

SWOT STRATEGIC ANALYSIS OF ROMANIA – GEOPOLITICAL CONSEQUENCES FOR NATIONAL, REGIONAL, AND NATO SECURITY

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ABSTRACT: *This study presents a SWOT strategic analysis of Romania, examining its geopolitical position and the implications for national, regional, and NATO security. Romania's strategic strengths include its NATO membership, geographic location at the crossroads of Central and Eastern Europe, and growing military capabilities. Weaknesses involve infrastructure limitations, socio-economic disparities, and political vulnerabilities. Opportunities emerge from deepening regional cooperation, EU integration, and defense modernization, while threats stem from regional instability, hybrid warfare, and Russian influence in the Black Sea area. The analysis highlights how Romania's internal and external dynamics shape its security posture, emphasizing the critical interplay between national resilience, regional stability, and NATO's strategic objectives in the evolving European security environment.*

Keywords: SWOT analysis, Geopolitical, national security, regional security, NATO security

1. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly complex global environment, the security landscape of Eastern Europe has gained heightened strategic significance. Romania, situated at the crossroads of Central and Southeastern Europe, occupies a critical geopolitical position that directly influences national, regional, and transatlantic security dynamics. Understanding the interplay between Romania's internal capabilities and external threats is essential for formulating effective defense and foreign policy strategies. A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis provides a structured framework for evaluating Romania's strategic posture. By systematically assessing internal strengths and vulnerabilities alongside external opportunities and risks, this approach illuminates the factors shaping Romania's security environment. Such an analysis is particularly relevant given the country's role as a NATO member state and its proximity to potential regional flashpoints, where geopolitical shifts can have cascading effects on alliance cohesion, regional stability, and national defense planning. This study aims to examine Romania's strategic landscape through a SWOT lens, highlighting the implications of internal capabilities and external pressures on national security, regional stability, and NATO operational readiness. By identifying key strategic factors, the analysis contributes to a nuanced understanding of Romania's role within the broader European security architecture and offers insights for policymakers, military planners, and international partners navigating the evolving geopolitical environment. [1,2]

2. THE IMPORTANCE AND NECESSITY OF STRATEGIC SWOT ANALYSIS

2.1. Essential Information's

In the contemporary security environment, characterized by hybrid threats, geopolitical instability, and rapid technological change, national security planning requires structured and forward-looking analytical tools. For Romania – situated at NATO's eastern flank and

bordering the Black Sea region – security analysis must integrate both national interests and alliance commitments. A Strategic SWOT analysis provides a systematic framework to evaluate Romania’s security posture within its regional environment and NATO membership, supporting informed decision-making and strategic resilience. [3,4]

2.2. Conceptual Framework: SWOT Analysis in Security Studies

Originally developed for organizational strategy, SWOT analysis has been adapted to national security and defense planning as a qualitative strategic assessment tool.

In security studies, SWOT analysis:

- Integrates internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) with external dynamics (opportunities and threats);
- Facilitates risk assessment and prioritization;
- Supports policy coherence between national, regional, and alliance-level strategies.

For NATO member states, SWOT analysis helps align national defense planning with collective defense principles under Article 5, deterrence strategies, and capability development goals. [1,3,4]

2.3. Romania’s Strategic Security Context

A. Regional Environment:

Romania’s security environment is shaped by:

- Proximity to the Black Sea, a contested geopolitical space;
- Instability in the Eastern Neighborhood, including the Russian-Ukrainian conflict;
- Energy security vulnerabilities and critical infrastructure exposure;
- Hybrid threats such as cyber operations, disinformation, and economic coercion. [2,3,4]

B. NATO and Euro-Atlantic Integration:

As a NATO member since 2004 and an EU member since 2007, Romania’s security is deeply embedded in:

- NATO’s deterrence and defense posture;
- Enhanced Forward Presence and regional defense plans;
- EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) initiatives. [3,4]

2.4. Importance of SWOT Analysis for Romania’s Security Strategy

Strategic SWOT analysis is essential because it:

- Enhances situational awareness and threat anticipation;
- Supports evidence-based defense planning;
- Identifies capability gaps relevant to NATO’s collective defense;
- Improves civil–military coordination and whole-of-government approaches;
- Strengthens national resilience against hybrid and non-military threats. [1,2,3,4]

By integrating SWOT findings into national security strategies, Romania can better prioritize investments, reforms, and alliance contributions.

