, and personnel specialization.

Civil protection and societal resilience emerge as central pillars of national security, reflecting Albania's exposure to natural hazards and hybrid threats. As mentioned already, the National Civil Protection Agency (NCPA) has become the core institutional actor in this domain, coordinating ministries, municipalities, private operators, and international partners. Its mandate is fully aligned with the logic of “whole-of-government and whole-of-society” resilience articulated by NATO and the EU.



Albania's membership in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism since 2022 has significantly increased interoperability, enabling joint planning, disaster-response coordination, and knowledge transfer. Exercises such as FloodNorthALB 2025 demonstrate Albania's growing capacity to contribute to regional resilience. On the other front, under the transatlantic requirements, the Agency's work directly supports NATO's seven baseline requirements for national resilience, particularly in ensuring population support, continuity of essential services, and infrastructural robustness.

NATO Baseline Requirement	Albania Status	Key Strengths	Gaps Identified	Required Measures
Continuity of Government	Improving	Clear legal mandates	Need robust continuity planning	Establish Redundant C2
Energy Supply Security	Vulnerable	Regional interconnections	Ageing grids	Modernization & redundancy
Population Support	Moderate	Civil Protection Agency	Logistics gaps	Expand shelters & stockpiles
Food & Water	Sufficient	National networks	Rural vulnerabilities	Water security strategy
Communications	Mixed	Growing ICT sector	Cyber risk exposure	Harden national networks
Transport/Mobility	Developing	Major corridors	HNS gaps	Upgrade corridors for NATO
Critical Infrastructure	At risk	EU mechanisms	Fragmented oversight	Unified CIP framework

TABLE 4. Civil Protection & Resilience Matrix (NATO's 7 Baseline Requirements)

The overall results of the GAP evaluation show a hierarchy of capability needs. Air defence, cyber defence, host-nation support, logistics, and critical-infrastructure protection constitute the most urgent gaps for the 2024–2026 period. Land-force modernization, naval and air upgrades, radar-network integration, and reserve-force reform become priority areas for 2027–2030. Medium-intensity gaps include medical support (ROLE 3), UAV/counter-UAV capabilities, and military education and training modernization. These findings provide a clear roadmap for defence-policy decisions and resource allocation.

To close these gaps, several strategic actions are recommended. In the immediate term, Albania should launch an accelerated air-defence acquisition and integration programme. Cyber defence requires the rapid operationalization of the Cyber Defence Command. Logistics and host-nation support need architectural redesign to meet NATO mobility standards. Land and naval modernization programs must be sequenced to deliver mission-capable platforms before 2030. The reserve-force system must be transformed into a flexible, trained, and scalable component of national defence. Finally, critical-infrastructure protection should be reinforced through joint mechanisms with the EU and NATO, ensuring continuity of essential services during crises.

Domain	Required Capability	Status	Development Path
Air	Air defence, UAV	Critical gap	Short-term acquisition
Land	Mobility, anti-armour	Partial	2027–2030 modernization
Maritime	Patrol vessels, MDA	Insufficient	Fleet upgrades
Cyber	Defence & resilience	Fragmented	Cyber Command
Medical	Role 3	Partial	NATO alignment
Reserves	Mobilization	Weak	Structural reform

TABLE 5. Force Development Requirement

To summarize few gaps of those considered:

Critical gap to be addressed by 2026 are as followed:

- Air Defense;
- Protection of critical infrastructure;
- Cyber defense and inter-institutional coordination;
- Logistics and Host Nation Support.

Those considered Average Gap:

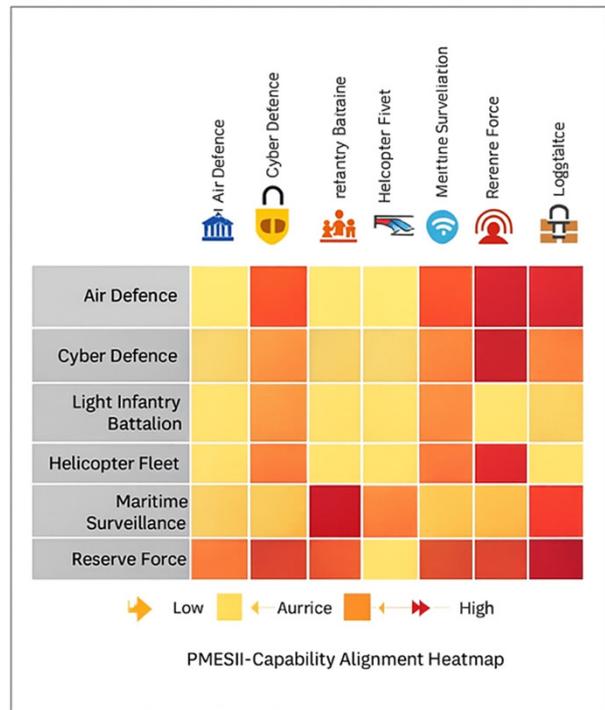
- UAV and Counter-UAV;
- ROLE 3;
- Military education.

Those considered High gap (2026–2030):

- Modernization of ground vehicles;
- Modernization of the naval and air fleet;
- Radars and sensors;
- Reservists.



Map of Albania with Capability Locations



PMESII-Capability Alignment Heatmap

1.4 Rationale for an Integrated Defence Architecture. The National Security Strategy 2024-2028 – vision, guiding principles, national interests, resilience pillars.

The National Security Strategy is Albania’s highest-level guidance document, setting out the country’s key security objectives and defining its strategic interests. It identifies three enduring core tasks at the centre of the national interest:

1. Safeguarding sovereignty and protecting the inviolability of national territory;
2. Ensuring the integrity of democratic institutions and the security of citizens;
3. Advancing Euro-Atlantic integration and contributing to regional stability.

The Strategy underscores that the rule of law, accountable governance, and sustainable economic development are essential pillars of national resilience. It places Albania firmly within the Euro-Atlantic community, both as a committed NATO Ally and a dedicated EU candidate, highlighting that strong transatlantic ties remain vital for the security of a small state in a complex strategic environment. These core tasks are the result of a comprehensive assessment of Albania’s contemporary security landscape, including hybrid challenges, regional dynamics, and evolving risks that shape national defence priorities.

Further, in the next chapters will be delivered an assessment of the strategic security environment, conducted in three levels of national interest: at the global, regional, and national levels, which provides the foundation for defining the institutional response of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Albania (AFRA) to contemporary threats to national security. This multilayered analysis enables AFRA to align its posture, capabilities, and operational priorities with both national objectives and the evolving security dynamics within the Euro-Atlantic space. The NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, adopted in June 2022 at the Madrid Summit, clearly states that “we are living in an era of strategic competition and pervasive instability” and underscores that “the Russian Federation’s brutal and unlawful aggression against Ukraine has gravely altered the Euro-Atlantic security environment.”⁹

⁹ NATO Security Concept. 2022 Madrid Summit. For more Strategic Concepts refer to the link: <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/strategic-concepts>

This conceptual shift reaffirms that Allies face the most significant deterioration of their security landscape since the end of the Cold War, with profound implications for deterrence, defence, and collective resilience.

In this context, the Republic of Albania must ensure that its defence posture, strategic planning, and operational readiness remain fully synchronized with NATO's strategic orientation. The Armed Forces are therefore required to anticipate and respond to a spectrum of threats, including hybrid attacks, cyber operations, strategic coercion, and the spillover effects of regional instability, while contributing effectively to Alliance deterrence and defence across all domains.

The domestic security environment of the Republic of Albania remains stable, with no immediate risks that could undermine the country's territorial integrity or threaten the constitutional order. As a state with a clear Western geostrategic orientation, a serious engaged NATO member, EU candidate country, and an active contributor to international decision-making on security, peace, and stability, Albania continues to represent a point of interest against malign global actors. Their activity is expected to intensify amid the broader escalation of confrontation and the increasingly aggressive posture of adversarial states pursuing geostrategic aims that challenge the current international and European security architecture. Albania's firm and proactive alignment with NATO, the EU, and other partner structures further positions the country as a target for actors seeking to erode Alliance unity and undermine regional security. Such hostile activity aims to negatively influence the political system, exert political and economic pressure on key strategic decisions, foster instability, manipulate public perception, fuel skepticism, and obstruct the country's progress in the Euro-Atlantic integration processes. Also classified information and secure communications systems remain exposed to a spectrum of security risks and threats posed by both state and non-state actors.¹⁰ The ultimate objective of these efforts is to compromise national security and disrupt Albania's relations with its allies.

Finally, hostile influence activities are expected to persist in multiple forms, including the use of third-party intermediaries, with the objective of shaping the information environment to advance foreign strategic interests. Such activities may include attempts to interfere with or manipulate democratic processes as a method already observed in EU member states and other international contexts. Recognizing this threat, the Parliament of the Republic of Albania has formally adopted a Resolution condemning any interference in the country's democratic processes. These measures underscore the commitment of national institutions to safeguard democratic integrity and resilience against malign external influence.

¹⁰ Politico. Iranian hackers target Albania in retaliation for hosting dissidents. Link at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/iran-hackers-target-albania-servers-in-retaliation-hosting-dissidents/>

Part II

THE MILITARY STRATEGY 2024

2.1 National Military objective: Strategic framework

Albania's military strategy builds on the foundations set by the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, the National Security Strategy, and the country's commitments within NATO's framework.¹¹ In this context, the Armed Forces are expected to evolve into a more professional, agile, and mission-ready force, capable of responding effectively to security challenges at home and abroad. The strategy translates national policy direction into a military framework that clarifies how defence institutions will operate, develop, and integrate within the wider Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

The national Military Strategy outlines five overarching national military objectives:

- a. Safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity in close cooperation with allies;
- b. Developing and sustaining capabilities that meet national and collective defence requirements;
- c. Contributing to regional and international stability through NATO, EU, and UN operations;
- d. Supporting civil authorities during crises and emergencies; and
- e. Strengthening public confidence through professionalism, transparency, and effective communication.

To achieve these strategic objectives, the Military Strategy is organised around four core principles, several of which were introduced in the first chapter but are further operationalised here. *First*, it prioritises the development of a fully professional, agile, and deployable force capable of meeting national and collective defence tasks. *Second*, it institutionalises capability-based planning as the primary mechanism for aligning missions, resources, and long-term force development. *Third*, it deepens integration with NATO structures, standards, and operational concepts to ensure full interoperability across all domains. *Finally*, the Strategy advances comprehensive defence cooperation, strengthening coordination across governmental institutions and with international partners. Taken together, these principles reflect the logic of NATO's Warfighting Capstone Concept (NWCC) and the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) framework, ensuring that the Albanian Armed Forces remain interoperable, adaptable, and prepared for multidomain operational challenges.

¹¹ To find more information refer to the National Military Strategy official document: Per miratimin e strategjise ushtarake. Link at: <https://www.mod.gov.al/images/akteligjore/strategjite/ligj-83-dt-260724-strategjia-ushtarake.pdf>

2.2 Doctrinal Principles – multi-mission force, deterrence posture, interoperability, NATO collective defence alignment.

The transformation of the armed forces, is based upon four foundational principles that set a roadmap for the development, employment, and transformation of the Armed Forces. These principles ensure that the force remains credible, resilient, and fully aligned with NATO's evolving operational requirements.

2.2.1 Development of a Fully Professional Force

The strategy emphasizes that the future Armed Forces must be a capable, professional, and mission-ready institution, structured around deployable, agile, and well-trained units. Professionalization includes:

- Modern personnel management, including merit-based recruitment, transparent career progression, and continuous professional military education.
- Strengthening leadership development, with an emphasis on joint thinking, operational competence, and command readiness at all levels.
- Maintaining high readiness, especially for rapid reaction units, specialized forces, and cyber defence elements.
- Enhancing the reserve component, transforming it into a structured, trainable, and mobilizable capability that complements active forces during crises or deployments

2.2.2 Capability-Based Planning (CBP)

Aligned with NATO's defence planning process, the Military Strategy adopts a capability-based approach that prioritizes investments according to operational needs and strategic risk. This includes:

- Identifying required capabilities, from land mobility and maritime awareness to cyber defence and air surveillance, based on national tasks and NATO commitments.
- Balancing modernization with sustainability, ensuring that new systems can be maintained, integrated, and employed effectively.
- Phased development cycles, linking short-, medium-, and long-term capability goals to resource availability.
- Multi-domain integration, ensuring that land, air, maritime, cyber, and space-related capabilities work as a coherent system.
- Technology adoption and innovation, including digital transformation, unmanned systems, and improved command-and-control structures.

Through this approach of identification, Albania can prioritize realistic, affordable, and high-impact capabilities that enhance national resilience while strengthening NATO's collective posture. Several steps have been undertaken by the Albanian government. The Defence Industry Agency (DIA) is positioned as the keystone institution of Albania's defence-industrial transformation. First, in the beginning of the '90, it was the creation of the Military Import–Export Company (MEICO), which marked a shift from production toward asset management and liquidation of inherited stockpiles. The ongoing industrial revitalization, include steps such as the creation of KAYO, as a flagship institutional innovation designed to reconstitute Albania's defence-industrial infrastructure. These initiatives are interpreted not as isolated projects, but as the foundation of an ecosystem approach that integrates state ownership, private entrepreneurship, and foreign technological partnerships under NATO-aligned standards. The end goal of such progress is the rehabilitation of traditional dead facilities in Mjekës, Gramsh, and Poliçan, combining inherited physical infrastructure with modern production principles.

2.2.3 Deepening Integration with NATO Structures

Albania's Military Strategy also places NATO interoperability and integration at the core of its defence posture. This includes:

- Full alignment with NATO doctrines, standards, and operational concepts such as the Warfighting Capstone Concept (NWCC) and the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA)¹².
- Improving readiness for NATO missions, ensuring that Albanian units meet NRF¹³, VJTF¹⁴, and mission requirements at high readiness levels.
- Participation in NATO exercises and training, supporting joint and combined mission rehearsal, interoperability, and operational cohesion.
- Integration of command-and-control systems into NATO's federated networks for air, maritime, and cyber domains.
- Expanding Host Nation Support (HNS) arrangements to facilitate Allied deployments, logistics corridors, and pre-positioning initiatives.

Regarding few of the above aspects, Albania has become a security provider for the alliance. A clear example is the different military exercise it takes part, such as: Defender Europe '25¹⁵: A large-scale multinational exercise led by the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) that took place in May 2025. Albania is a key host nation, contributing to the enhancement of interoperability, military readiness, and the ability to respond to potential threats. Throughout the years following its membership in NATO, Albania was not only a firm committed partner in Defender Europe '21¹⁶, but also participated in: Adrion Liveks 09¹⁷, a NATO naval exercise hosted by Albania in the Adriatic Sea in 2009, which involved naval forces from several countries, including Albania, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, and Slovenia. Another strategic military exercise is Trident Juncture 2018¹⁸, when Albanian commandos joined this large NATO exercise held in Norway, Sweden, and Finland to train the NATO Response Force and test the Alliance's defense capabilities.

