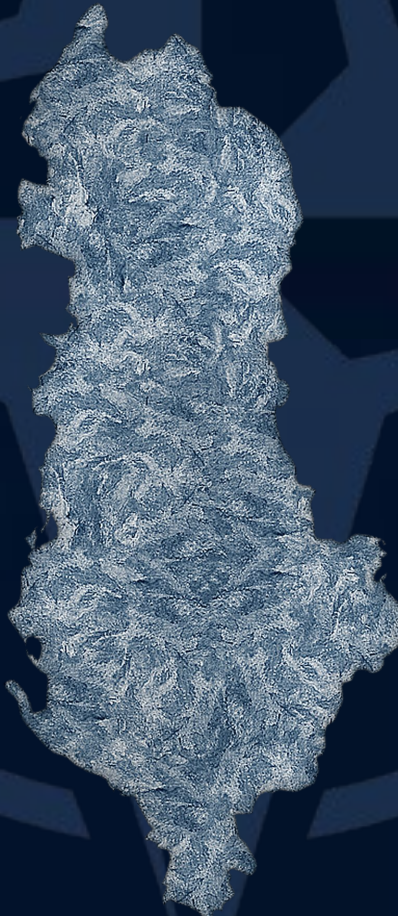




# ALBANIA

## NATO Country Assessment — *TIER TWO* —

CAPABILITY MODERNIZATION • NATO UNITY • LATE TO 2%



JULY 2026



# TIER 2

Average Ally



# AT A GLANCE

## *Toplines*

- **Equipment Spending Transformed on a Modest Budget:** Equipment share surged from 16.5% (2014) to 42.1% (2025)—one of the strongest such shifts in the alliance—while personnel costs fell from 68% to 33%. But with a total defense budget of only \$570M, the absolute numbers remain small.
- **2% of GDP—Barely, and Late:** Albania only crossed NATO's minimum threshold in 2025, after years below the non-US alliance average. Legislation now commits to 2.5% by 2029.
- **Among NATO's Most Politically Reliable Allies:** 98% public support for NATO membership, multiparty political consensus, and Albania will host the 2027 NATO Summit — the first Western Balkans country to do so.



# FORCE STRUCTURE AT A GLANCE



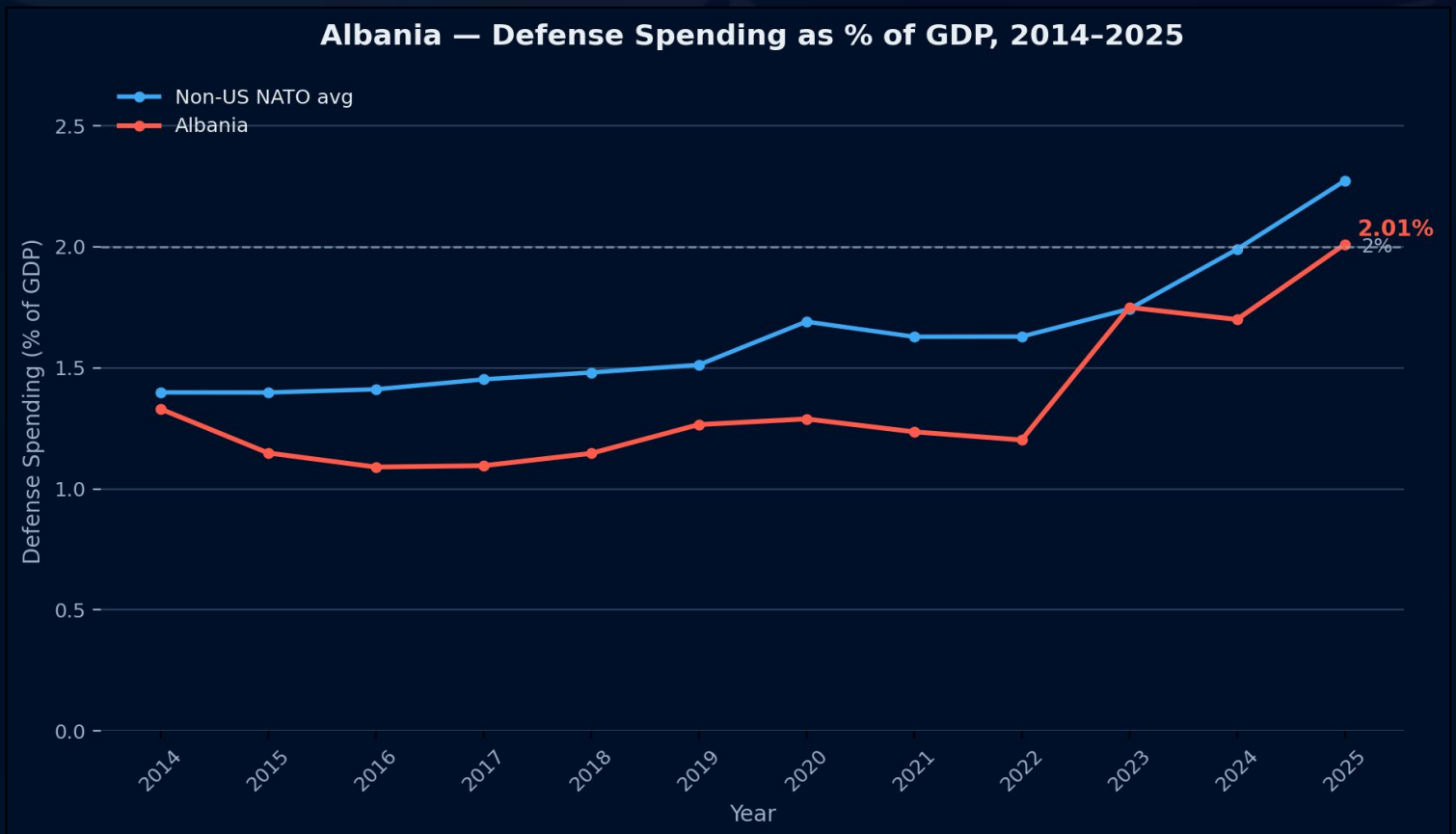
This radar chart compares a country's force structure to the Non-US NATO median (data from IISS's 2026 Military Balance) across six capability areas: Land Combat (tanks, IFVs), Active Personnel (total active-duty troops), Naval Combat (submarines, destroyers/frigates/corvettes), Air & Missile Defense (long/medium-range SAM systems), Air Combat (4th-gen+ combat aircraft), and Fires (artillery, rocket launchers). Scores are weighted, with modern platforms counted fully and legacy platforms counted at reduced weight.



# MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

## *Defense Spending Level*

Albania crossed NATO's 2% GDP threshold for the first time in 2025, reaching \$570M. That follows over a decade of spending near 1% of GDP. The trajectory is now accelerating: cumulative spending for 2025–2029 is projected at ~\$2.2B—nearly double the \$1.4B total from 2020–2024. Legislation passed in 2024 commits Albania to 2.5% of GDP by 2029. Both as a percentage of GDP and in absolute terms, Albania remains one of NATO's smallest defense budgets. But the direction and legal commitment are trending positive.

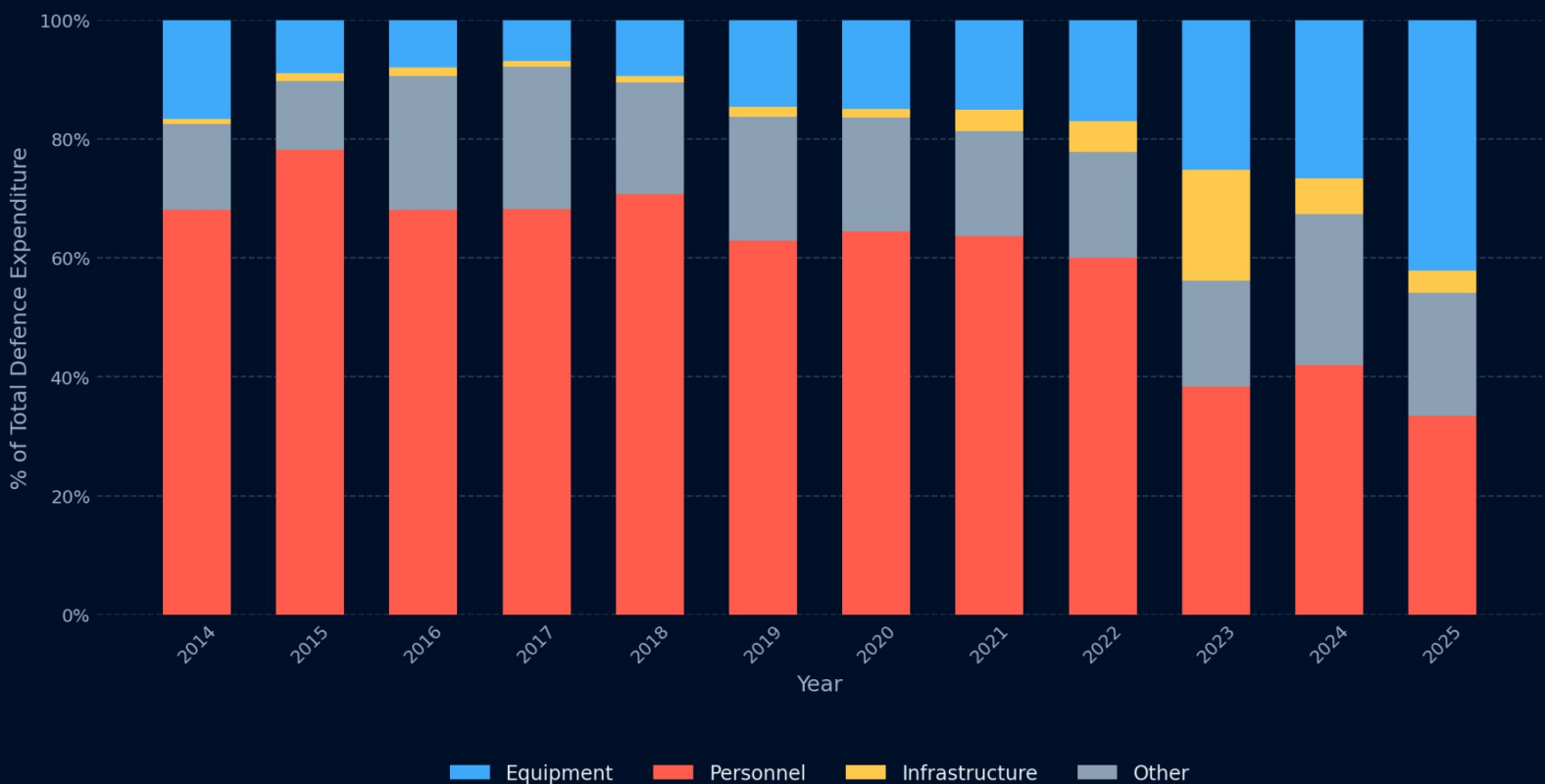


# MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

## *Equipment Share*

Albania's equipment share tells a story of structural reform within limited resources. The share of defense spending allocated to equipment rose from 16.5% in 2014 to 42.1% in 2025. This is an impressive transformation that tracks closely with the alliance's push to move money away from salaries and toward hardware. This is one of Albania's strongest indicators that they are taking the military rejuvenation of NATO seriously. Few NATO members have achieved this magnitude of equipment-share growth over the same period.

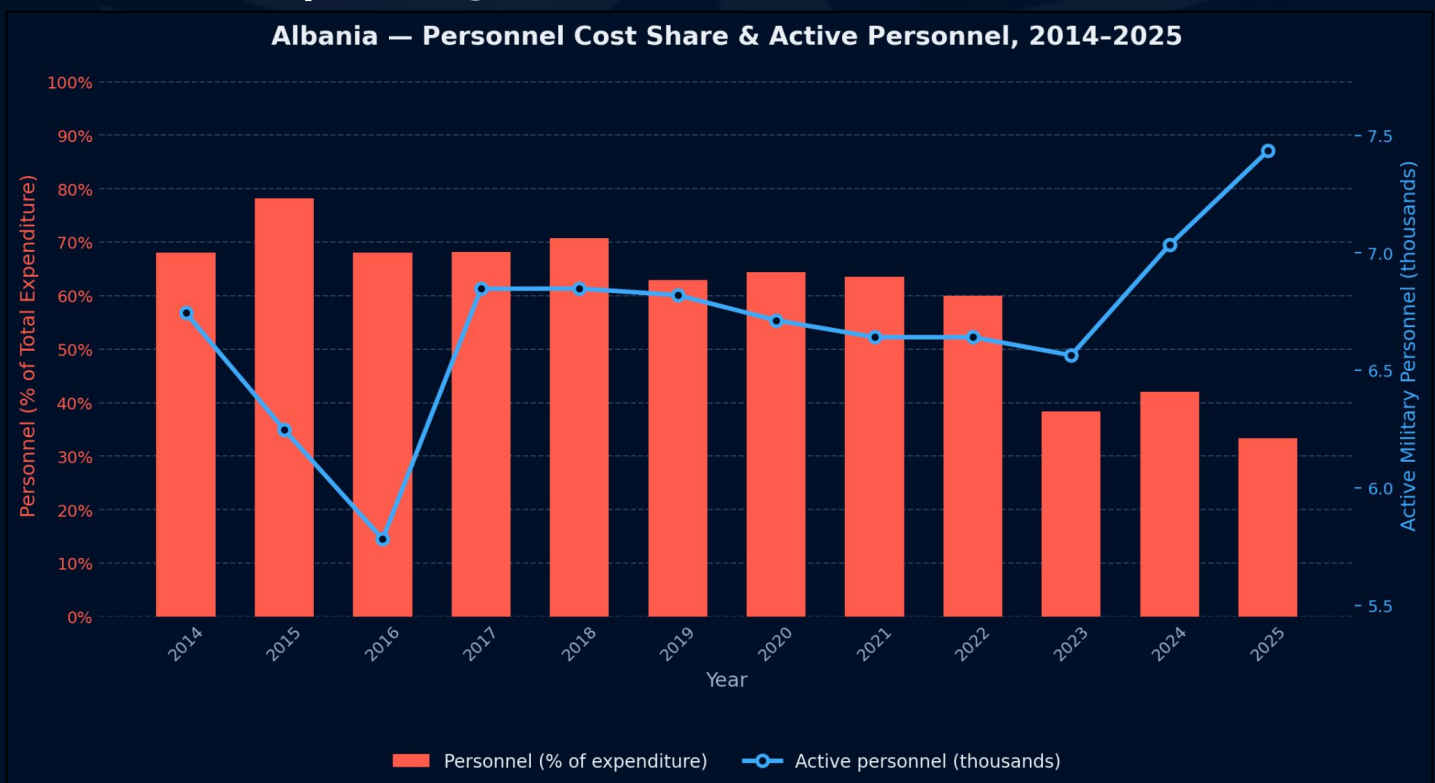
Albania — Defence Expenditure by Category, 2014-2025



# MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

## *Manpower & Recruitment*

Personnel costs fell from approximately 68% of the defense budget in 2014 to 33% in 2025 while still recruiting a larger force. In NATO terms, this is a significant quality improvement: Albania has dramatically reduced the portion of its budget consumed by wages while building a larger military, indicating a strengthening force. The remaining 33% personnel share is still meaningful for a small, labor-intensive force, but the trajectory brings Albania close to alliance norms on this metric. The absolute budget remains small, so even 42% equipment share still equals limited capital in gross dollar terms.



# MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

## *Capability Modernization*

Albania's [modernization program](#) starts from a very low baseline with no fixed-wing combat aircraft, no organic air defense, aging Soviet-era inventory, but recent procurements show meaningful progress. Key acquisitions since 2020: 3 Bayraktar TB2 strike drones at Kuçovë; Thales Ground Master 400 Alpha air defense radars (Albania's first national air surveillance capability); 40 US-surplus MaxxPro Plus MRAPs; a late-2025 Elbit Systems deal covering ATMOS 155mm howitzers, SPEAR mortars, and tactical drones; 35 Javelin anti-tank missiles; and UH-60 Black Hawks arriving from January 2024. Short-range air defense remains the most significant unaddressed gap.



# MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

## *Force Posture*

Albania's force posture reflects a small ally punching above its weight in allied deployments. [Active contributions](#) include 256 troops in Kosovo, 40 troops in Latvia's Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP), 30 troops in Bulgaria's eFP, and 31 troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina. On the hosting side, Albania's signature contribution is [Kuçovë Air Base](#) which was reopened on 4 March 2024 following a €50M NATO-funded initiative. It is the alliance's first tactical airbase in the Western Balkans, capable of hosting F-16s and other allied aircraft. [Naval infrastructure](#) at Porto Romano and Pashaliman is also developing into an Adriatic access node, with the September 2025 visit of the US Sixth Fleet flagship USS Mount Whitney signaling growing military relevance. Albania does not host permanent US forces or a major US basing presence, but Kuçovë represents a meaningful forward-posture contribution to American power projection.



# MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS

## *Industrial Base*

Albania's defense industrial base is minimal but low labor costs and active investor interest make it an attractive partner. The centerpiece is the [Elbit Systems agreement at Rubik](#), which envisions domestic drone and artillery production with Israeli technical support. On the naval side, the [April 2026 Fincantieri-KAYO joint venture](#) at Pashaliman will produce and maintain small and medium naval vessels. The state-owned KAYO company also has a separate Italian shipbuilding joint venture for coastal patrol vessel production. Domestic ammunition production is targeted for 2026. Albania is not yet a meaningful participant in EU defense programs due to its non-EU status. The industrial base is a long-run development story, not a current capability.



# STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

## *Declared Posture*

Albania's strategic posture documents like the [National Security Strategy](#), the [Military Strategy](#), the [Long-Term Development Plan PAZH 2024–2033](#), and the January 2025 10-year [bilateral security cooperation agreement](#) with Ukraine demonstrate an Albania closely align with NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept. On Russia, Albanian explicitly identifies Russian aggression as a direct European and Western Balkans security problem, and Prime Minister Edi Rama has been among the more vocal Western Balkans leaders in support of Ukraine. On China, Albania's defense documents identify Chinese influence in the Western Balkans as a security concern; Albania is not part of the China-CEE 14+1 format and has moved toward restricting Chinese telecom participation in critical networks. On Iran, Albania is one of NATO's most sharply aligned states: it hosts the [MEK at Camp Ashraf-3](#), severed diplomatic relations with Tehran in September 2022 following state-attributed cyberattacks, and maintains an active cyber-defense hardening program with US and NATO assistance.



# STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

## *Ukraine Support*

Albania sits outside the Kiel Institute's comparable tracking framework, which limits precise GDP-percentage comparisons to the alliance median. Albania has [donated \\$66 million](#) in direct military and security assistance support, supplemented by unvalued in-kind military aid including artillery shells, ammunition, Soviet-era stocks, fuel, and maintenance services. More significant than the volume is the diplomatic architecture: Albania was the first Western Balkans state to sign a [10-year security cooperation agreement](#) with Ukraine, opened its first embassy in Kyiv in January 2025, committed to English-language training for Ukrainian F-16 pilots and technicians, and hosted the [Ukraine–Southeast Europe Summit](#) in Tirana in February 2024. Albania is a small country that will always be structurally limited in contributions, yet its outsized diplomatic assistance is impressive.



# STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

## *Russian Decoupling*

Albania had minimal Russian energy exposure before 2022 and faces no meaningful withdrawal cost. Domestic hydropower typically accounts for over 90% of electricity production, there is no Russian pipeline-gas dependence, and Albania hosts the [Trans-Adriatic Pipeline](#) transporting Azeri gas to Italy as part of the Southern Gas Corridor. Russian energy imports were never significant. On sanctions enforcement, Albania has aligned with every EU Russia sanctions package from the 6th through the 20th, a notable act for a non-EU candidate country.



# STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

## *Public Support & Political Resilience*

In the [2024 NATO polling](#), Albania recorded the highest support for staying in NATO in the alliance at 98%, and 78% said their country is more safe as a result of NATO cooperation. Albania also led the alliance on increased defense spending support at 81% favoring an increase, and Ukraine support stood at approximately 86% combined, the highest total in the survey. Sixty-three percent agreed Albania should defend another NATO ally if attacked. The government under Edi Rama is firmly pro-NATO and Albania is preparing to host the 2027 NATO Summit, while the main opposition Democratic Party is equally pro-NATO, leaving no major parliamentary force challenging alliance membership or its Ukraine posture.



# STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

## *Hedging Behavior*

Albania's hedging behavior is clean across every relevant dimension. There is no meaningful Belt and Road participation, no involvement in the China-CEE 14+1 format, no Chinese-controlled critical infrastructure, and a trajectory toward restricting Chinese telecom participation in 5G and critical networks. Arms procurement is entirely US, Israeli, Turkish, and Italian-sourced with no procurement from Russia, China, Iran, or North Korea. There are no documented high-level outbound state visits to Moscow, Beijing, or Tehran during the war period. Albania has not obstructed Finnish or Swedish NATO accession, and has not obstructed the EU's Russia sanctions packages. Albania recognizes that its future is secured in a strong NATO and Western alliance, not hedging with rival adversaries.



# STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

## *Operational Cooperation*

Albania has participated in NATO and US operations well beyond what its force size would suggest. It [contributed to ISAF](#) in Afghanistan and the [coalition in Iraq](#), demonstrating early willingness to deploy alongside major allies. KFOR [Kosovo contributions](#) have been continuous since accession, politically significant given Albania's relationship with Kosovo's Albanian majority. Albania contributes troops to NATO Multinational Brigade Latvia and Multinational Battlegroup Bulgaria, giving it simultaneous Baltic and Southeastern Flank presence. The signature infrastructure contribution is [Kuçovë Air Base](#) that provides allied F-16 and aircraft access. Porto Romano's growing maritime relevance, underscored by the USS Mount Whitney visit in September 2025, adds an important Adriatic access node. Albania participates in Defender Europe and Western Balkans exercises. Force size bounds what Albania can contribute, but its deployment record and hosting infrastructure represent a consistently willing ally.