2.5. Necessity in the NATO context

Within NATO, SWOT analysis:

- Helps Romania align national capabilities with NATO Defense Planning Process (NDPP);

- Enhances burden-sharing and credibility within the Alliance;
- Contributes to collective deterrence by addressing regional vulnerabilities;
- Supports interoperability and operational readiness;

Given NATO's emphasis on 360-degree security, Romania's strategic SWOT assessment also contributes to broader alliance stability in Southeastern Europe and the Black Sea region. [3,4]

2.6. Conclusion

The strategic SWOT analysis of Romania's security is both important and necessary in a volatile regional and alliance context. It provides a structured analytical framework that links national defense priorities with NATO's collective security objectives. By systematically evaluating strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, Romania can enhance strategic foresight, resilience, and its role as a key security provider on NATO's eastern flank.

3. SWOT STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

3.1. Strength

- **NATO membership:** Romania has been a member of NATO since March 29, 2004, and benefits from the protection of Article 5 of the NATO Treaty ("an attack against one member is considered an attack against all");
- **EU membership:** Romania has been a member of the European Union (EU) since January 1, 2007;
- **Schengen Area membership:** On March 31, 2024, Romania became a member of the Schengen Area with air and maritime borders only, and on January 1, 2025, Romania fully acceded (including land borders) to the Schengen Area;
- **Strategic partnership with the United States of America:** Romania hosts elements of the NATO missile defense shield at Deveselu, an important component of European defense, as well as the presence of U.S. troops on Romanian territory, including at the Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base;
- **Important geostrategic position:** Located on the eastern border of NATO and the EU, Romania is a strategic bastion against threats from the east and controls part of the Black Sea, giving it an essential role in regional security;
- **Increase in defense capabilities:** Modernization of the armed forces and the acquisition of modern equipment (F-16 aircraft, Patriot systems, Piranha V armored vehicles, etc.), as well as an increase in the defense budget (over 2.5% of GDP starting in 2025);
- **Cybersecurity:** Romania is a regional hub in the field of cybersecurity, hosting the EU's European Cybersecurity Competence Centre;
- **Intelligence and counterterrorism:** Intelligence services (SRI, SIE, DGIA) are well integrated into Western security networks;
- **Regional stability and pro-Western commitment:** Romania maintains a clear orientation toward NATO and the EU, being a reliable ally in the region;
- **Declaration of the Black Sea as an area of strategic interest by NATO (Madrid Summit 2022):** At the NATO Summit in Madrid, held on June 28–30, 2022, the Black Sea was officially recognized as an area of strategic interest for the Alliance, a decision

driven by the region's strategic importance in the context of European security and the war launched by Russia in Ukraine;