12 Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) represents NATO's central military posture designed to protect the alliance, maintain stability, and prevent conflict across the Euro-Atlantic region. The DDA concept emphasizes a combination of deterrence through credible capabilities and defence through readiness and resilience, ensuring that any potential adversary understands that aggression against NATO members would be met with a unified and effective response. DDA integrates a range of measures, including forward-deployed forces, rapid reaction units such as the NATO Response Force (NRF) and the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), advanced command and control structures, and comprehensive planning for both conventional and hybrid threats. It also involves strong multinational cooperation, interoperability, and continuous exercises to maintain operational readiness. The principle of DDA reflects NATO's layered approach to security: by combining pre-positioned forces, rapid reinforcement, and credible military capabilities, the alliance ensures deterrence against potential aggression while preserving the ability to defend its members if deterrence fails. Beyond purely military dimensions, DDA also encompasses civil preparedness, resilience of critical infrastructure, and integration with broader political and strategic tools to ensure the security of the Euro-Atlantic area as a whole. Find the link at SHAPE: Deter and Defend. [https://shape.nato.int/dda#:~:text=NATO's%20Deter%20and%20Defend%20\(DDA\)%20program%20is,its%20largest%20adaptation%20since%20the%20Cold%20War](https://shape.nato.int/dda#:~:text=NATO's%20Deter%20and%20Defend%20(DDA)%20program%20is,its%20largest%20adaptation%20since%20the%20Cold%20War)

13 The **NATO Response Force (NRF)** is a highly capable multinational military formation designed to respond quickly to crises and emerging threats worldwide. Established in 2003, the NRF represents NATO's commitment to collective defense, crisis management, and security assurance. It brings together land, air, maritime, and special forces contributions from multiple NATO member states, totaling approximately 25,000 personnel. The force is maintained at a high level of readiness, enabling NATO to deploy it within a timeframe ranging from a few days to several weeks, depending on the nature and urgency of the mission. Through the NRF, NATO ensures that it can respond flexibly to a variety of scenarios, from conflict prevention and stabilization operations to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

14 Within the NRF exists an even more agile element, the **Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF)**. Established in 2014 in response to emerging security challenges in Europe, the VJTF serves as NATO's "spearhead" force, capable of deploying within only a few days. Comprising around 5,000 to 6,000 troops contributed by a lead nation with the support of other NATO members, the VJTF combines land, air, and special forces to deliver an immediate and effective response to threats to NATO territory. While the NRF can be deployed over a period of several weeks, the VJTF is designed for almost instantaneous action, acting as the first wave of NATO's rapid response while the broader NRF mobilizes. Together, the NRF and VJTF illustrate NATO's layered approach to rapid response: the NRF provides the full capability and flexibility to address crises globally, while the VJTF ensures that the alliance can react immediately to any urgent threat, maintaining credibility and deterrence in an unpredictable security environment. Head to the Wales NATO Summit 2014: https://www.nato.int/cps/ru/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm?selectedLocale=en

15 Defender Europe 25 Outreach Tour. <https://www.europeafrica.army.mil/Defender/dvpTag/2025/>

16 Defender Europe 2021 Factsheet. <https://www.europeafrica.army.mil/Portals/19/documents/DEFENDEREurope/DE21%20Factsheet.pdf?ver=Lfkvd8zMhx3xuJhiNk-l8Q%3D%3D>

17 "ADRION LIVEX", a regional exercise on the implementation of legality at sea. <https://www.mod.gov.al/eng/index.php/newsroom/911-adrion-livex-a-regional-exercise-on-the-implementation-of-legality-at-sea>

18 US joins NATO Trident Juncture Exercise. <https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/1666272/us-joins-natos-trident-juncture-exercise/>

2.2.4 Advancing Comprehensive Defence Cooperation

The Strategy promotes a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to national security. Comprehensive cooperation includes:

- Close coordination with civilian institutions, especially in crisis management, civil protection, cybersecurity, and disaster response (already mentioned in the previous chapter the role of the National Civil Protection Agency).
- Interagency planning mechanisms, aligning defence, intelligence, diplomacy, and civil protection structures to ensure unified action during emergencies.
- Cooperation with EU¹⁹ frameworks, including the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, PESCO²⁰ projects, and regional security arrangements in the Western Balkans.
- Partnership with the United States and key NATO allies to support modernization, training, and joint capability development.
- Engagement with international organizations (UN, OSCE) for peacekeeping, resilience building, and standards alignment. This part will have a dedicated attention in the next chapter.
- Strengthening societal resilience, including strategic communications, civil preparedness, and public trust building.

This principle reinforces the holistic idea that security is shared, interdependent, and requires coordinated action across institutions, allies, and society. Building on this strategic direction, the Military Strategy is grounded and realistically facing challenges in a fast changing world. For a better understanding the table below illustrates all pillars into a comprehensive summary.

Pillar	Definition & Purpose	Key Lines of Effort
1. Professional Force Development	Ensures the Armed Forces evolve into a fully professional, mission-ready, and deployable force aligned with NATO force standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modern recruitment and retention system • Advanced training and education (incl. NCO corps development) • Expansion of deployable and modular units • Revitalized Reserve Component
2. Capability-Based Planning	Aligns defence resources, modernization, and readiness targets with operational requirements and NATO capability commitments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium- and long-term capability plans (PAZH 2024–2035) • Prioritization of C4ISR, mobility, fires, air defence, and cyber • Investment model: 2% GDP + 20% modernization • Integrated logistics and sustainment planning
3. Integration with NATO Structures	Embeds Albania's forces, command structures, and planning cycles into the wider NATO deterrence and defence posture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment with NDPP and DDA • Interoperability with Joint Force Command structures • Participation in NATO exercises and readiness initiatives • Development of Host Nation Support and pre-positioning

¹⁹ Permanent Structured Cooperation- PESCO is an EU framework designed to deepen security and defence cooperation among EU member states. It was established under the **Treaty of Lisbon (Article 42.6 TEU)** and became operational in **2017**. PESCO allows participating countries to **jointly develop military capabilities, improve defence readiness, and invest in shared projects**. The overarching goal of PESCO projects is to **enhance European strategic autonomy** while remaining complementary to NATO. Through the European Peace Facility measure, the EU will provide to the Albanian Armed Forces **light armoured multipurpose vehicles, as well as tactical and engineering vehicles** and, where needed, related supplies and services, including operational and maintenance training. They focus on making EU militaries **more capable, interoperable, and ready** for both national and collective defence missions. <https://www.pesco.europa.eu/about/>

²⁰ The Council has adopted the second bilateral assistance measure under the **European Peace Facility of €15 million** with the aim of strengthening defence capacities and capabilities of the **Albanian Armed Forces, bringing the total amount of support to Albania to €28 million to date**. The decision complements the support already provided by the EU and aims to further strengthen the ability of the Albanian Armed Forces to deploy timely and effectively. The assistance measure will also enhance Albania's potential to contribute to the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operations and missions and international coalitions. Today's decision illustrates the EU's **strong continued engagement with Albania on security and defence**. It also reflects the mutual commitment to strengthen cooperation in this field, building on the signature of the Security and Defence Partnership between the EU and Albania in November 2024 and the launch of the first Security and Defence Dialogue in April 2025. The adoption of a new support package recognises **Albania's full alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy**. **Continue on:** <https://www.pesco.europa.eu/about>

4. Comprehensive Defence Cooperation	Expands civil-military coordination and international partnerships to strengthen resilience and crisis-response capacity.	• Civil emergency support (EUCER, UCPM, disaster response)• Defence diplomacy and bilateral cooperation• Multi-agency coordination in hybrid-threat mitigation• Strengthening societal resilience and public communication
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Table nr. 6 Doctrinal Principles

2.3 Operational Framework – threat typology; force employment; command and control; and human capital and leadership.

The Operational Framework defines how the Armed Forces of the Republic of Albania (AFRSH) anticipate, prepare for, and respond to the full spectrum of security threats. It serves as the bridge between strategic objectives and the practical employment of forces, ensuring readiness, resilience, and coordinated action across all domains of operation. As the security environment becomes increasingly complex, shaped by conventional, hybrid, cyber, and non-state threats, the AFRSH must adopt a flexible, modular, and interoperable operational structure that aligns with NATO’s 2022 Strategic Concept and regional defence priorities.

2.3.1 Threat Typology

Today’s threat environment is complex and interlinked, with risks that cut across domains and amplify by overlapping into one another over time. To support a clearer assessment of the major challenges confronting Albania, here are few of the emerging security threats.

a. Conventional Military Threats

While the likelihood of direct interstate conflict remains low, the regional strategic environment has been affected by geopolitical tensions, military modernization in neighbouring regions, and unpredictable behaviours of revisionist states. AFRSH must maintain credible deterrence and readiness to ensure territorial defence and contribute to NATO’s collective security posture. Still the status of Kosovo’s independence and NATO KFOR mission presence on the ground imply a non-stable region.

b. Hybrid and Gray-Zone Threats

These include disinformation campaigns, political interference, economic coercion, sabotage, and proxy activities conducted by state or non-state actors. Hybrid threats are particularly relevant given Albania’s strategic position in the Western Balkans, the presence of hostile influence operations, and recent episodes of cyber aggression.

c. Cyber and Information Domain Threats

Cyberattacks targeting government networks, critical infrastructure²¹, and military systems represent a growing challenge. The 2022 cyberattack on Albania demonstrated that hostile actors can disrupt national systems, compromise sensitive information, and attempt to weaken institutional credibility.

d. Terrorism and Violent Extremism

According to the 2023 country report on Terrorism, although currently at low levels, regional instability and transnational extremist networks continue to pose risks²². Albania remains a partner in global counterterrorism efforts and must maintain vigilance against recruitment, financing, and radicalization channels.

21 Cybersecurity in Albania, Systematic Review of attacks on State Institutions and Sensitive Data Leaks (2014- 2024). Link at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/397813701_Cybersecurity_in_Albania_Systematic_Review_of_Attacks_on_State_Institutions_and_Sensitive_Data_Leaks_2014-2024

22 Country Reports on Terrorism 2023: Albania. Link at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2023/albania>

e. Organized Crime²³ and Transnational Illicit Networks

Criminal groups²⁴, particularly those involved in trafficking, money laundering, and cyber-enabled crimes, undermine national security and resilience. Their ability to exploit technology and operate across borders demands integrated law enforcement and military support measures.

f. Human Security Threats and Civil Emergencies

Natural disasters, climate-related disruptions, pandemics, and mass migration flows require the Armed Forces to maintain robust civil support capabilities and rapid response structures under the framework of civil-military cooperation.

In order to organise these threats in a structured and comparable way and at the same time to support decision-making and prioritisation, the identified threats are summarised in a risk-assessment table that classifies them by probability, impact, potential consequences and mitigation measures relevant to Albania's defence objectives.

Risk Category	Description	Likelihood	Impact	Potential Consequences	Mitigation Measures
Political Interference & Influence Operations	Attempts by foreign actors to manipulate domestic politics, public opinion, or policymaking, especially related to strategic decisions and EU/NATO integration.	Medium–High	High	Undermined political stability; slowed Euro-Atlantic integration; loss of public trust in institutions	Strengthen public diplomacy; monitor foreign media influence; enhance strategic communication; transparency in policymaking
Hybrid Threats (Cyber, Information, Propaganda)	Use of cyber attacks, disinformation campaigns, and social media manipulation to disrupt public perception and governance.	High	High	Public mistrust; disruption of critical services; destabilization of government functions	Implement robust cybersecurity frameworks; intelligence monitoring; public awareness campaigns; NATO cyber collaboration
Espionage & Intelligence Penetration	Unauthorized access to classified information by state and non-state actors, targeting “state secrets,” NATO/ EU data, or security agreements.	Medium–High	Very High	Compromised national security; damage to international partnerships; leakage of sensitive strategic plans	Strengthen counterintelligence operations; personnel vetting; secure communication protocols; continuous audits and encryption
Terrorism & Extremist Activities	Potential actions by violent extremist organizations or radicalized individuals, domestic or transnational.	Low–Medium	High	Civilian casualties; disruption of public order; negative international perception	Intelligence-led policing; border security; counter-radicalization programs; community engagement

23 To learn more on organized crime go to Global Organized Crime Index <https://ocindex.net/country/albania>

24 Internationally active Albanian organized crime network busted – 10 arrests. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/internationally-active-albanian-organised-crime-network-busted-10-arrests> to learn more on the work done by EUROPOL in a joint cooperation with Albanian SPAK.

Critical Infrastructure Vulnerabilities	Threats to energy, transport, communication, and water systems due to sabotage, cyber attacks, or natural hazards exploited by adversaries.	Medium	High	Disruption of essential services; economic losses; societal panic	Critical infrastructure protection plans; redundancy measures; emergency response exercises; cybersecurity defenses
Economic & Strategic Leverage Risks	Manipulation of key economic sectors, foreign investment, or supply chains to create dependency or exert pressure.	Medium	Medium–High	Policy coercion; weakened sovereignty; limited strategic autonomy	Diversify foreign investment; enforce transparent procurement processes; strengthen regulatory oversight
Social & Public Resilience Risks	Targeted campaigns to increase societal polarization, skepticism toward institutions, or disinformation exploitation.	Medium–High	Medium–High	Public unrest; erosion of trust in state institutions; slowed integration processes	Promote civic education; enhance media literacy; community resilience programs; early-warning monitoring of social trends

Table nr. 7 Operational Framework: Threat typology risk categories

The Operational Framework of the Albanian Armed Forces embodies a flexible and forward-looking approach to both national and regional security. By identifying the full range of potential threats, tailoring the use of military forces, and reinforcing command and control structures, Albania strengthens its ability to deter aggression, respond rapidly to crises, and operate seamlessly alongside NATO partners. This approach ensures that the country plays an active and dependable role in Euro-Atlantic security, addressing traditional military challenges while also managing cyber risks, hybrid threats, organized crime, and humanitarian emergencies in an increasingly complex security landscape.

2.3.2 Force Employment

The employment of the Albanian Armed Forces is shaped by a flexible design that allows the force to adjust rapidly to the full spectrum of contemporary threats. At the core of this approach is the enduring mission of territorial defence and deterrence. The Armed Forces maintain key units capable of protecting national sovereignty while also contributing to NATO’s collective defence posture. Readiness elements, specialized infantry, air-surveillance capabilities, and supporting logistical structures ensure that Albania can deploy forces quickly and effectively when required.

