

Romania and the War Between Iran and the US-Israel Coalition

Calibrating Strategic Options Within Euro-Atlantic Relations

Alexandru Ionuț Drăgulin



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Abstract

The military confrontation between Iran and Israel – strategically supported by the United States of America – represents a test for Euro-Atlantic cohesion and for the capacity of EU member states to adapt their traditional foreign policy line to the rapid developments in the international environment. Beyond the immediate military dimension, the conflict has structural implications for the non-proliferation regime, the credibility of Western deterrence, and transatlantic cohesion. At a declaratory level, the central stake remains the Iranian nuclear file. From the perspective of the US and the EU, the major risk is not only the accumulation of enriched nuclear material, but also the approach of a technological threshold that would allow Iran to rapidly achieve a military nuclear capacity. Consequently, the declared strategic objective of the US and its allies is to prevent Iran from achieving military nuclear capabilities under the governance of a theocratic regime following the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Keywords: nuclear non-proliferation, strategic coherence, transatlantic coordination, regional stability, de-escalation.

¹ This publication draws exclusively on open-source materials. The opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the institution.

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INTRODUCTION

The military confrontation between Iran and Israel – strategically backed by the United States – represents a test for Euro-Atlantic cohesion and for the ability of EU member states to adapt their traditional foreign policy line to the fast-paced changes in the international environment. Beyond the immediate military aspect, the conflict has structural implications for the non-proliferation regime, the credibility of Western deterrence, and transatlantic solidarity.

At a declaratory level, the central stake remains the Iranian nuclear issue. From the standpoint of the US and the EU, the major risk lies not only in the accumulation of enriched nuclear material, but also in Iran approaching a technological threshold that would allow it to quickly achieve military nuclear capabilities. Consequently, the declared strategic goal of the US and its allies is to prevent Iran from acquiring military nuclear capabilities under the rule of a theocratic regime established after the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The conflict must also be analyzed through the lens of global strategic competition. The war in the Middle East has once again highlighted the informal alliances between non-democratic, revisionist states, bringing to the forefront the axis formed by the Russian Federation, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the People's Republic of China. Cooperation between Iran and the Russian Federation – including in the field of military technologies – has been highlighted in official statements from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This connection establishes a direct link between the Iranian issue and European security, particularly regarding the war in Ukraine.

Against this backdrop, Romania cannot treat the conflict solely as a regional crisis with limited temporal and spatial effects, but rather as a relevant variable in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has anticipated that this will be a protracted war. Emphasis was placed on the "situation of increased insecurity", noting that, at present, "we have neither certainty nor significant indicators to make us believe that this conflict will end immediately" ([MAE 2026a](#)).

THE US AND THE EU: DIFFERENCES IN APPROACH AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ROMANIA

The calibration of Romania's strategic options must stem from an understanding of the differences in emphasis between Washington and Brussels.

The approach of the United States of America

The United States' foreign policy toward Iran is structured around a logic of strategic deterrence and the prevention of nuclear proliferation. From Washington's standpoint, the fundamental objective is to prevent Iran from acquiring the capability to develop nuclear weapons and to limit its role as a destabilizing actor in the Middle East ([US National Security Strategy 2025](#)).

In doctrinal terms, this approach combines three main elements: economic pressure through broad sanctions targeting the Iranian financial, energy, and military sectors; credible military deterrence, including a regional military presence and strategic cooperation with Israel and regional allies; and conditional diplomacy, designed to offer a negotiated way out only if nuclear restrictions are respected (US National Defense Strategy 2026). This strategy reflects the classic American foreign policy paradigm: combining economic and military pressure with selective diplomatic tools.

US policy toward Iran pursues four major objectives:

a. Preventing nuclear proliferation. Washington's absolute priority is to stop Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. This concern is shared by Western allies and Israel (DIA Report – Iran Military Power 2019). For the US, Iran crossing the nuclear threshold would have major consequences: triggering a regional nuclear arms race, diminishing the credibility of the global non-proliferation system, and altering the strategic balance in the Middle East.

b. Maintaining the security of Israel, the main strategic ally of the US in the region. Military cooperation between the US and Israel includes intelligence sharing, joint missile defense systems, and strategic coordination in the face of Iranian threats. Washington considers

limiting Iran's influence essential to regional stability and Israel's security ([US National Security Strategy 2025](#)).

c. Limiting Iran's regional influence. The US aims to reduce Iran's capacity to influence regional conflicts through non-state actors or regional alliances. In this regard, Washington has implemented sanctions and restrictive measures against Iranian entities, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps ([Iran Sanctions 2025](#)).

d. Maintaining freedom of navigation and regional stability. For the US, the stability of maritime routes and the security of energy infrastructure represent a strategic dimension of regional policy. Therefore, Washington maintains a significant naval presence in the Persian Gulf.