- **Access to the Black Sea (warm sea) through the Port of Constanța:** Romania benefits from a key strategic position in the Black Sea region, having access to a “warm” sea navigable throughout the year;
- **Navigability of the Danube and the connection between the North Sea, the Caspian Sea, and the Black Sea:**
 - **Vital commercial route:** The Danube is one of the most important navigable routes in Europe, connecting 10 countries—Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine;
 - **Strategic access to the North Sea via the Rhine–Main–Danube Canal:** The Main–Danube Canal (German: *Main-Donau-Kanal*; also known as the Rhine–Main–Danube Canal or the European Canal), 171 km long, has linked the Main River to the Danube from Bamberg via Nuremberg to Kelheim since 1992. The canal is part of the maritime route between Rotterdam and Constanța, which represents the shortest navigable connection between the North Sea and the Black Sea, via the Rhine, Main, Main–Danube Canal, Danube, and the Danube–Black Sea Canal;
 - **Connectivity between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea via the Volga–Don Canal:** This canal is part of the Unified Deep Water System of European Russia. Together with the lower Volga and the lower Don, the Volga–Don Canal provides the most direct navigable connection from the Caspian Sea to the Sea of Azov and further to the Black Sea, and thus to the world's oceans;
- **Danube–Black Sea Canal:** The Danube–Black Sea Canal connects the Danube River (one of the largest and most important rivers in Europe) to the Black Sea, facilitating the transport of goods between the interior of Europe and the Black Sea coastal areas, as well as access to the Middle East and Asia;
- **Danube Delta:** The Danube Delta is located at the meeting point of three states—Romania, Ukraine, and Moldova—and controls the main entry of the Danube River into the Black Sea through its three branches: Chilia, Sulina, and Sfântu Gheorghe;
- **Hydrocarbon resources in the Black Sea:** The hydrocarbon resources at Neptun Deep, an offshore block located in the Black Sea, are of significant geopolitical importance for Romania, the Black Sea region, and Europe as a whole;
- **Gold natural resources at Roșia Montană:** Roșia Montană is one of the largest gold reserves in Europe and one of the oldest mining sites in the world, with estimated resources of approximately 314 tons of gold;
- **Coal natural resources (hard coal, lignite, and anthracite):** Romania's mining regions, especially the Jiu Valley (for hard coal) and Oltenia (for lignite), have traditionally been important economic centers, providing jobs and contributing significantly to economic development. Today, these areas are in transition, facing major economic and social challenges, particularly following the closure of some mines or the decline in coal production;
- **Interconnection of the National Power System with ENTSO-E (the European electricity transmission system):** Romania's interconnection with ENTSO-E (European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity) is of significant geopolitical

importance, given Romania's central role in energy security and the integration of EU energy markets;

- **Interconnection of the National Natural Gas System with ENTSO-G (the European gas transmission system):** Romania's interconnection with the European gas network ENTSO-G (European Network of Transmission System Operators for Gas) plays an important geopolitical, economic, and energy role for the country;
- **National oil system infrastructure:** Romania has significant refining infrastructure, with major refineries capable of processing and exporting petroleum products;
- **Existence of nuclear energy:** With two nuclear reactors in operation at the Cernavodă Nuclear Power Plant, Romania produces a substantial share of its electricity from nuclear sources, thus reducing dependence on energy imports, especially fossil fuels such as natural gas or oil;
- **Strategic human resource (highly skilled workforce):** Romania's highly skilled strategic human resources represent a major geopolitical advantage, contributing to economic development, attracting investment, strengthening political influence, and promoting innovation. [1-5]

3.2. Weaknesses

- **Proximity to Russia and regional instability:** Romania is located near an aggressive Russia, which exerts its influence through the war in Ukraine and through its military presence in Transnistria;
- **Partial energy dependence and deficient infrastructure:** Although Romania has natural gas resources, the extraction and transport infrastructure is not sufficiently developed, energy interconnections with the EU are inadequate, and major projects such as the Cernavodă nuclear reactors or the exploitation of gas in the Black Sea have been delayed;
- **Low influence in the region and within the EU:** Romania has difficulty asserting a strong voice in European politics and is often marginalized in strategic decisions; compared to Poland or Hungary, Bucharest has weaker influence in shaping regional policies;
- **Weak infrastructure and poor logistics:** Romania has an underdeveloped road and railway system, which reduces its economic attractiveness and its capacity to become a regional hub; the Port of Constanța could be a major strategic point, but it is not sufficiently well connected to the rest of Europe;
- **The Moldova Republic issue and relations with Transnistria:** Romania supports the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the EU, but Russian influence remains strong there, and the presence of Russian troops in Transnistria represents a threat to regional security;
- **Negative demographics and massive emigration:** Population decline and labor force emigration reduce Romania's ability to develop its economy and maintain a strong army;
- **Brain drain:** The emigration of highly qualified individuals from Romania is a phenomenon that significantly affects the economy and society;
- **Internal problems: political instability and corruption:** Political instability in Romania is a recurring problem, caused by factors such as conflicts between parties, lack of

cohesion within the government, frequent changes of prime ministers, and internal disputes in Parliament. [1-5]