Based on the Human Resources Development Plan assessments under the PAZH document, it is determined that the active personnel strength would be set at 8,500 service members.²⁵ The reorganization of the Albanian Armed Forces (AAF) structure aims to develop new combat capabilities, which requires both structural changes and an increase in personnel. These enhanced capabilities will support missions conducted domestically, within the framework of the Alliance, in other coalitions, and in inter-institutional operations at the national level. Within this framework, the new AAF structure establishes a clear division between combat forces, combat support, and combat service support, integrating each element under its respective command. This redesign is based on their nature, specific functions, and the need to ensure efficient employment when required.

²⁵ National Long Term Development Plan. Per miratimin e Planit Afatgjate te Zhvillimit. Link at: <https://www.mod.gov.al/images/PDF/2024/ligj-84-dt-260724-plani-afatgjate.pdf>

The planned personnel growth acknowledged by the PAZH²⁶ for the period 2024–2033 is as follows:

- Short term: The active force will remain at 8,500, complemented by a 30% reserve component.
- Medium term: The active force will increase to 9,000, while maintaining the additional 30% reserve personnel. This growth is driven by the introduction of several technology and equipment modernization projects.
- Long term: The plan foresees the active force growing to 9,500, informed by a comprehensive study of all personnel categories. The size of the reserve force will be determined based on periodic assessments. This phase will focus on fully fielding and operationalizing modern equipment and systems.

Personnel management across all categories, soldiers, NCOs²⁷, officers, and civilian staff, will follow a complete, modernized lifecycle approach. This includes improving the recruitment system, strengthening meritocracy and career advancement standards, and ensuring that personnel are supported through professional development as well as transitions from active duty to reserve service or integration into civilian life.

Beyond national defence, Albania plays an active role in strengthening regional and international security. Its contribution to NATO operations, multinational battlegroups, and joint exercises reinforces interoperability with Allies and enhances the operational credibility of the force. These engagements also deepen Albania's role in regional deterrence efforts and demonstrate its commitment to Euro-Atlantic security. Recognizing the evolving nature of modern conflict, the Armed Forces have also developed capacities to address hybrid and cyber threats. Dedicated units are tasked with countering disinformation, securing critical digital infrastructure, and supporting national institutions during cyber incidents. The Cyber Defence Centre acts as the operational hub for these capabilities, ensuring a coordinated and resilient response to non-traditional threats.

Civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) forms another central component of the force employment model. CIMIC units play a crucial role in disaster response, humanitarian support, and crisis management across the country. Their contribution continues to grow through NATO-aligned training programs, joint exercises, and strengthened cooperation with local authorities and civilian institutions. The Armed Forces also rely on a range of specialized capabilities that enhance their operational reach. Air assets based at the Kuçovë Air Base, engineering and explosive ordnance disposal teams, and reconnaissance elements all provide essential support for both national missions and multinational deployments.

Finally, the system is reinforced by well-trained Rapid Reaction Forces, which provide immediate operational responsiveness, and by a revitalized reserve component that offers vital surge capacity during large-scale or prolonged emergencies. Together, these elements ensure that Albania's Armed Forces remain adaptable, mission-ready, and capable of supporting both national priorities and Alliance commitments.

2.3.3 Command and Control (C2)

A modern and resilient Command and Control (C2) system lies at the heart of Albania's defence transformation, functioning as the central mechanism through which situational awareness, decision-making, and coordinated military action are exercised. In line with NATO doctrine, Albania is progressively shaping a C2 structure that is interoperable, digitally enabled, and capable of managing complex, multidomain operations. This evolution reflects both national strategic priorities and the broader requirements of the Alliance's Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) framework.:

²⁶ Ibid. pp 31-33

²⁷ **Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs)** are experienced military personnel who hold authority through appointment rather than a formal commission. They serve as the critical link between enlisted personnel and commissioned officers, providing leadership, supervision, training, and operational expertise. NCOs are considered the backbone of the armed forces, ensuring discipline, continuity, and the effective execution of missions at all levels of military organization. Their roles and responsibilities are essential for maintaining unit cohesion, professional development, and operational readiness in accordance with NATO standards.

- Unified Strategic Direction

At the strategic level, Albania ensures unified political–military direction through the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff, which translate national security priorities into actionable military guidance. This alignment guarantees that operational decisions, resource allocation, and capability development remain consistent with the National Security Strategy and Albania’s NATO commitments. Joint Command Structure Efforts continue toward strengthening joint operations across land, air, maritime, cyber, and CIMIC components. The Joint Operations Centre (JOC) functions as the central hub for monitoring, command, and coordination. Central to this system is the strengthening of joint command structures, which integrate land, air, maritime, cyber, and CIMIC elements under a more cohesive operational framework. The Joint Operations Centre (JOC) plays a pivotal role in this architecture, serving as the primary hub for real-time monitoring, operational planning, and coordination of domestic missions and NATO-related tasks. Its development mirrors NATO’s shift toward joint, fused, and cross-domain command arrangements.

- Digitalization and Network-Centric Operations

Digitalisation is also transforming Albania’s C2 posture. The ongoing integration of secure communication networks, encrypted data systems, and protected information-sharing platforms enhances operational tempo and reinforces resilience against cyber intrusion. This transition toward network-centric operations supports faster decision cycles and strengthens Albania’s capacity to contribute to NATO’s federated mission networks.

- Interagency Coordination

Because contemporary security challenges increasingly require whole-of-government approaches, interagency cooperation is a critical dimension of Albania’s C2 model. Coordination with intelligence services, law-enforcement structures, civil-protection agencies, and international partners significantly broadens the scope of situational awareness and reinforces national crisis-management mechanisms. This reflects NATO’s emphasis on comprehensive crisis response and civil-military synergy.

- NATO Interoperability

Interoperability remains a defining pillar of Albania’s C2 development. The Armed Forces continuously align their procedures, reporting mechanisms, communication protocols, and doctrinal frameworks with NATO standards. Regular participation in multinational exercises and command-post drills ensures that Albanian units can integrate seamlessly into Allied command networks and operate effectively under NATO-led headquarters.

- Resilience and Redundancy

Finally, the system incorporates resilience and redundancy as core design principles. Backup command facilities, alternative communication routes, cyber-defence layers, and contingency procedures ensure the continuity of command even under hybrid disruption or kinetic attack. These measures reflect NATO’s broader approach to resilience, which emphasises survivability, operational endurance, and the ability to sustain command structures under pressure.

Overall, Albania’s C2 development represents a deliberate modernization effort that anchors national defence within NATO’s operational ecosystem. By combining strategic coherence, joint integration, digital transformation, interagency cooperation, and robust resilience measures, the country is building a command system capable of supporting both national priorities and collective defence missions across the Euro-Atlantic space.

2.3 Human Capital and Leadership Development.

The military strategy identifies human resources as a strategic enabler.²⁸ It emphasizes professional education, performance-based careers, and reserve integration to strengthen retention and morale. Collaboration with the Armed Forces Academy (AFA) and NATO training centres underpins this approach. Parallel to these initiatives, Albania continues to professionalize its forces, investing in education and training. The Armed Forces Academy of Albania has been restructured to align its curricula with Allied standards, with the vision to exchange programmes with NATO schools, such as Oberammergau or the Baltic Defence College. A tangible progress has been made since 2017, when Albania became part of NATO's CoE²⁹. Becoming a sponsoring nation at the NATO Security Force Assistance (SFA) CoE, represents concrete progress for Albania's defence-education and interoperability agenda: as a contributing country, Albania now participates directly in a network of around 32 accredited NATO Centres of Excellence that support doctrine development, training, exercises, lessons-learned analysis, and concept experimentation for NATO and partner forces. The involvement of Albania in SFA CoE.³⁰ underscores its commitment to enhance its defence capacity, contribute to Alliance-wide standards, and build on educational and professional opportunities for its security forces based on the four pillars of the CoE's.



Source: COE Catalogue.³¹

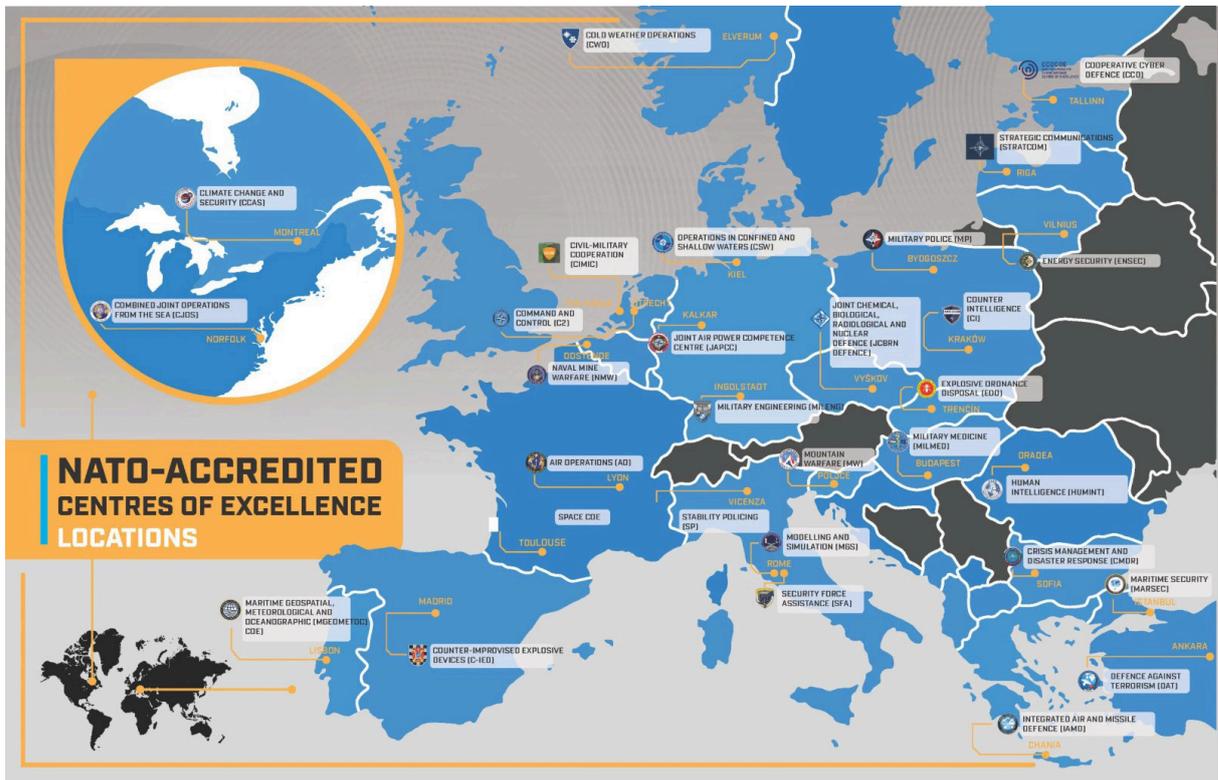
A full national strategy under the Ministry of Defence focuses on recruiting, training, and retaining professional personnel through modern education, simulation, and collective exercises in line with NATO's *Education, Training, Exercise and Evaluation (ETEE)* system. To understand the flow link of the educational framework here are the institutions which provide it.

28 Military Strategy of the Republic of Albania. <https://www.mod.gov.al/images/akteligjore/strategjiite/ligj-83-dt-260724-strategjia-ushtarake.pdf>

29 A Centre of Excellence (COE) is a nationally or multinationally funded institution that provides recognized expertise and experience in a specific area of military activity. Although not part of NATO's formal command structure, each COE is accredited by NATO's Allied Command Transformation and plays a critical role in supporting the Alliance through doctrine development, training and education, experimentation, and lessons learned. <https://www.mscoe.org/content/uploads/2022/12/COE-CATALOG-2023.pdf>

30 NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence. Rome, Italy. <https://www.nsfcoe.org/>

31 NATO accredited Centres of Excellence. Allied Command Transformation. <https://www.act.nato.int/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2025-COE-CATALOGUE-Final-v2.pdf>



Actor	Sub-Actors / Institutions	Relationship / Role
NATO	JADL	Strategic guidance, training, coordination
	NATO Oberammergau	Education, joint military exercises
Ministry of Defence (Albania)	NATO Centers of Excellence CoE (Defence)	Specialized expertise, capability development
	Armed Forces Academy	Education, officer training
	College of Defence and Security	Advanced training, policy development
Flow / Link	NATO → Ministry of Defence	Provides standards, training, and cooperation opportunities

Table nr. 8 The flow link of the educational framework

All the above accomplishments are a testament of Albania making substantial progress in aligning its defence education with NATO standards, demonstrating a clear commitment to bringing its students closer to allied countries. It also emphasizes professionalization and meritocracy, ensuring the recruitment and retention of highly skilled personnel through competitive compensation and transparent promotion systems. Continuous professional development is supported by the Armed Forces Academy and the Defence and Security College, strengthened by active cooperation with West Point and NATO institutions. Notably, Albania has achieved full academic accreditation and introduced master's and doctoral programs in Security and Defence Studies. This is an important milestone that underscores the country's dedication to cultivating a modern, competent, and internationally integrated defence workforce, fully prepared to operate within NATO frameworks.

Besides developing of the educational branch, a strong emphasis has been put also towards the new structure of the armed Forces. According to the PAZH, this new structure of the Armed Forces introduces a clear division between combat units, combat support, and combat service support, integrating them under their respective commands according to their nature, characteristics, and operational employment requirements. This streamlining ensures that each component can be used efficiently and effectively when required.

Part III

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT WITH NATO DEFENCE PLANNING PROCESS (NDPP): GDP DEFENCE BUDGET PLEDGE AND MODERNIZATION.

The PAZH addresses the full context of defence planning and translates national security objectives, priorities, and defence policies into actionable plans, fully aligned with NATO requirements and Albania's commitments to collective defence.³² It outlines how the Armed Forces will develop, ensuring they are properly equipped, trained, and ready to safeguard the values and interests of the country and the Alliance in an increasingly complex and dynamic security environment.

3.1 Capability Development – land, air, naval, cyber, logistics, education.

Across many reports and documents, you can reaffirm that assessing the military strength of a country like Albania requires a broader perspective than simply counting troops or platforms. For small and medium-sized states, especially those integrated into collective defence systems such as NATO, military power is measured not only by the number of tanks, aircraft, or personnel, but by the ability to operate effectively within an alliance, to respond rapidly to crises, and to sustain national resilience against a wide range of threats. This is because if you try to make an inventory of its capabilities, Albania is a small country with an old outdated military infrastructure left from its communism era. Thus, dynamic nature of strength means that military power is not static.³³ It evolves with investments, reforms, doctrine changes, technological adoption (cyber, drones, precision weapons), and shifting strategic environments.