The instruments utilized to achieve these objectives include: economic pressure through sanctions aimed at limiting the Iranian regime's economic resources and increasing the costs of its regional policies; military deterrence – the US maintains a significant military presence in the Middle East and cooperates closely with Israel and regional partners; selective diplomacy – the easing of sanctions is conditional on the limitation of the Iranian nuclear program and compliance with international agreements. Currently, the White House rejects the possibility of negotiations and utilizes military coercion.

The American approach is oriented toward strategic prevention and rapid response. Its main limitations are the difficulty of controlling regional escalation, the risk of strengthening Iran–Russia relations, and the possibility that economic pressure may not alter Iran's strategic behavior.

The Approach of the European Union

The European Union avoids an exclusively military approach and promotes a dual strategy that combines diplomatic instruments with a sanctions policy. It is more cautious regarding escalation and prioritizes medium-term stability. The framework of action includes a combination of strategic pressure and diplomatic openness. EU policy toward Iran aligns with the traditional paradigm of European foreign policy: combining normative and economic pressure with the maintenance of diplomatic channels.

In strategic terms, the EU pursues three main objectives: preventing nuclear proliferation and maintaining the international nuclear control regime; limiting Iran's destabilizing behavior in the region; and avoiding a regional military escalation that could affect global stability. This approach reflects the logic of European foreign policy based on multilateralism, selective sanctions, and diplomatic instruments, rather than a strategy centered on military deterrence.

The EU's instruments are predominantly diplomatic and economic in nature:

a. Maintaining sanctions and political and economic pressure as an alternative to military action, "in response to the actions of the Iranian authorities, whether concerning the brutal repression of the Iranian people and human rights violations or threats to the region and European and international security through Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs and support for armed groups in the Middle East" ([Consiliul de Afaceri Externe al Uniunii Europene 2026](#)). In Romania's view, the mechanism of sanctions and pressure is "a very important leverage in future negotiations" and serves a dual role that converges with its own interests – "it can be an instrument to increase pressure, but at the same time, it can be an instrument that can encourage de-escalation" ([MAE 2026a](#)).

b. Supporting the multilateral framework and diplomatic solutions. The European Union rejects unilateral approaches and advocates for solutions that exclude transactional strategies, preferring a normative power posture in its relations with the neighborhood: "The European Union will continue to contribute to all diplomatic efforts to reduce tensions and find sustainable solutions to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons" ([Consiliul de Afaceri Externe al Uniunii Europene 2026](#)). The EU continues to view negotiation and multilateral instruments as the main mechanisms for managing the Iranian file.

c. Avoiding uncontrolled escalation: "The events taking place in Iran must not lead to an escalation that could threaten the Middle East, Europe, and other regions, with unpredictable consequences" ([Consiliul de Afaceri Externe al Uniunii Europene 2026](#)). Most member states are reluctant to see the conflict expand and prefer a crisis-management strategy to direct confrontation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also supports this mechanism, promoting multilateralism as a peacemaking tool: "We firmly condemn the attacks that Iran carries out in

the region and wish to contribute within the international formats where we are present to achieve de-escalation" ([MAE 2026a](#)).

d. Protecting regional stability through cooperation: "We remain in close contact with partners in the region to contribute to easing tensions and reaffirm the firm commitment of the European Union and its member states to protect regional security and stability" ([Consiliul de Afaceri Externe al Uniunii Europene 2026](#)).

This results in a difference in approach that reflects the EU's posture as a geopolitical actor favoring economic and normative tools, while the US operates within a logic of strategic deterrence and military security.

An element highlighted after the meeting of foreign ministers is the EU's limited capacity to influence the conflict's evolution. The European Union finds itself in a difficult position: it is directly affected by the conflict's consequences (energy, regional security), yet it has limited leverage over the strategic decisions of the main actors.

This situation reflects a structural tension in the EU's foreign policy between its ambition as a geopolitical actor and its limited hard power instruments. The approach reflects the European model of foreign policy: firmness in objectives but caution in the use of instruments of force.