3.3. Opportunities

- **European funds and foreign investment:** Romania can benefit from significant EU funds for militarization, infrastructure, digitalization, and the green transition;
- **Infrastructure and connectivity:** Development of the highway and railway network (e.g., the Pan-European Corridor IV) and the expansion of the Port of Constanța as a logistics hub for maritime transport;
- **IT&C sector and innovation:** Romania can become a regional IT hub, with technology centers in Cluj, Bucharest, and Iași;
- **Energy and natural resources:** The exploitation of resources in the Black Sea can reduce energy dependence on Russia;
- **Agriculture and the food industry:** Fertile soil and resources to become a major exporter of agri-food products;
- **Three Seas Initiative:** The initiative aims to contribute to the economic development of Central and Eastern Europe through infrastructure connectivity in three main areas: Transport (e.g., Via Carpatia); Energy; Digital. [1-5]

3.4. Threats

- **The war in Ukraine:** The proximity of the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine increases the risk of security incidents at Romania's borders, either through accidental attacks or regional destabilization;
- **Russia as a destabilizing actor:** Moscow uses hybrid tactics (disinformation, cyberattacks, propaganda) to influence states in the region, including Romania;
- **The Republic of Moldova and Transnistria:** Instability in Moldova and the presence of Russian troops in Transnistria represent a strategic vulnerability for Romania;
- **Cyberattacks:** Romanian institutions are frequently targeted by cyberattacks, many attributed to hacker groups affiliated with Russia;
- **Disinformation and propaganda:** Russia and other hostile states conduct disinformation campaigns to influence Romanian public opinion and to weaken trust in state institutions and in NATO/EU;
- **Dependence on energy resources:** Although Romania has its own gas resources, energy security remains a sensitive issue, especially in the context of tensions in the Black Sea;
- **External economic influence:** Strategic Chinese investments and the control of critical infrastructure by foreign actors may create economic vulnerabilities;
- **Uncontrolled migratory flows:** Romania lies on the Balkan route of illegal migration, which may generate security risks;
- **International terrorism:** Although not a direct target, Romania may be indirectly affected through its strategic partnerships;
- **Militarization of the region:** Russia is strengthening its military presence in the Black Sea, putting pressure on NATO and the littoral states, including Romania;
- **Sabotage and hostile actions:** Possible acts of sabotage against critical maritime infrastructure or gas pipelines in the Black Sea. [1-5]

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF GEOPOLITICS IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF NATIONAL, REGIONAL, AND NATO SECURITY

4.1. Introduction

Geopolitics – the study of how geography, power, and political interests interact – remains a foundational element in the design of security architectures at national, regional, and alliance levels. Despite globalization and technological change, physical space, strategic locations, and regional power balances continue to shape threat perceptions, military planning, and institutional cooperation.

For NATO in particular, geopolitics underpins collective defense, deterrence strategies, and crisis management across an increasingly contested Euro-Atlantic area. [6]

4.2. Geopolitics and National Security Architecture

At the national level, geopolitics influences security architecture through:

- **Geographic constraints and advantages** – States design defense policies based on borders, terrain, access to seas, airspace, and proximity to rivals or allies. For example, maritime states prioritize naval power and sea lines of communication, while landlocked states focus on territorial defense and alliances;
- **Threat perception and strategic culture** – Historical conflicts, neighboring powers, and regional instability shape how states perceive risk. These perceptions inform force posture, military doctrine, intelligence priorities, and defense spending;
- **Strategic depth and resilience** – Geopolitical positioning affects access to energy routes, supply chains, and critical infrastructure. National security planning increasingly integrates cyber, space, and economic dimensions, but these remain geographically anchored (e.g., undersea cables, satellite ground stations).