One of the most widely used assessments of global military strength is the Global Firepower (GFP) "PowerIndex", which is the leading annual global defence review since 2005.³⁴ It compares nearly 145 countries using more than 60 factors, including manpower, equipment (aircraft, tanks, ships), logistical capacity, defense budget, geography, industry base, and access to resources like energy. According to the latest data from Global Firepower (GFP), Albania is ranked 90th globally among around 145 countries on the "PowerIndex" scale.³⁵ In the Western Balkans regional ranking, Albania typically comes behind Serbia and a few other larger regional militaries, but ahead of smaller neighbors such as North Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Kosovo. Nevertheless, these reports and rankings need to be taken with limitation accuracy.

³² National Long Term Development Plan. Per miratimin e Planit Afatgjate te Zhvillimit. Link at: <https://www.mod.gov.al/images/PDF/2024/ligj-84-dt-260724-plani-afatgjate.pdf> p. 2.

³³ Global Firepower explanation. https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.php#google_vignette

³⁴ GFP Annual Ranking. 2025 Military Strength Ranking. https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.php#google_vignette

³⁵ Fuqja ushtarake, ku renditet Shqipëria sipas raportit të "Global Firepower" Vox News Albania+2Oculus News+2

In Albania's case, military strength is best evaluated through a combination of capability, readiness, interoperability, and strategic positioning. Albania's geostrategic position makes it an important ally for the transatlantic alliance and its projection of power. As a NATO member since 2009, Albania's defence posture is anchored in collective security, meaning that its national strength derives in part from the integrated power of the Alliance. This shifts the focus from mass to quality, from isolated national forces to joint operational capability, and from traditional metrics to those that reflect modernization, adaptability, and contribution to shared missions. In this regard, Albania has been an active country repeatedly involved in different full-scale complex military exercises under NATO such as Defender Europe. This is one of the largest designed drill to emphasize Albania's role and visibility. Led by US European Command it involve 19 allied and partner nations, enhancing military readiness and response capacity across Europe. And at the same time reinforcing Albania's strategic importance within NATO's southern flank.³⁶ Albania's position (somewhere positioned somewhere around 90th³⁷ globally and somewhere around 135th³⁸) reflects a number of strengths and constraints:

Some of the strengths reflected in these rankings are a collective analysis of its force, investments and importance. First of all, its military relatively well integrated into NATO structures, which compensates for certain capability gaps and provides a collective security umbrella. With not more than 19 aircraft in total and its Bayraktar drones are positive efforts Albania is doing to modernize its force. Nevertheless, the Albanian Armed Forces are calibrated in a way that it serves more for national defense, rapid response, regional cooperation, and participation in multinational operations, rather than large-scale power projection. The second strongest point regards the level of investments in modernization for example: upgrading critical infrastructure, improving interoperability, acquiring new equipment or new emerging technologies, which are all expected to gradually enhance Albania's position over time.³⁹

Besides this there are some limitations or constrains Albania faces are related with the lack of heavy conventional assets. According the GFP report, its inventory of combat aircraft, long-range artillery, and heavy armored formations is minimal or absent. The size of the force, in terms of active and reserve personnel remains modest compared to larger regional militaries. As stated above in the strength aspects of Albania's military position, as a small military, Albania's capacity for independent power projection is limited. Its strength as a small country relies heavily on alliance integration, collective defence, and niche capabilities (e.g., rapid reaction, special forces, coastal surveillance).⁴⁰

Nevertheless, this kind of ranking methodology should be taken with caution. First of all, there are no official rankings of the alliances our country is part due to several levels of security and classified information. And second, indices like Global Firepower use a broad set of quantitative factors (troop numbers, equipment counts, budget, geography), but do not account for qualitative variables such as training, doctrine, morale, leadership, alliance coordination, intelligence, or cyber capabilities. A ranking is a snapshot. It does not predict performance in a real conflict and actual outcomes depend heavily on context, tactics, political will, and external support. For a NATO member like Albania, alliance integration and interoperability often matter more than raw power. The strategic value lies in how Albania's forces fit within the collective defence architecture.

Albania's progress can be measured in several key dimensions. First is force structure and modernization, including the development of land, air, and maritime units that can operate seamlessly with allied forces. Investments in air surveillance, maritime security, special forces, and integrated communication systems demonstrate a shift toward a modern, agile military able to respond to both conventional and hybrid threats. The ongoing modernization of equipment—ranging from air-defence systems to unmanned platforms—adds to Albania's strategic value within the Alliance.

Second, readiness and training play a central role. Albania's participation in NATO exercises, multinational deployments, and regional security missions provides an objective measure of operational capability and professional standards. These activities strengthen tactical proficiency while reinforcing Albania's reliability as a contributor to Euro-Atlantic security.

36 Albania hosts NATO's "Defender Europe" 2025. <https://albaniantimes.al/albania-hosts-natos-defender-europe-25/>

37 Albania ranks 90th in the world in terms of military power. <https://euronews.al/en/albania-ranks-90th-in-the-world-in-terms-of-military-power/>

38 <https://www.militarypowerrankings.com/military-power/albania>

39 Albania ranks 90th in the world in terms of military power. <https://euronews.al/en/albania-ranks-90th-in-the-world-in-terms-of-military-power/>

40 Niche capabilities explanation see page 13.

Third, interoperability and alliance integration form an essential part of assessing military strength for a country of Albania's size. The ability to plug into NATO's command structures, logistics, intelligence networks, and operational frameworks significantly enhances national defence. In many ways, Albania's military strength is magnified through this collective architecture, allowing the country to perform roles and missions that would be impossible without allied integration.

Finally, institutional resilience and defence governance, including: cybersecurity, strategic planning, civil-military coordination, and crisis response mechanisms—round out Albania's overall defence profile. In an era defined by cyber intrusions, disinformation, organized crime, and hybrid pressures, national strength is measured not only by kinetic power but also by how well institutions can prevent, absorb, and recover from multidimensional threats. Further investments in cyber, hybrid defence, mobility, C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance), and specialised capabilities can yield high strategic value. Participation in multinational NATO structures and EU security frameworks enhances national security and shows that even small states contribute meaningfully through coordination, specialization, and burden-sharing.

3.2 Budget and Resource Allocation + 2 % GDP commitment and 20 % modernization share.

The war in Ukraine and the new geopolitical and geostrategic reality have changed the framework for long-term planning. According to the Chief of the General Staff of the Republic of Albania, Major General Arben Kingjii: *“As technology evolves, it is vital that the Armed Forces modernize; therefore, PAZH considers the inclusion and integration of new technologies, both in advanced weapon systems and in cybersecurity capabilities and intelligence systems.”*⁴¹

Albania achieved a 2 % of GDP defence budget, with a pledge of a 20 % dedicated to modernization. Resources target infrastructure, equipment, and innovation while ensuring sustainability. The PAZH 2024–2033 articulates a phased modernization strategy combining infrastructure renewal, capability enhancement, and human capital development. Based on the official document of the Long-Term Development Plan the modernization and innovation strategy phases are as follow:

1. Short-Term (2024–2026):

- Rehabilitation of key military bases and logistics hubs.
- Establishment of the Cyber Defence Command.
- Training reforms through partnerships with NATO Centres of Excellence.

2. Medium-Term (2027–2030):

- Acquisition of Bayraktar TB2 unmanned aerial systems for surveillance and deterrence.
- Procurement of new multi-role helicopters for search-and-rescue and disaster response.
- Expansion of command-and-control and communication systems to NATO standard.

3. Long-Term (2031–2033):

- Enhancement of maritime patrol capabilities with P-133 “Libra”-class vessels.
- Integration of radar networks and air-defence systems under the NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defence framework.
- Development of host-nation support capacities for Allied deployments.

Budgetary data show consistent upward trends: Albania surpassed the 2% GDP benchmark in 2024, allocating roughly one-fifth of the total to modernization. In the aftermath of the Hague NATO Summit, where allies pledged to achieve a 5% GDP⁴² of defence budget, Albania has undertaken several steps to sustaining this rising trajectory of rising defence budgets. Although a long-term ambition, it is expected to consolidate the Armed Forces as a credible mid-sized contributor within the Alliance.

⁴¹ National Long term Development Plan. Per miratimin e Planit Afatgjate te Zhvillimit. Link at: <https://www.mod.gov.al/images/PDF/2024/ligj-84-dt-260724-plani-afatgjate.pdf>

⁴² Defence expenditures and NATO's 5% commitment. Link at: <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/defence-expenditures-and-natos-5-commitment>

Different from the current reality, during the communist period, Albania followed a strict policy of self-reliance but the cost was enormous and it was mostly shaped by deep political isolation. In response, the state built a centralized military–industrial system, establishing key production sites in Mjekës, Gramsh, and Poliçan. These factories focused on producing light weapons, ammunition, mines, and basic aviation ordnance. And the priority was not technological excellence, but the ability to produce large quantities independently. Although this approach gave Albania a certain level of industrial autonomy, it was limited by outdated technology, weak or even lack of innovation, and the high strategic cost of isolation. Perhaps the most visible legacy of this era is the vast number of bunkers still scattered across the country, which today stand as powerful symbols of both a deeply defensive mindset and a system built around permanent mobilization. Albania stands today at a decisive stage of defence consolidation and modernization. Since joining NATO in 2009, the country has consistently advanced its institutional reforms to meet the Alliance’s evolving requirements. The *Long-Term Development Plan of the Armed Forces 2024–2033* (PAZH) articulates a vision for a professional, modern, and interoperable military force capable of responding to both national and collective threats. It sets out three strategic phases — short-term (2024–2026), mid-term (2027–2030), and long-term (2031–2033) — to guide reforms in structure, doctrine, and capability development.⁴³ Based on the current security environment and the national objectives set in the defence sector, the Military Strategy outlines the core principles guiding Albania’s defence policy. These principles rest on collective security, collective defence, and a deep commitment to integration and cooperation with international security organisations.

Albania’s security and defence concept is inseparable from NATO’s system of collective defence. Modernisation efforts will prioritise the development of ground-based air defence capabilities, unmanned aerial systems, and technologies for detecting and neutralising unmanned threats. Alongside these priorities, the Armed Forces will continue upgrading their weapons systems, transport vehicles, helicopters, naval platforms with combat capabilities, and overall firepower.

To sustain these efforts of modernization, Albania’s Military Strategy is shaped by the realities of today’s security environment and by the country’s strategic commitments within the Alliance. It is fully aligned with NATO’s Strategic Concept and reflects the relevant suite of NATO strategic documents and guidance. The strategy comes in hand also because it incorporates the requirements stemming from NATO’s Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) and the NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept (NWCC), ensuring that Albania’s force development remains coherent with the Alliance’s long-term defence posture and operational vision. At the core of the plan lies Albania’s dual defence objective: protection of national sovereignty and contribution to NATO’s collective defence posture. The PAZH explicitly anchors Albania’s strategy in the principles of the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept and the European Union’s *Strategic Compass*. This is the reason, why it needs an update and reform in the light of the Hague Summit and the substantial historic pledge of 5 % of GDP in defence expenditures. Nevertheless, a significant commitment of meeting the 2% target achieved in 2024, signals Albania’s transition from a security consumer to a net security provider.

3.3 Civil-Military Integration and Resilience – new pledge under NATO Hague Summit.

Albania has embraced a holistic resilience model derived from NATO’s Article 3, ensuring continuity of government, energy security, food and health systems, and resilient communications. Civil protection and strategic communication are included as components of deterrence, reflecting lessons from the 2019 earthquake and cyberattacks on public infrastructure. Besides this model, Albania has to reach a certain level of civil resilience expenditures foreseen in the Hague NATO Summit. Expenditure pledge now include the military component and a mixed civilian-military activities.⁴⁴ Allies have agreed that the 5% defence investment commitment will cover two key areas. “At least 3.5% of GDP each year, based on NATO’s agreed definition of defence spending, will be dedicated to meeting core defence needs and achieving NATO Capability Targets

⁴³ National Long Term Development Plan. Per miratimin e Planit Afatgjate te Zhvillimit. Link at: <https://www.mod.gov.al/images/PDF/2024/ligj-84-dt-260724-plani-afatgjate.pdf> pp. 10-12.

⁴⁴ Defence expenditures and NATO’s 5% commitment. Link at: <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/defence-expenditures-and-natos-5-commitment>

by 2035. Each Ally will submit annual plans outlining a credible, step-by-step path to reach this objective. The remaining up to 1.5% of GDP will support a broader set of priorities, including protecting critical infrastructure, defending networks, ensuring civil preparedness and resilience, fostering innovation, and strengthening the defence industrial base. The overall spending trajectory and balance will be reviewed in 2029, taking into account the strategic environment and updated Capability Targets. Allies also reaffirm their sovereign commitment to support Ukraine, recognizing that its security strengthens their own, and will include direct contributions to Ukraine's defence and defence industry when calculating defence spending."⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The Hague Summit Declaration issued by NATO Allies. Link at <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2025/06/25/the-hague-summit-declaration>

Part IV

ASSESSMENT OF THREATS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

4.1 Strategic Threat Environment – geopolitical, hybrid, cyber, climate, migration dimensions.

The presence of NATO, the EU, as well as the UN and the OSCE, alongside regional cooperation forums and bilateral initiatives, continues to serve as an anchor of stability and a vital platform for collaboration. The Balkans' geostrategic position has enabled the region to evolve into a connecting hub for economic, energy, infrastructure, and technological projects. In the military domain, the region has developed joint initiatives such as the recent Albanian, Kosovo and Croatia Memorandum of Understanding.⁴⁶ These kinds of cooperative structures, contributes to combined operations and supports mutual assistance during military preparedness, crisis management and civil emergencies.

In all national strategic documents also mentioned in this study, the risk of direct military aggression against Albanian territory is assessed as low. However, the current international security environment, particularly along NATO's eastern flank, has increased the likelihood that an attack on an Allied nation could occur. This meaning that such an attack, combined with the obligations stemming from Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, could draw Albania into a conventional conflict. This kind of a conflict carries the potential to escalate, including through the possible use of weapons of mass destruction. Although, in line with all allies, Albania does not support, nor does it seek, the use of military force for reasons of aggression against any other state. It is in support of peace and stability within the European architecture and beyond it.

After the Ukraine war, various state and non-state actors that do not share the same values as Western democracies are accelerating the modernization of their armed forces, creating dynamics that carry significant implications for regional and global stability. This trend is reflected in increased investments in the defense sector, the expansion of military capabilities, and the acquisition of offensive weapons systems by certain states or entities in the Western Balkans. Many of these actors benefit from the backing of, or serve as proxies for, authoritarian powers. Such developments risk undermining mutual trust, potentially igniting an arms race among Western Balkan countries. The gradual militarization of the region—combined with the presence of long-standing “frozen conflicts” rooted in ethnic and political tensions—creates conditions in which, under the wrong geopolitical circumstances, these disputes could escalate into military confrontations, including the possibility of inter-state conflict.

⁴⁶ Albania, Croatia, and Kosovo sign joint declaration on Defense Cooperation. Link at: <https://www.mod.gov.al/eng/newsroom/1805-albania-croatia-and-kosovo-sign-joint-declaration-on-defence-cooperation>

The National Security Strategy notes three levels of threat:

- **Domestic:** vulnerability of institutions, corruption, and disaster exposure.
- **Regional:** hybrid pressure, organized crime, and fragile governance in the Western Balkans;
- **Global:** resurgence of great-power competition and erosion of the rules-based order;

4.1.1 Domestic security environment

Organized crime in the Republic of Albania remains a complex and evolving security challenge with significant strategic implications for law enforcement, particularly in the domain of cyber-enabled organized crime. Despite considerable improvements in state enforcement capacity, criminal networks, groups, and individuals, especially those involved in drug trafficking and production, continue to demonstrate high levels of adaptability in response to intensified police, judicial, and financial control measures. While authorities have achieved notable results through seizures, prosecutions, and asset confiscations, criminal actors have increasingly refined their operational methods, exploited digital tools, and adjusted their structures to mitigate the impact of state countermeasures, underscoring the need for more advanced, intelligence-led, and technologically integrated law enforcement strategies. Over the years, the revenues generated from criminal activities, facilitated by persistent informal economic practices, impunity, and low prosecution rates, often exacerbated by corruption within the justice system. All this dynamic have allowed the systematic injection of illicit funds into both the formal and informal economy. This financial penetration not only undermines economic integrity but also provides criminal networks with resources to expand and diversify their operations.

Furthermore, key elements of Albanian organized crime groups have increasingly extended their presence beyond national borders, establishing operational footholds in other European countries. This transnationalization includes not only trafficking networks but also the relocation of production sites and the sourcing of narcotics from international supply chains. Such developments increase the complexity of law enforcement and counter-narcotics operations, requiring enhanced cooperation with international partners, intelligence sharing, and strategic alignment with EU and NATO frameworks.

The persistence and evolution of organized crime in Albania poses multifaceted risks⁴⁷:

- **Economic:** Distortion of markets, infiltration of legitimate businesses, and illicit capital flows that undermine financial integrity⁴⁸.
- **Security:** Funding for other criminal or destabilizing activities, including corruption, money laundering, and potential links to terrorism financing.
- **Political & Social:** Influence over political processes, erosion of public trust in institutions, and the potential to exploit systemic vulnerabilities.

Furthermore, the adoption of information and communication technologies by criminal networks, coupled with the migration of their operations into cyberspace, has significantly increased the complexity of law enforcement efforts. Digital platforms enable these groups to conceal their activities, launder proceeds, and communicate across borders with greater security, making it increasingly challenging to identify, investigate, and prosecute offenders. This shift contributes directly to a growing sense of impunity among criminal actors, allowing them to operate with reduced risk of detection or legal consequence. These cyber-enabled elements are now deeply embedded in international organized crime networks, facilitating coordination, resource sharing, and operational planning across multiple jurisdictions. Within Albania, such integration strengthens the operational capabilities of domestic criminal groups, enabling them to expand their activities in drug trafficking, money laundering, financial fraud, and other illicit sectors. And, their strategic implications of this trend are significantly related with the below critical issues such as:

⁴⁷ Politico. 21.03.2025. DASH Report on Albania: Corruption, Weak Rule of Law, and Unemployment Fuel Drug Trafficking. <https://politiko.al/english/e-tjera/raporti-i-dash-per-shqiperine-korrupsioni-sundimi-i-dobet-i-ligjit-dhe-p-i528088>

⁴⁸ There are different references where to deep the research in organized crime in Albania and its corelation with illicit financial flows. Kocani. D., Agovic. A. Illicit Financial flows in Albania. 2024. <https://see.globalinitiative.net/hotspots/iffs/reports/albania.pdf>

1. **Law Enforcement Complexity:** Traditional policing and investigative methods are less effective in detecting and disrupting cyber-mediated criminal operations, requiring investment in specialized digital forensics, intelligence, and cybersecurity capabilities.
2. **National Security Risk:** Cyber-enabled criminal networks can provide resources or infrastructure for other destabilizing activities, including corruption, hybrid threats, and potential links to transnational terrorism financing.
3. **Economic Impact:** Increased integration of criminal proceeds into legitimate digital financial systems risks undermining financial integrity, distorting markets, and enabling further criminal expansion.
4. **International Cooperation Necessity:** The transnational nature of these networks demands strengthened partnerships with EU, NATO, and regional law enforcement and intelligence bodies to ensure timely information exchange, joint investigations, and coordinated disruption efforts.

To address these challenges, Albania must continue strengthening enforcement mechanisms, improve judicial effectiveness, enhance anti-corruption measures, and expand regional and international cooperation to disrupt transnational criminal networks. While strategically investing in intelligence-led policing, asset recovery, it will also need to establish preventive social measures to reduce the adaptability and resilience of organized crime. At the same time, the country must prioritize the development of cyber-focused law enforcement units, advance digital surveillance and intelligence capabilities. On the other hand, it urges to implement regulatory measures targeting virtual financial flows, complemented by stronger public–private partnerships with financial institutions, telecom providers, and technology companies to enhance early detection, mitigation, and prosecution of cyber-enabled criminal activities. Thereby, reducing the operational advantages of criminal networks, lowering impunity, and safeguarding national security, economic stability, and public trust.

a) Critical Infrastructure Security

The protection of critical infrastructure has become a top priority in the face of escalating cyber threats, as well as due to vulnerabilities associated with aging or degraded equipment. Such weaknesses can be exploited by terrorist actors or organized crime networks, amplifying other threats to national security and public safety. The interdependence of critical infrastructure sectors—including energy, transportation, water supply, and communications—means that a targeted attack in one sector can have cascading effects across multiple domains, increasing societal and economic disruption. In this regard, Albania has created the Security and Defence Innovation Centre,⁴⁹ where increasing awareness of cyber security and protection of critical infrastructure is its major focus.

For example, from 2014 to 2024, Albania has experienced cyclical repeated cyber incidents targeting governmental and critical systems.⁵⁰ One notable case involved a cyber attack on national government networks that temporarily disrupted certain public services and highlighted the vulnerabilities in information security protocols. Although the immediate operational impact was contained, the incident underscored the potential consequences of cyber-enabled attacks on essential services and the need for continuous modernization of critical infrastructure defenses.

Strategically, these developments emphasize the necessity of:

1. **Strengthening Cybersecurity Capabilities:** Implementing advanced intrusion detection, threat intelligence, and incident response mechanisms across all critical sectors.
2. **Modernization and Maintenance of Equipment:** Ensuring that physical and digital infrastructure is upgraded to prevent exploitation by malicious actors.
3. **Cross-Sector Coordination:** Enhancing cooperation between public authorities, private sector operators, and international partners to improve resilience and rapid recovery.
4. **Scenario-Based Planning:** Conducting exercises simulating cyber and hybrid attacks to identify vulnerabilities, test response mechanisms, and reduce potential cascading effects.

49 Security and Defense Innovation Center. Link at: <https://sdic.gov.al/sq/njoftime/12>

50 Elezi, E., Cybersecurity in Albania, Systematic Review of Attacks on State Institutions and Sensitive Data Leaks (2014-2024). Richmond Publishing. Link at: <https://www.richtmann.org/journal/index.php/ajis/article/view/14558/14147>

All the above is crucial to take into account when prioritizing these measures, as a way for Albania can reduce the exposure of critical infrastructure to cyber threats and mitigate the broader implications for national security, public trust, and economic stability.

b) Energy Security

Energy security is no longer merely a global concern; it has become a primary national security issue for the Republic of Albania. Albania holds significant potential to become a regional leader in energy security due to its abundant renewable energy resources, strategic geographic position, and growing interconnection with regional energy networks. With strong hydropower capacity, increasing solar and wind investments, and access to key electricity transmission corridors, Albania is well positioned to enhance energy independence and contribute to regional energy stability. Its coastline and proximity to major European energy routes also offer opportunities for offshore energy development and cross-border electricity trade. By modernizing infrastructure and embracing digital grid technologies, Albania can improve supply resilience and reduce dependency on external energy sources, strengthening its role as a reliable energy partner in the Western Balkans.

Threats are associated with the availability of energy resources, the reduction of hydropower potential due to changing climatic conditions, the aging of existing infrastructure, and the increasing energy demands of the population. Furthermore, disruptions in global energy markets, exacerbated by the search for alternative suppliers to reduce dependence on adversarial states that may leverage energy for geopolitical pressure, pose additional risks to national energy security. Under these conditions, the effective management and protection of existing energy infrastructure take on strategic priority. Key measures include strengthening operational efficiency, upgrading aging facilities, and implementing enhanced security protocols to prevent cyberattacks or sabotage that could potentially trigger a national crisis. The government is undertaking a comprehensive program of infrastructure modernization to improve the reliability, efficiency, and resilience of the national energy system. At the same time, it is actively diversifying energy sources to reduce dependence on single suppliers and expand the use of renewable and alternative energy. As mentioned above, strengthening cybersecurity measures has become a key priority to protect critical energy infrastructure from cyber threats and digital attacks. In parallel, the government is enhancing emergency preparedness and resilience planning to ensure rapid response and continuity of supply during crises or major disruptions. Finally, it is promoting regional cooperation to improve cross-border energy connectivity, coordination, and shared energy security objectives.

Albania possesses notable reserves of critical energy-related minerals, including chromium, copper, nickel, and bitumen-related resources, which are increasingly important for batteries, electric vehicles, and renewable energy technologies.⁵¹ These mineral assets position Albania as a competitive player at the regional level, with the potential to integrate into European and global supply chains for strategic raw materials. In a recent national conference on natural resources, the overall findings evaluate that a review of the mining strategy of Albania to ensure a sustainable and long-term development is needed to face new challenges. "Needs for mining products in green industries developed recently globally and to create new possibilities for our metallic mineral reserves as secure resource in the supply chain for the region and European market."⁵² Through responsible exploration, modern extraction methods, and value-added processing, Albania can strengthen its role as a supplier of critical minerals to international markets. Within appropriate legal and strategic frameworks, this capability can enhance Albania's competitiveness and reduce external dependency in global supply chains that are currently dominated by major producers, including China. While remaining aligned with European sustainability and governance standards, Albania is limiting China's influence in its market and is firmly resisting to become China's hub in the region.⁵³

51 AIDA. Renewable Energy Sector Factsheet. Link at: https://aida.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/AIDA_FactSheet_Energy2024.pdf

52 Mati., S., November 2025. Mineral strategy and policies of albania, alignment, harmonisation with union legislation and european policy for minerals
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/397989343_MINERAL_STRATEGY_AND_POLICIES_OF_ALBANIA_ALIGNMENT_HARMONISATION_WITH_UNION_LEGISLATION_AND_EUROPEAN_POLICY_FOR_MINERALS

53 Chinese Influence in Albania. Center for European Policy Analysis report. <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/chinese-influence-in-albania/>

The Government of Albania has undertaken a comprehensive strategy to enhance national energy security, recognizing its critical role for both economic stability and national resilience. These initiatives not only improve generation efficiency but also mitigate vulnerabilities related to climate variability and changing hydrological conditions. The integration of renewable energy, including solar and wind power, into the national grid reduces dependence on any single source and enhances the country's ability to respond to supply disruptions. Acknowledging the growing threat of cyberattacks, the government has also implemented robust cybersecurity measures across critical energy infrastructure. This includes the deployment of advanced monitoring systems and intrusion detection mechanisms within power plants and grid management networks, ensuring that potential threats can be identified and neutralized swiftly. To further safeguard energy continuity, Albania conducts national drills and contingency planning exercises designed to ensure rapid response to any disruption, whether caused by technical failure, natural disaster, or malicious activity. These preparedness measures enhance both operational resilience and public confidence in the reliability of energy services.

Finally, Albania actively engages in regional and European cooperation to bolster energy security. Through cross-border electricity trading and joint emergency response protocols, the country not only strengthens its own energy resilience but also contributes to the stability and reliability of the wider regional energy network. Through these strategic initiatives, Albania aims to reduce vulnerability to both physical and cyber threats, ensure reliable energy supply, and maintain the operational integrity of the energy sector under evolving domestic and international challenges.

c) Migration and Transit Security: Strategic Context

Migration remains a defining structural factor shaping Albania's socio-economic development and security environment. Illegal and irregular migration through Albanian territory is closely linked to the Balkan route, which continues to serve as a significant corridor toward Europe. Albania functions as a key transit country for unauthorized migration, and the nation is not immune to the influence of migration flows originating from conflict-affected regions. As a transit hub on the Balkan corridor, Albania faces persistent challenges in managing irregular cross-border movements while maintaining national security and public order.⁵⁴ At the same time, emigration of Albanian citizens has increased in recent years. Factors such as the freedom of movement within the European region, opportunities offered by the global labor market, and other socioeconomic drivers have contributed to a rise in the number of Albanians leaving the country. This includes highly skilled professionals and well-educated segments of the population, whose departure presents both economic and social challenges for the country. Socioeconomic pressures remain the primary factor driving irregular emigration, while domestic labor market demands have created a parallel trend of attracting migrant workers from third countries to meet workforce needs. However, international assessments underline that challenges remain in effective policy implementation, data standardisation, and the management of labour migration, particularly in balancing mobility needs with protection safeguards.⁵⁵ Addressing these dynamics requires an integrated approach that combines protection of vulnerable migrants, effective border and migration management, and long-term resilience-building measures, linking migration policy with broader development objectives, security considerations, and Albania's EU integration path.⁴

To address these dynamics, Albania has developed migration policies in alignment with EU standards, emphasizing regulated migration flows, humanitarian obligations, and border security. A key component of this strategy is the bilateral agreement with Italy, which strengthens cooperation in managing migration flows, facilitating legal pathways for migration, combating human trafficking and smuggling networks, and coordinating on border management and security measures. Through this agreement, both countries work to monitor and regulate migration along critical transit routes, enhance information sharing, and ensure rapid response mechanisms in case of irregular migration surges or security incidents. Nevertheless, this agreement has sprouted many concerns and controversies in regards of its substance in managing illegal migratory

54 International Organization for Migration. National Strategy on Migration and Action Plan 2024-2026. <https://albania.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1401/files/documents/2024-12/nsm-eng.pdf>

55 IOM Country Strategy of Albania. 2022-2025. <https://albania.iom.int/news/iom-albania-launches-country-strategy-2022-2025>

flows.⁵⁶ A public debate has also risen in Albanian society due to its implementation. This is why, by combining national regulatory frameworks, regional coordination, and targeted bilateral agreements, an aspiring country seeks to manage migration flows effectively while protecting national security, supporting economic stability, and fulfilling its obligations as a responsible partner within the Euro-Atlantic framework.