In sum, geopolitics translates geography into strategy, determining how states protect sovereignty and national interests. [6]

4.3. Geopolitics in Regional Security Architectures

At the regional level, geopolitics shapes patterns of cooperation and competition:

- **Regional power balances** – Security architectures often emerge in response to dominant or revisionist powers. Regional alliances, confidence-building measures, and arms control regimes aim to stabilize these balances;
- **Security complexes** – Regions tend to form “security complexes” where the security of one state is closely linked to others. Instability in one area (e.g., the Black Sea, the Middle East) can rapidly spill over, driving regional coordination;
- **Institutional differentiation** – Different regions develop distinct security institutions based on geopolitical realities. Europe emphasizes multilateralism and collective defense, while other regions may rely more on bilateral arrangements or ad hoc coalitions.

Geopolitics explains why regional security architectures vary in effectiveness, cohesion, and institutional depth. [6]

4.4. Geopolitics and NATO’s Security Architecture

NATO represents the most advanced example of a geopolitically driven collective security system.

A. Collective Defense and Geography:

- NATO's core mission – collective defense under Article 5 – is explicitly territorial;
- The alliance's force posture, forward presence, and command structure are designed around strategic regions such as the Baltic Sea, Eastern Europe, the Arctic, and the Mediterranean.

B. Deterrence and Strategic Signaling:

- Geopolitics shapes NATO's deterrence posture vis-à-vis state competitors;
- Military exercises, troop deployments, and infrastructure investments are calibrated to reassure allies and deter adversaries without escalating conflict.

C. Enlargement and Strategic Space:

- NATO enlargement reflects geopolitical calculations about stability, influence, and strategic depth;
- Each enlargement round reshapes NATO's borders, threat environment, and operational requirements.

D. New domains, old geography:

- While NATO now addresses cyber, space, and hybrid threats, these domains remain geopolitically embedded;
- Critical infrastructure, communication nodes, and logistics hubs are geographically fixed, reinforcing the relevance of territorial defense. [6]

4.5. Interdependence of National, Regional, and NATO Security

Geopolitics links all three levels of security architecture:

- ***National strategies feed into NATO planning***, as member states contribute forces and capabilities shaped by their own geographic realities;
- ***Regional instability tests alliance cohesion***, requiring NATO to adapt rapidly to shifting geopolitical conditions;
- ***NATO provides strategic coherence***, integrating diverse national and regional interests into a unified deterrence and defense framework.

This interdependence makes geopolitics both a constraint and a coordinating mechanism within the alliance. [6]

4.6. Conclusion

Geopolitics remains central to the architecture of national, regional, and NATO security. While technological innovation and non-traditional threats have expanded the security agenda, they have not diminished the importance of geography, power distribution, and strategic space. For NATO and its member states, effective security architecture depends on continuously adapting geopolitical analysis to evolving threats, ensuring deterrence credibility, alliance cohesion, and strategic resilience in an increasingly complex international environment.

5. DEVELOPMENT AT NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY OF ROMANIA

5.1. Purpose

The National Security Strategy (NSS) is Romania's highest-level strategic document for guiding national defense and security policies. It defines threats, priorities, objectives, and Romania's approach to ensuring national security. [6,7]

5.2. Legal and Institutional Framework

A. Legal Basis: Romanian Constitution, Law on National Defense, Law on the Romanian Intelligence Service, Law on Crisis Management.

B. Institutions Involved:

- Supreme Council of National Defense (CSAT): Main body approving and coordinating security strategy;
- Ministry of National Defense: Develops defense policies and military planning;
- Intelligence Services: Provide threat assessments;
- Other Ministries: Foreign Affairs, Interior, Justice, Energy, etc., contribute to sectoral security measures. [6,7]

5.3. Development Process

Threat Assessment:

- Conducted by intelligence agencies and military analysis centers;
- Includes internal and external threats: cyber threats, hybrid warfare, terrorism, energy security, organized crime.

Strategic Planning:

- CSAT defines national interests, strategic objectives, and priority sectors;
- Coordination with relevant ministries ensures alignment across domains (defense, economy, infrastructure).