4.1.2 Regional security landscape level of analysis “Instability and Foreign Malign Influence”

The Western Balkans remain a region of strategic dynamics, where unresolved political disputes, ethnic tensions, and external influences interact. This fluidity continues to face a complex set of threats and challenges, most notably the destabilizing and malign interference of third actors, which is a reality in some border countries. Foreign malign actors seek to exploit regional vulnerabilities by leveraging Serbia and its associated proxy networks to advance geopolitical objectives that run counter to the values and interests of the Euro-Atlantic community. Through a combination of diplomatic pressure, cultural-religious influence, and intelligence-driven activities, these actors intentionally manipulate ethnic sensitivities and unresolved political issues across the region. Their aim is to deepen divisions, erode trust in democratic institutions, and undermine the progress of Western integration processes. This orchestrated effort manifests in various forms of hybrid threats, including disinformation campaigns, covert influence operations, cyber activities, and political manipulation.

Such destabilizing actions directly affect the regional security environment of the Western Balkans and pose tangible risks to the missions and presence of NATO/KFOR and the European Union in the area. In this context, Serbia continues to pursue a dual-track policy, balancing economic incentives and partnerships with the European Union while simultaneously aligning its security and defense posture with Russian strategic interests. This ambivalence contributes to uncertainty, encourages proxy dynamics, and increases the risk of miscalculation at a time when the region remains exposed to fragile political settlements and ethnic tensions. Consequently, it is of crucial importance to make an assessment based on the PMESII-base analysis tailored specifically to WB and Albania's strategic security environment.

1. Political

- Persistent political polarization in several Western Balkan states creates openings for foreign malign influence.
- The Russian Federation leverages Serbia and affiliated proxies to undermine Euro-Atlantic integration and weaken regional democratic governance.
- Unresolved political disputes—particularly related to Kosovo—remain exploitable flashpoints that could escalate during periods of geopolitical tension.

2. Military

- Increasing militarization in parts of the region, including procurement of offensive weapon systems and force modernization by Serbia with Russian and Chinese support.
- Presence of “frozen conflicts” and ethnically charged security incidents increase the risk of rapid escalation.
- Hybrid military–intelligence activities, including covert support to paramilitary structures, threaten regional stability and challenge NATO/KFOR posture.

3. Economic

- Economic dependencies on non-Western actors (energy, infrastructure, and strategic investments) expose some states to political leverage.
- Use of economic influence operations—loans, investment agreements, and opaque financial networks—creates vulnerabilities and reduces alignment with EU standards and oversight.

4. Social

- Ethnic divisions and historical grievances remain highly sensitive and easily exploitable through disinformation and propaganda.

⁵⁶ The Italy- Albania Deal: 2025 Review and Outlook. November 2025. Link at: <https://europeanrelations.com/the-italy-albania-deal/>

- Narratives promoted by foreign actors fuel mistrust between communities, reinforce polarization, and weaken social cohesion.
- Migration pressures and demographic decline contribute to structural fragility in several states.

5. Information

- Intensifying disinformation campaigns target public opinion, undermine trust in Euro-Atlantic institutions, and amplify anti-Western narratives.
- Foreign media networks, online platforms, and coordinated information operations promote narratives aligned with Russian strategic interests.
- Cyber vulnerabilities across government institutions enable espionage, data theft, and disruption attempts.

6. Infrastructure

- Critical infrastructure—energy grids, transport corridors, telecommunications—suffers from limited resilience and, in some states, foreign ownership or influence.
- Dependence on non-NATO telecommunications technologies increases exposure to espionage and operational disruption.
- Insufficient protection of critical national infrastructure (CNI) against hybrid tactics remains a significant vulnerability.

Below is a table that summarize the PMESII dimension of the regional security environment.

PMESII Dimension	Core Threats / Challenges	Strategic Effects	Recommended Courses of Action (COAs)
P – Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign malign influence (primarily FR via Serbia and proxies) • Exploitation of unresolved disputes (Kosovo) • Polarization of political systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erosion of democratic institutions • Reduced alignment with EU/NATO • Potential political destabilization 	<p>COA P1: Enhance national resilience through interagency coordination (NSC, MFA, MoD, SHISH) for countering foreign interference.</p> <p>COA P2: Intensify regional diplomatic engagement (Kosovo, NMK, Montenegro) and trilateral frameworks.</p> <p>COA P3: Expand strategic communication campaigns to reinforce Euro-Atlantic orientation.</p>
M – Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Militarization and offensive procurement in region • Russian/Chinese support to Serbian military • Persistent frozen conflicts • Hybrid military–intelligence networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher risk of escalation • Increased pressure on NATO/KFOR • Threats to territorial integrity of allies 	<p>COA M1: Accelerate modernization and force readiness (C2, ISR, air defence, mobility).</p> <p>COA M2: Strengthen operational integration with NATO for collective defence scenarios.</p> <p>COA M3: Expand CIMIC and Host Nation Support (HNS) capacities to support NATO reinforcements.</p>
E – Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic investments by non-Western actors (energy, ports, telecoms) • Opaque financial flows • Dependency on external energy networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage risks for influence • Limited resilience to economic coercion 	<p>COA E1: Increase scrutiny of critical foreign investments (screening mechanisms).</p> <p>COA E2: Diversify energy supply and advance regional interconnectivity.</p> <p>COA E3: Implement economic resilience planning aligned with EU standards.</p>

S – Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic tensions (especially in Kosovo–Serbia interface) • Disinformation targeting communities • Polarization and identity-based manipulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced social cohesion • Increased vulnerability to hybrid destabilisation 	<p>COA S1: Increase whole-of-society resilience through public education, media literacy, and community engagement. COA S2: Bolster civil protection and crisis management coordination. COA S3: Develop targeted programmes for countering extremist narratives.</p>
I – Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinated disinformation campaigns • Cyber espionage and attacks on government systems • Weak institutional cyber defence capacities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of public trust • Strategic confusion in crisis • Data breaches impacting defence/ security 	<p>COA I1: Establish a National Cyber Defence Centre with military–civil cooperation. COA I2: Enhance cooperation with NATO StratCom COE and CCDCOE. COA I3: Develop rapid response teams and a national disinformation monitoring platform.</p>
I – Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerabilities in energy, transport, telecoms • Dependence on non-NATO tech suppliers (5G risks) • Limited CNI protection standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased exposure to sabotage/hybrid disruption • Reduced ability to support NATO operations 	<p>COA INF1: Strengthen physical and cyber protection of critical infrastructure. COA INF2: Prioritise NATO-standard resilience planning (baseline requirements). COA INF3: Improve dual-use infrastructure for military mobility and rapid reinforcement.</p>

Table nr. 9 PMESII- base analysis to WB and Albania's strategic security environment.

This table illustrates the region's security environment. Together, these PMESII dimensions reinforce one another, producing a multidimensional security environment marked by uncertainty, hybrid threats, and heightened strategic competition that demands adaptive, resilient, and integrated national and alliance responses. After capturing such a comprehensive picture of the global security threats and challenges, regional alliances and partnerships pose an opportunity to Albania to strengthen its role as a factor of stability internally and externally. In its aspiration to EU integration process, the region continues to face a set of shared and persistent threats, including the presence of organized crime with extensive regional and transnational links, external influence operations, and internal factors that facilitate radicalization and violent extremism. These pressures contribute to the erosion of interethnic relations, sustain high levels of corruption, and enable economic crime, which is further aggravated by widespread informality. Socio-economic vulnerabilities, the protracted transition period, an underdeveloped democratic culture, unresolved interstate issues, and increasingly nationalist rhetoric further complicate the security environment. The PAZH identifies hybrid operations, organized crime networks, and disinformation campaigns as some of the most serious non-military threats undermining stability in the region. Albania's geographic position, close to potential flashpoints such as Kosovo and the Adriatic–Ionian corridors, requires sustained vigilance, preventive action, and proactive regional diplomacy.

The national strategic documents emphasise that instability in any part of the Western Balkans can rapidly spill across borders. This makes regional cooperation and intelligence sharing essential components of national security. Because, malign influence activities, such as fake news, disinformation, and conspiracy-driven narratives, have increased significantly, shaping public perceptions and weakening trust in the effectiveness of democratic institutions and the broader security environment. The speed and reach of digital communication have amplified the impact of these campaigns, allowing hostile actors to exploit information ecosystems more effectively. As a result, not only in the region in countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia or Kosovo, but everywhere, disinformation is increasingly challenging the credibility of factual and scientific information, undermining governance, sowing panic, and generating instability with direct implications for national security.

4.1.3 Tectonic shifts in the global security architecture

The contemporary global security environment is increasingly defined by a complex and fluid interplay of political volatility, economic fragmentation, military modernization, societal polarization, information-domain contestation, and infrastructure vulnerabilities. In his speech in 2024 by the Chair of the Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer explained how our alliance is facing a tectonic shift in global security architecture while saying: “The tectonic plates of power are shifting”.⁵⁷ Politically, strategic competition among major powers has intensified. Thus, eroding long-standing norms and reducing the effectiveness of multilateral institutions in crisis management. Has become the new normal. Economically, fluctuating energy markets, technological decoupling, and disrupted supply chains have generated new patterns of dependence and leverage, creating both vulnerabilities and opportunities for state and non-state actors. Militarily, rapid advances in unmanned systems, long-range precision capabilities, cyber weapons, and dual-use technologies are reshaping deterrence paradigms and lowering the threshold for hybrid escalations. Socially, demographic pressures, migration flows, and disinformation campaigns exacerbate societal divisions, inhibiting resilience and weakening trust in public institutions. In the information domain, the weaponization of narratives, deepfakes, AI-enabled propaganda, and the strategic use of digital platforms have created a persistent cognitive battlespace where perceptions and public sentiment are targeted as decisively as physical infrastructure. As recognised also from PAZH, the global security environment is defined by instability, unpredictability, constant change, and intensifying strategic competition.⁵⁸ State actors with malign intent are increasingly seeking to develop capabilities that allow them to influence the security environment, challenge international norms, and undermine interests, values, and established ways of life. These ambitions are being pursued through influence and interference across all domains, including the use of military force.

4.2 Regional Role and Alliances – NATO, EU, OSCE, bilateral partnerships.

4.2.1 NATO Membership and Strategic Integration

Albania’s NATO membership remains the cornerstone of its national defense and regional security strategy. Since joining in 2009, Albania has modernized its armed forces, enhanced interoperability with Alliance partners, and actively contributed to multinational exercises and operations. Participation in NATO missions allows Albania to strengthen operational readiness, develop advanced cyber and intelligence capabilities, and engage in joint planning for crisis response.

Albania’s strategic position in the Western Balkans is reinforced through a combination of multilateral and bilateral engagements:

- **NATO membership** underpins defense modernization, joint operational capacity, and collective deterrence.
- **OSCE participation** strengthens institutional capacity, regional cooperation, and non-military security resilience.
- **EU integration** drives comprehensive reforms and aligns Albania with European security standards.
- **Bilateral partnerships**, especially with Italy, enhance operational readiness in migration, border control, and organized crime management.

Together, these mechanisms enable Albania to maintain its national security, support regional stability, and actively contribute to Euro-Atlantic strategic objectives. This integrated approach ensures that Albania can respond effectively to both conventional and non-conventional threats while reinforcing its role as a trusted partner in regional security frameworks. At the same time this allow us to understand the reasons why Albania from a consumer turned into a contributor to collective defence and security.

⁵⁷ Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer. NATO Official warns West: Be ready for ‘anything’. Politico. Link at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/nato-needs-warfighting-transformation-says-military-chief/>

⁵⁸ National Long Term Development Plan. Per miratimin e Planit Afatgjate te Zhvillimit. Link at: <https://www.mod.gov.al/images/PDF/2024/ligj-84-dt-260724-plani-afatgjate.pdf> page 5

Area	Details / Achievements
Peacekeeping & Operations	Deployments in Kosovo (KFOR), Afghanistan, and NATO Response Force rotations
Military Exercises	Participation in Trident Juncture, Dynamic Mongoose, and regional interoperability exercises
Cybersecurity & Hybrid Threats	Integration into NATO's Cyber Defense Centers; participation in cyber defense drills
Intelligence & Strategic Planning	Membership in NATO committees and access to Alliance intelligence-sharing platforms
Capacity Building	Modernization of equipment, training programs, and NATO standardization of Armed Forces procedures

Table nr. 10 Key NATO Contributions and Activities

The national strategies, be it the military or national security one, reaffirm NATO membership as the *foundation of national defence* and EU accession as the *strategic objective of foreign policy*. They call for deeper NATO-EU coordination in countering hybrid threats, border security, and resilience planning, which were already elaborated above.

In the long term, Albania's defence transformation is firmly anchored in NATO's evolving strategic framework and operationalized nationally through the Alliance's agreement on a **5% defence investment benchmark**. While this commitment represents a structural shift in collective defence planning—linking military capability development with resilience, innovation, and defence-industrial strength—it also places significant pressure on Albania's economy. Nevertheless, this alignment demonstrates how Albania internalizes NATO's burden-sharing model as a driver of long-term force development rather than treating it as a purely budgetary obligation.

Under the agreed framework, Allies will allocate **at least 3.5% of GDP annually**—in line with NATO's definition of defence expenditure—to meet core defence requirements and achieve NATO Capability Targets by **2035**, supported by annual national plans outlining credible, incremental pathways toward this objective. An additional **up to 1.5% of GDP** will be directed toward broader security priorities, including the protection of critical infrastructure, cyber defence, civil preparedness and resilience, innovation, and the strengthening of the defence industrial base. The overall spending trajectory and balance will be reviewed in **2029**, taking into account the evolving strategic environment and updated capability requirements. Allies have also reaffirmed their sovereign commitment to support Ukraine, recognizing that its security reinforces collective security, and will include direct contributions to Ukraine's defence and defence industry within their defence spending calculations.

From a **PMESII-ASCOPE perspective**, Albania's NATO integration produces effects across all strategic dimensions. Politically, Albania's consistent adherence to NATO commitments enhances its credibility as a reliable Ally and strengthens its voice within collective decision-making structures. Militarily, participation in NATO missions, particularly in Kosovo and its role in Iraq, has reinforced operational professionalism, interoperability, and readiness, all of which are reflected in its national force-structure. Economically, defence investments and industry reform generate spillover effects in manufacturing, technology, and skilled employment, supporting national resilience beyond the defence sector. Regarding its **geostrategic location**, linking the Adriatic Sea to key Western Balkan corridors, shows a prominent importance in both NATO regional planning and national long term infrastructure priorities. From an ASCOPE lens, areas, structures, and capabilities such as ports, airfields, transport corridors, and logistics hubs acquire dual civil-military relevance. Their protection and modernization align directly with NATO's resilience objectives under the 1.5% investment pillar, reinforcing Albania's role in securing the Alliance's southern flank and ensuring freedom of movement for allied forces.

Viewed through a PMESII lens, defence industry reform contributes to economic sustainability, reduces strategic dependency, and supports military readiness through enhanced lifecycle sustainment and repair capabilities. At the societal level, it contributes to workforce development and mitigates the long-term effects of skilled labour migration which is a national constrain in itself. Overall, interoperability remains a central military objective and a defining requirement of NATO membership. Thus, alignment with NATO doctrines, operational concepts, and technical standards, particularly through the adoption of STANAGs⁵⁹, ensures that Albanian forces can integrate seamlessly into multinational formations. This interoperability extends beyond equipment to include command-and-control systems, logistics, communications, and training. Through a PMESII–ASCOPE lens, interoperability strengthens not only military effectiveness but also institutional trust, shared procedures, and collective situational awareness.

Albania's defence transformation increasingly reflects the priorities and operational standards of the NATO Alliance, particularly in response to a changing threat environment marked by the proliferation of unmanned systems, precision-strike capabilities, and hybrid forms of coercion. Within this context, air and missile defence has assumed greater strategic importance, as integrated air surveillance and layered defence architectures contribute both to the protection of national airspace and to NATO's regional air picture. These capabilities play a critical role in safeguarding population centres and critical infrastructure, while reinforcing collective deterrence and early warning mechanisms. Cooperation with NATO has also driven the modernization of Albania's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities, notably through the development of unmanned aerial systems aligned with Alliance standardization frameworks. Compliance with NATO standards enables secure information exchange and integration into allied command-and-control structures, enhancing interoperability. From a PMESII perspective, these capabilities strengthen military situational awareness while also supporting civil authorities in disaster response, border security, and critical infrastructure protection, underscoring their dual-use value.

Hybrid threats constitute a central challenge shaping Albania–NATO cooperation. Cyberattacks, disinformation, economic pressure, and sabotage increasingly target political institutions, societal cohesion, and defence supply chains. Addressing these risks requires coordinated civil–military responses, strategic communication, and resilient governance, linking political, informational, and societal dimensions of security. Albania's national defence planning reflects this approach by prioritizing cyber defence, information security, and institutional resilience alongside conventional military capabilities, in line with NATO doctrine. Sustainability and efficiency in defence investment represent another key area of convergence between Albania and NATO. The incorporation of lifecycle management and life-cycle costing principles supports operational readiness while aligning logistics and sustainment practices with NATO codification and standardization requirements. This approach enhances transparency, long-term planning discipline, and institutional accountability, contributing to greater trust between defence institutions, international partners, and society.

Finally, defence education and innovation underpin Albania's long-term contribution to the Alliance. Professional military education, academic research, and applied innovation are increasingly integrated to support capability development in emerging domains such as cyber defence, autonomous systems, and artificial intelligence. These investments strengthen human capital, promote interoperability, and reinforce national resilience, ensuring the continuity and adaptability of Albania's Armed Forces within NATO structures. Taken together, Albania–NATO cooperation extends beyond force modernization to encompass institutional reform, resilience building, and strategic adaptation.

Viewed through the PMESII–ASCOPE analytical lens, this cooperation represents a comprehensive state-level response to an increasingly complex and contested security environment, firmly embedding Albania within the Alliance's collective defence framework as shown below from the next table.

⁵⁹ **STANAGs (NATO Standardization Agreements)** are legally non-binding yet politically authoritative agreements among NATO member states that codify common technical, procedural, and operational standards, enabling interoperability, harmonization of military capabilities, and effective multinational cooperation within the Alliance.

Domain	Key Factors	Relevance to NATO & PAZH
Political (P)	NATO membership obligations, Alliance solidarity, decision-making credibility	Albania's political commitment to NATO is operationalized through PAZH, translating Alliance Capability Targets and burden-sharing commitments into national planning. Active participation in missions enhances political credibility and influence within NATO structures.
Military (M)	Force readiness, interoperability, capability development, air & missile defence	PAZH aligns force structure, training, and equipment with NATO doctrines and STANAGs. Emphasis on air surveillance, ISR, UAVs, and joint operations strengthens Albania's contribution to collective defence and deterrence.
Economic (E)	Defence spending, industrial base, lifecycle costing	Defence investment under PAZH supports NATO's emphasis on sustainable capability development. Defence industry reform, LCM/LCC, and public-private partnerships reduce dependency and enhance economic resilience.
Social (S)	Public trust, civil preparedness, human capital	PAZH integrates civil preparedness and resilience, aligning with NATO's 1.5% resilience pillar. Defence education and professional development strengthen societal support for national defence and Alliance commitments.
Information (I)	Strategic communication, cyber defence, disinformation resilience	Hybrid threats require coordinated information strategies. PAZH prioritizes cyber security, secure communications, and counter-disinformation, aligning with NATO's focus on information resilience and societal defence.
Infrastructure (I)	Ports, airfields, roads, energy networks, C2 systems	Albania's Adriatic ports, airbases, and transport corridors are critical ASCOPE structures. PAZH prioritizes their protection and modernization to support NATO mobility, logistics, and rapid reinforcement.
Physical Environment (P)	Geography, terrain, maritime access	Albania's terrain and Adriatic coastline provide strategic depth on NATO's southern flank. PAZH incorporates environmental and geographic factors into defence planning and regional security contributions.
Time (T)	Long-term planning cycles, readiness timelines	PAZH provides a phased, long-term framework aligned with NATO timelines (2030–2035), ensuring gradual capability development, investment predictability, and readiness progression.
Areas (A)	Strategic regions, borders, maritime zones	Border areas, maritime approaches, and regional corridors are integrated into NATO situational awareness and PAZH force deployment planning.
Structures (S)	Military bases, depots, C2 centers, critical infrastructure	PAZH emphasizes protection and modernization of dual-use structures that support both national defence and NATO operations, including air surveillance and logistics hubs.
Capabilities (C)	ISR, UAVs, air defence, cyber, logistics	Capability development under PAZH is synchronized with NATO force goals, enabling Albania to contribute niche but interoperable capabilities to multinational operations.
Organizations (O)	MoD, General Staff, AIM, NATO commands	Institutional coordination between national defence bodies and NATO structures ensures governance, interoperability, and accountability in defence planning and execution.

People (P)	Military personnel, civilians, industry workforce	Investment in defence education and innovation under PAZH addresses human capital gaps, supports generational renewal, and strengthens both military and industrial expertise.
Events (E)	NATO exercises, deployments, crises, hybrid incidents	Participation in NATO exercises and operations feeds lessons learned back into PAZH, strengthening readiness, interoperability, and crisis-response capabilities.

Table nr. 11: PMESII–ASCOPE Matrix: NATO Integration into the Albanian Defence Context

4.2.2 OSCE Engagement and Regional Security Cooperation

Albania actively engages with the OSCE to address non-military security challenges and promote regional stability. OSCE involvement provides frameworks for early-warning mechanisms, confidence-building measures, and collaborative initiatives in governance, border security, and human rights. Albania’s engagement with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) constitutes an integral component of its broader security architecture, complementing its commitments within NATO and its European Union accession process. Since becoming an OSCE participating State in 1991, Albania has embraced the organization’s comprehensive security concept, which integrates politico-military stability, economic and environmental security, and the human dimension. This approach reinforces NATO’s role in collective defence and deterrence, while supporting the EU’s focus on institutional reform, democratic governance, and societal resilience.

Focus Area	Description / Impact
Border Management	Training and technical support for secure and effective border operations
Rule of Law & Governance	Assistance in judicial reforms, anti-corruption initiatives, and institutional transparency
Counterterrorism & Organized Crime	Regional cooperation to prevent trafficking, cybercrime, and extremist activity
Human Rights & Civil Security	Monitoring programs to support democratic governance and protection of vulnerable populations
Early Warning & Regional Dialogue	Participation in regional OSCE forums for conflict prevention and security coordination

Table nr. 12 OSCE Programs and Initiatives

The OSCE Presence in Albania, established in 1997, has played a sustained role in strengthening democratic institutions, the rule of law, electoral integrity, and security-sector governance. These efforts directly complement NATO’s emphasis on military professionalism, interoperability, and defence capability development, as well as the EU’s normative frameworks and accession-related reforms. Together, NATO, the EU, and the OSCE form mutually reinforcing pillars of Albania’s national security and reform trajectory.

Beyond institutional reform, Albania’s cooperation with the OSCE has expanded into a range of **security-and-society projects** that address the human and societal dimensions of security. These initiatives include support for community policing, countering violent extremism, combating human trafficking, strengthening border management, enhancing cyber awareness, and promoting media freedom and strategic communication. Such projects contribute to social cohesion, public trust in institutions, and resilience against hybrid threats, thereby complementing NATO’s focus on hard security and the EU’s emphasis on societal stability and governance.

Albania's leadership as OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in 2020 further demonstrated its ability to bridge transatlantic and European security agendas. During this period, Albania promoted dialogue, conflict prevention, and cooperative security, while maintaining attention to unresolved conflicts and emerging non-traditional threats. This role highlighted the OSCE's value as an inclusive platform for confidence-building and crisis management, operating alongside NATO's deterrence posture and the EU's civilian and stabilization instruments. In the Western Balkans, the complementary roles of NATO, the EU, and the OSCE are particularly evident. NATO provides security guarantees and military integration; the EU advances political, economic, and legal convergence; and the OSCE contributes to conflict prevention, confidence-building, and the strengthening of societal resilience. Albania's active participation across all three frameworks enhances regional stability and reinforces a holistic security approach that integrates defence, governance, and societal engagement.

Taken together, Albania's engagement with NATO, the EU, and the OSCE demonstrates a coherent, multi-layered security strategy that extends beyond force modernization. By combining defence reform with security-and-society projects, Albania advances a comprehensive model of national resilience, aligning military readiness with democratic governance, social cohesion, and cooperative security in an increasingly complex regional environment.

4.2.3 EU Integration Process and Albania's alignment with EU CFSP and CSDP

Albania's EU accession process drives strategic reforms in governance, security, and socio-economic development. Progress in judicial reform, anti-corruption measures, and public administration modernization not only advances accession objectives but also strengthens resilience against organized crime, cyber threats, and migration-related risks. Over recent years, Albania has demonstrated a high degree of consistency in aligning its foreign, security, and defence policies with those of the European Union. This alignment is most clearly reflected in Albania's full adherence to the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), including the systematic alignment with EU declarations, political positions, and restrictive measures. *In particular, Albania's response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has underlined its strategic orientation toward the European Union and its willingness to position itself firmly within the EU confirm that Albania continued to align fully with all CFSP positions throughout the reporting period, highlighting a sustained commitment rather than a situational or symbolic one.*⁶⁰ All measures taken by EU and Albania in fact are tools designed to strengthen the operational effectiveness, mobility, and protection of the Albanian Armed Forces, reflecting growing confidence in Albania as a security partner and a concrete cooperation in defence capacity-building.

Regarding support to Ukraine, the EU and Albania share the goal of providing assistance for as long as necessary to ensure Ukraine can defend its political independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. To achieve this, the EU and Albania will examine options to streamline joint efforts, including the potential participation of Albania in EU initiatives aimed at enhancing Ukraine's defence capacities, in line with established procedures and the EU's institutional framework.

Domain	Achievements / Milestones
Judicial Reform	EU-aligned anti-corruption and judicial modernization programs
Border Security	Strengthened border control infrastructure; joint patrols with Italy
Migration Management	Albania-Italy agreements for transit monitoring and legal migration pathways
Law Enforcement Cooperation	Joint operations targeting organized crime, trafficking, and cybercrime
Regional Crisis Response	Cross-border emergency protocols and coordination with EU partners

Table nr. 13 EU Integration & Bilateral Partnership Highlights

⁶⁰ Commission Staff Working Document. Albania 2024 Report. Pp.93-95. Link at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52024SC0690>

The deepening of Albania–EU relations in the security domain was further formalised with the signing of the Security and Defence Partnership⁶¹ in November 2024. This agreement established a structured political framework for enhanced cooperation across a broad range of areas, including defence policy, crisis management, cybersecurity, and responses to hybrid threats. The partnership itself represents a qualitative step forward, moving beyond the traditional accession-driven dialogue and placing Albania within a more strategic and operational relationship with the European Union. This development was reinforced in April 2025 with the launch of the first EU–Albania Security and Defence Dialogue in Tirana. The dialogue provides a regular platform for exchange on regional and global security challenges, defence cooperation priorities, and emerging threats. Its establishment reflects both Albania’s growing integration into EU security structures and the EU’s recognition of Albania as a credible contributor to shared security objectives.

To an important degree, it is also Albania’s commitment to European and regional security is also evident through its participation in EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations. Notably, Albania contributes to EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina, demonstrating its readiness to engage in collective efforts aimed at maintaining peace and stability in the Western Balkans. These contributions enhance Albania’s operational experience and foster interoperability with EU and partner forces.

Beyond conventional defence cooperation, Albania has increasingly aligned itself with EU efforts to address non-traditional and hybrid security threats. Cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and foreign interference have become central concerns within the European security landscape, and Albania’s policy responses mirror these evolving priorities. The adoption of the National Cybersecurity Strategy 2025–2030 represents an important step toward strengthening national resilience in the digital domain. Albania’s accession to the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE) further reinforces this trajectory, enabling closer cooperation with EU and partner countries on countering hybrid challenges. In parallel, Albania has aligned with EU statements condemning hybrid campaigns and adopted a National Strategy against Foreign Interference and Disinformation, signalling a clear understanding that security today extends beyond military capabilities to include the protection of democratic institutions, information integrity, and societal trust. Taken together, Albania’s expanding engagement with the European Union in security and defence reflects a deeper strategic alignment grounded in shared values, mutual trust, and a common interest in long-term stability in the Western Balkans.

Albania’s bilateral partnerships play a critical role in reinforcing both its defence and security capacities, particularly in areas where operational challenges intersect with broader regional stability. The partnership with Italy exemplifies this dynamic: through the Albania-Italy Bilateral Migration Agreement, the two countries coordinate responses to irregular migration, human trafficking, and cross-border security threats. This framework not only enhances operational effectiveness—through improved information sharing and rapid deployment capabilities—but also positions Albania as a key regional hub for migration management and law enforcement cooperation.