Drafting and Consultation:

- Draft strategy prepared by National Defense and Intelligence Council;
- Consultations with Parliament, government ministries, and external experts.

Approval and Publication:

- Final approval by CSAT and submission to the President;
- Publicly available for transparency and strategic signaling. [6,7]

5.4. Key Components

- **Threats & Risks:** Regional instability, Russian aggression, cyber attacks, terrorism;
- **Strategic Objectives:** Strengthening defense capabilities, ensuring territorial integrity, protecting critical infrastructure;
- **Policy Priorities:** NATO alignment, EU security cooperation, national resilience, defense modernization.

5.5. Regional security strategy

Romania's regional security strategy focuses on the Black Sea and Eastern European security environment, given its geographical position and proximity to volatile regions (e.g., Ukraine, Russia, Balkans).

A. Objectives:

- Strengthen regional stability and cooperation;
- Promote NATO and EU integration in neighboring countries;
- Enhance regional energy, cyber, and maritime security.

B. Regional Instruments:

- **Bilateral & Multilateral Cooperation:**
 - With Black Sea countries (Bulgaria, Ukraine, Turkey, Georgia, Moldova);
 - Participation in regional initiatives like the Black Sea Strategic Forum and EU Regional Cooperation Programs.
- **Military Presence & Exercises:**

- Hosting NATO bases and participating in joint exercises (Saber Guardian, Sea Shield);
- Developing rapid response and defense infrastructure along strategic borders.

5.6. NATO Security Strategy and Romania

A. NATO Strategic Context:

- NATO's strategic documents guide Romania's military planning and security alignment:
 - NATO Strategic Concept (latest: 2022);
 - NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP);
 - Allied Command Operations (ACO) guidance.
- Focus areas include deterrence, defense, collective security, cyber defense, hybrid threats, and resilience.

B. Romania's Role:

- Acts as a frontline NATO state due to proximity to Russia and the Black Sea;
- Hosts NATO facilities, including:
 - Multinational Divisions and Air Policing Units;
 - Ballistic Missile Defense radar in Deveselu.
- Participates in NATO missions (e.g., Kosovo, Iraq, Enhanced Forward Presence in Poland).

C. Integration Process:

- Alignment of National Security Strategy with NATO priorities;
- Capability Development:
 - Modernization of Romanian Armed Forces to meet NATO standards;
 - Investment in interoperability (equipment, communication, training).
- Regional Deterrence and Crisis Management:
 - Cooperation in intelligence sharing and rapid reaction forces;
 - Active participation in NATO exercises and contingency planning. [6,7]

5.7. Challenges in security strategy development

- Rapidly evolving threats: cyber attacks, hybrid warfare, energy insecurity;
- Balancing national priorities with NATO and EU obligations;
- Ensuring societal resilience to both internal and external crises;
- Political and economic constraints on defense spending and infrastructure development.

6. CONCLUSION

The SWOT strategic analysis of Romania reveals a complex interplay of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that carry significant geopolitical implications for national, regional, and NATO security. Romania's strategic location at the crossroads of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, combined with its NATO membership and growing defense capabilities, constitutes a considerable strength that enhances both national security and regional stability. However, persistent internal weaknesses—such as economic disparities, infrastructure gaps, and political volatility—pose constraints on the country's capacity to fully leverage its strategic potential.

Externally, Romania faces both opportunities and challenges. The evolving security landscape in Eastern Europe, particularly in light of Russia's assertive policies and regional

instability, offers Romania the chance to consolidate its role as a regional security provider and a key NATO partner. Conversely, persistent threats – Including hybrid warfare, cyberattacks, and geopolitical tensions in the Black Sea region – underline the vulnerabilities inherent in its strategic position.

Overall, the SWOT analysis underscores that Romania's security and geopolitical influence are contingent upon its ability to strengthen domestic resilience, enhance defense capabilities, and actively engage with regional and alliance partners. Effective strategic planning, coupled with proactive NATO integration, will be essential for Romania to mitigate risks, seize strategic opportunities, and contribute meaningfully to the stability of Southeastern Europe.

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