Beyond Italy, Albania leverages a network of bilateral defence partnerships to strengthen its innovation and operational capacity across multiple domains:

- **France:** Focused on interoperability, joint air and land exercises, tactical expertise, and operational planning, reinforcing Albania’s capacity to operate seamlessly within NATO frameworks.
- **Croatia:** Provides expertise in maritime security, joint training, and civil-military coordination, supporting Albania’s efforts to secure its Adriatic littoral and regional maritime interests.
- **Turkey:** Offers access to advanced technologies, unmanned systems, air defence, and specialized military training, enhancing Albania’s technological and tactical capabilities.
- **Israel:** Contributes expertise in cybersecurity, intelligence, and UAV innovation, bolstering Albania’s capacity to address hybrid and asymmetric threats.
- **Saudi Arabia:** Facilitates strategic dialogue, counterterrorism training, and logistics cooperation, reflecting a broader engagement with innovation-driven security approaches.

61 Albania: New security and defence partnership with the EU to strengthen capabilities and cooperation. 19.11.2024. EEAS Press. Link at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/albania-new-security-and-defence-partnership-eu-strengthen-capabilities-and-cooperation_en

- **Italy:** Functions as a cornerstone partner, providing integrated support across defence, migration management, civil-military cooperation (CIMIC), and intelligence operations, underscoring Albania's strategic relevance in regional security networks.

Collectively, these partnerships not only enhance Albania's operational readiness and tactical competence but also reinforce its defence diplomacy. By aligning national capabilities with the requirements of multinational security initiatives, Albania demonstrates credibility, reliability, and a proactive approach to collective security. Strategically, this network enables Albania to translate bilateral engagements into broader regional influence, ensuring that its contributions to NATO, EU, and other multilateral operations are both practical and policy-relevant.

Part V

CONCLUSIONS AND STRATEGIC OUTLOOK 2035

5.1 Opportunities for Defence Diplomacy and Innovation

Albania's identified strategic opportunities and challenges carry significant policy implications for its defence planning and governance. Its strategic location as a NATO anchor on the Adriatic entails a responsibility to invest consistently in host nation support, military mobility, and infrastructure that enable Allied presence and rapid deployment. This geographic advantage should be leveraged through long-term commitments to interoperability, air and maritime domain awareness, and regional contingency planning.

The country's emerging defence-industrial potential—in maintenance, unmanned systems, and simulation—calls for targeted policies that prioritize niche capabilities over full-spectrum production. Regulatory reform, export controls, and public–private partnerships can integrate national industry into NATO and EU supply chains, maximizing economic and security returns while avoiding unsustainable investments. Similarly, access to Allied innovation ecosystems and European Peace Facility support requires strengthened institutional capacity to manage multinational projects. Professionalization of procurement agencies, alignment with NATO and EU standards, and robust project management are essential for transparency, efficiency, and strategic coherence. Human capital development is equally critical. Defence education and scholarship programs should be closely linked to national security policy, creating career pathways that encourage long-term service, technical specialization, and retention of skilled personnel within the Armed Forces and the wider defence sector. This need is intensified by migration pressures, highlighting that defence reform depends on broader socio-economic policies supporting career stability, professional development, and quality of life for military and civilian personnel.

Fiscal sustainability and disciplined procurement underscore the importance of realistic capability planning and multi-year budgeting frameworks. Defence policy must balance ambition with affordability, prioritizing capabilities that deliver the highest interoperability and deterrence value while maintaining public trust through transparent spending. Inter-agency coordination challenges further emphasize the need for clear mandates, shared information systems, and regular joint planning and exercises among defence, interior, civil protection, and cyber authorities. Without such coordination, Albania's capacity to respond to hybrid and complex crises remains constrained. Balancing defence investment with social and economic priorities also requires sustained political consensus and strategic communication. Defence must be framed not as a competing priority but as an enabler of national resilience, economic stability, and international credibility, ensuring public support for long-term security investments.

Albania's defence and security transformation reflects a decisive evolution from post-transition consolidation toward proactive contribution within the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. Over the past decade, alignment among the National Security Strategy, Military Strategy, and Long-Term Development Plan (PAZH 2024–2033) has produced a coherent framework linking national resilience with Alliance commitments. This convergence has enhanced strategic clarity, institutional discipline, and credibility as a NATO member while providing a realistic roadmap for capability development and international engagement. Recent developments have shown security in the twenty-first century extends beyond traditional territorial defence. In this context, Albania faces a complex matrix of threats, including hybrid and cyber risks, regional geopolitical volatility, environmental emergencies, energy insecurity, organized crime, and pressures on democratic institutions. Its defence architecture addresses these challenges through a whole-of-government approach, combining military modernization with civil preparedness, inter-agency coordination, and international cooperation. This integrated perspective aligns closely with NATO and EU concepts of resilience and comprehensive security.

Defence industry reform⁶² complements these operational advancements. Framed as a pillar of national security and economic resilience, Albania's defence-industrial agenda prioritizes modernization of legacy infrastructure, regulatory reform, and public–private partnerships. Focused on export-oriented production, technology transfer, and dual-use capabilities, these reforms aim to reduce external dependency while integrating Albania into NATO and EU defence ecosystems. Though small in scale, targeted integration into Allied supply chains—particularly in maintenance, logistics, simulation technologies, and unmanned systems—offers a sustainable pathway for long-term development.

Parallel efforts have strengthened Albania's Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) capabilities, enabling effective coordination with civilian authorities, international organizations, and local communities in disaster response, humanitarian assistance, and post-crisis recovery. Given Albania's vulnerability to floods, earthquakes, wildfires, and climate-related risks, CIMIC has become a core element of national resilience and a demonstration of Albania's contribution to stabilization operations prioritizing human security alongside military effectiveness. Cyber defence, too, has emerged as another critical domain. The 2022 cyberattacks against government infrastructure exposed vulnerabilities common to many small and medium-sized NATO members. Albania's response—prioritizing cyber defence, institutional coordination, and integration with NATO cyber structures—signals recognition that digital deterrence depends on both technological capability and governance resilience. The establishment of a national cyber defence centre and plans for an integrated Cyber Defence Command reflect a commitment to embedding cyber resilience across military and civilian sectors.

Albania's defence modernization is reinforced by bilateral and multilateral partnerships. Cooperation with the United States provides political assurance, advanced training, and access to high-end capabilities. European partners—including Italy, France, Turkey, Greece, Croatia, and the United Kingdom—enhance interoperability and facilitate knowledge transfer across all domains. Engagements with Israel and Saudi Arabia introduce innovation-driven security solutions and counter-hybrid expertise. Collectively, these relationships amplify defence diplomacy, strengthen operational readiness, and enhance Albania's international credibility.

Regionally, Albania positions itself as a stabilizing actor in the Western Balkans. Active participation in the Adriatic Charter (A-5), SEEBRIG, SEDM, DECI, and ADRION initiatives fosters interoperability and trust among regional partners. Contributions to KFOR, NATO Mission Iraq, EUFOR Althea, and the Multinational Force and Observers in Sinai demonstrate professionalism, reliability, and political commitment, reinforcing Albania's role in regional stability, including support for Kosovo's security development.

62 In 2024, Albania adopted two significant laws to reform its defence industry. **Law No. 87/2024**, “On the Regulation of the Production, Trade, Research, and Development of Weapons, Ammunition, Equipment, and Military Technologies,” established the **Defence Industry Agency**, responsible for licensing, supervising, and regulating all defence industry activities, including production, trade, research, demilitarization, and technological development, while ensuring compliance with safety, environmental, and ethical standards (Ministry of Defence, *Defence Industry Agency*, 2024, [mod.gov.al](#)). **Law No. 88/2024** created a **state-owned company (KAYO sh.a.)** tasked with centrally managing production, demilitarization, and trade of military equipment, aiming to revitalize Albania's defence industrial capacity and integrate it into NATO and EU supply chains (Ministry of Defence, *Official Gazette*, 2024; Euronews Albania, 2024, [euronews.al](#)). The legal framework provides incentives for public-private and international partnerships and defines mechanisms for monitoring, tracking, and controlling military products, reflecting Albania's broader strategic effort to modernize its defence sector (Vox News Albania, 2024, [voxnews.al](#); Balkanweb, 2024, [balkanweb.com](#)).

Strategic Dimension	Key Factors
Strategic Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic geography as a NATO anchor on the Adriatic • Emerging defence-industrial potential (maintenance, UAVs, simulation) • Access to Allied innovation ecosystems and European Peace Facility support • Youth engagement through defence education and scholarship programs
Strategic Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiscal sustainability and long-term procurement discipline • Human capital retention amid migration pressures • Inter-agency coordination and bureaucratic inertia • Balancing defence investment with social and economic priorities

Table nr.14 Strategic Opportunities and Challenges

Looking toward 2035, Albania’s strategic ambition depends on continuity in policy, financing, and institutional reform. Long-term success will require fiscal discipline, transparent procurement, and sustained political consensus across electoral cycles. Human capital remains critical: professionalization of the Armed Forces must be matched by retention strategies addressing migration pressures and incentivizing long-term service. Overcoming bureaucratic inertia and strengthening inter-agency coordination, particularly in crisis management and hybrid threat response, are equally essential for achieving Albania’s security objectives.

Despite these challenges, Albania is well positioned to capitalize on significant strategic opportunities. Its geographic location at the intersection of Adriatic maritime routes and Balkan land corridors gives it disproportionate relevance within NATO’s southern flank. Access to Allied innovation ecosystems, European Peace Facility instruments, and multinational training frameworks provides pathways for capability development beyond national resource limitations. Engagement of youth through defence education, scholarship programs, and reserve-force models offers an avenue to link national security with societal resilience and inclusion. In strategic terms, Albania’s future role extends beyond the defence of its territory. By acting as a bridge between NATO and EU security frameworks, between the Adriatic and the Western Balkans, and between military capability and civil resilience, Albania can shape its strategic neighbourhood in a stabilizing manner. Its experience demonstrates how small states, through strategic clarity, alliance integration, and institutional coherence, can become net contributors to collective security.

5.2 Strategic Lessons and Future Priorities – continuity, human capital, resilience, interoperability.

Albania’s defence architecture demonstrates that strategic coherence, aligning national security policy, military doctrine, and long-term capability planning, is essential for building credible and sustainable defence forces. The integration of strategic direction, operational doctrine, and multi-year force development provides a model that should be preserved and refined, ensuring continuity across political cycles and maintaining alignment with NATO’s evolving requirements. Future success will depend on sustained political consensus, disciplined implementation, and the ability to adapt planning instruments to emerging security risks.

Albania’s geographic position as a NATO anchor on the Adriatic underlines the strategic importance of investing in host nation support, military mobility, and enabling infrastructure. This advantage must be translated into long-term commitments to interoperability, air and maritime domain awareness, and regional contingency planning, strengthening Albania’s role as a facilitator of Allied presence and rapid deployment. Defence planning should continue to prioritise capabilities that enhance collective defence and regional stability rather than isolated national ambitions.

Strategic Factor	Policy Implications	Recommended Policy Response
Strategic geography as a NATO anchor on the Adriatic	Albania's location creates obligations as well as advantages, requiring sustained readiness to support Allied presence, mobility, and deterrence on NATO's southern flank.	Invest in Host Nation Support (HNS), military mobility infrastructure, air and maritime domain awareness, and contingency planning aligned with NATO force posture.
Emerging defence-industrial potential (maintenance, UAVs, simulation)	Defence industry policy must be selective and capability-driven to avoid inefficiencies and overextension.	Focus on niche capabilities, enable public-private partnerships, align regulatory frameworks with NATO/EU standards, and integrate into Allied supply chains.
Access to Allied innovation ecosystems and European Peace Facility support	External funding and innovation opportunities require strong institutional absorption capacity and governance.	Professionalize procurement and project management, strengthen transparency mechanisms, and enhance coordination with NATO and EU defence institutions.
Youth engagement through defence education and scholarship programs	Long-term force sustainability depends on linking defence needs with national human capital development.	Develop defence-related education tracks, scholarships, and reserve-force pathways in coordination with education and labour institutions.
Fiscal sustainability and long-term procurement discipline	Capability ambitions must remain aligned with economic realities to preserve credibility and public trust.	Implement multi-year defence budgeting, prioritize high-impact interoperable capabilities, and ensure transparent procurement oversight.
Human capital retention amid migration pressures	Defence modernization risks being undermined by loss of skilled personnel.	Introduce retention incentives, career development pathways, and quality-of-life measures for military and civilian defence staff.
Inter-agency coordination and bureaucratic inertia	Fragmented governance weakens responses to hybrid, cyber, and complex crises.	Strengthen whole-of-government coordination mechanisms, clarify mandates, and institutionalize joint planning and exercises.
Balancing defence investment with social and economic priorities	Defence policy requires societal legitimacy and sustained political consensus.	Integrate defence planning into national resilience narratives and strategic communication to demonstrate societal and economic value.

Table nr. 15 Strategic implications

The development of defence-industrial potential offers opportunities if approached selectively and realistically. Future policy should focus on niche capabilities—such as maintenance, unmanned systems, simulation, and sustainment—supported by regulatory reform, export control frameworks, and public-private partnerships. Integrating national industry into NATO and EU supply chains will maximise both security and economic returns while avoiding the risks associated with unsustainable full-spectrum production models. Access to Allied innovation ecosystems and European funding instruments, including the European Peace Facility, highlights the need to strengthen institutional capacity for managing multinational projects. This requires further professionalisation of procurement and project-management structures, alignment with NATO and EU standards, and robust governance mechanisms to ensure transparency, efficiency, and strategic coherence in defence investment. In this sense, human capital will remain a decisive factor in Albania's defence

transformation. Future reforms should deepen links between defence policy, education, and labour markets by expanding defence education, scholarship programmes, and technical career pathways. Retention strategies must address migration pressures by improving career predictability, professional development, and quality of life for military and civilian personnel, embedding defence workforce planning within broader national socio-economic policies.

Finally, effective defence reform depends on strong inter-agency coordination and sustained public support. Clear mandates, shared information systems, and regular joint planning among defence, interior, civil protection, and cyber authorities are essential for responding to hybrid and complex crises. Defence policy should be communicated as an enabler of national resilience, economic stability, and international credibility, ensuring that long-term security investments are understood as complementary to—rather than competing with—social and economic priorities.

In conclusion, Albania's defence transformation represents a credible and forward-looking model of Euro-Atlantic integration. The combination of modernization, interoperability, defence diplomacy, and resilience positions Albania to address the complex security challenges of the coming decade. If sustained with political will, institutional discipline, and strategic patience, Albania has the potential by 2035 to stand not only as a reliable NATO ally, but as a reference point for defence reform and regional stability in South-Eastern

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