Romania's strategic positioning

Romania's position is based on strategic convergence with the objectives of the US and European countries, complemented by the diplomatic balance necessary to maintain its standing within the ecosystem of formal and informal alliances. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs clarified Romania's stance toward its strategic allies, noting that "the stake we assume, both at the level of bilateral relations and within the European Union, is to contribute to the de-escalation of the conflict".

Therefore, the continuation of the war for an indefinite period runs counter to our country's interests, but the priority remains the fulfillment of obligations to allies (the strategic partnership with the US, decision-making consensus, and integration into the security strategy within the EU and NATO). The meeting between the Romanian minister of foreign affairs and the new US ambassador to Bucharest, Darryl Nirenberg, underscores both parties' willingness to strengthen the strategic partnership ([Ambasada SUA România, 2026](#)). Within the framework

of the EU Foreign Affairs Council, convened following the outbreak of the conflict in Iran, the Romanian minister reconfirmed adherence to the Union's foreign policy.

Romania's official position, expressed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reflects convergence with the Western consensus regarding the condemnation of Iran's destabilizing actions and "solidarity with the states in the region; the attacks against the states in the region are unjustified attacks and must be stopped" ([MAE 2026a](#)); support for the sanctions regime; preventing nuclear proliferation and supporting the role of the IAEA; and Euro-Atlantic coordination. In short, Romania encourages political regime change: "We support the right of the Iranian people to choose a future based on democracy and freedom, we condemn Iran's attacks in the region, and we support the need for de-escalation" ([MAE 2026a](#)).

At the same time, the public wording used by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidential Administration avoids maximalist rhetoric and does not explicitly endorse an escalation of the military conflict. Romania expresses understanding for Israel's security concerns and for US arguments regarding non-proliferation deterrence, but remains anchored within the language of European consensus.

The distinctive element of the Romanian position is the explicit integration of the Iranian file into the analysis of European security through the lens of the risks and threats posed by Iran–Russia cooperation. The relations between Russia and Iran are considered a determining factor for the evolution of the war in Ukraine and for the stability of NATO's eastern flank. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlighted the negative consequences of Russia–Iran cooperation on the evolution of the war in Ukraine, representing an indirect threat to Romania's security and stability in Eastern Europe: "At this moment, the fact that there is a significant decrease in military production capacity on Iranian territory can also have the effect of weakening the partnership between Iran and Russia and practically weakening the resources that Russia has access to in the war in Ukraine" ([MAE 2026a](#)).

This approach lends Romania's stance a more pronounced strategic dimension than simple normative alignment with European decisions.

CALIBRATING ROMANIA'S STRATEGIC OPTIONS

The core choice for Romania is not between the US and the EU, but rather to maintain strategic relations with both simultaneously while avoiding any perception of divergence.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "the main common goal in the upcoming period is to stop the attacks in the region, and here we are cooperating both at the European level and with transatlantic partners to increase, also through sanction packages and international condemnation, the pressure on Iran to halt these attacks against states in the region" ([MAE 2026b](#)).

At present, Romania's diplomatic logic is built around maintaining solid relations with both the US and the EU: it constantly outlines its positions based on common objectives (non-proliferation, regional stability); it promotes the integration of the Eastern European security dimension into the conflict analysis within the European Union; and it preserves coherence with NATO priorities.

For Romania, the essential challenge lies in calibrating its position to support the objective of preventing nuclear proliferation, maintaining its strategic relationship with the US, consolidating European cohesion, and integrating the conflict into the security analysis of NATO's eastern flank. Thus, there is a clear need for strategic coherence within a difficult context.

The most suitable strategic option for Romania consists of a dual calibration of its stance between the United States' approach and that of the European Union, avoiding both exclusive alignment with the logic of military deterrence and an exclusively diplomatic positioning. This option allows Romania to simultaneously maintain the credibility of its strategic relationship with Washington and its coherence with the European consensus.

From the perspective of its relationship with the United States of America, Romania should firmly support the strategic goal of preventing nuclear proliferation and recognize the legitimacy of Israel's security concerns. In official statements, the Romanian stance avoids phrasing that might suggest support for an escalation of military hostilities, keeping the focus on deterrence and regional stability.

In relation to the European Union, Romania must remain anchored in the paradigm of multilateralism and support the role of international institutions, including the International Atomic Energy Agency, in monitoring the Iranian nuclear program. Furthermore, Romania must promote the integration of the Eastern European security dimension into EU decisions regarding the conflict in Iran, underlining the negative correlation between Iran–Russia cooperation and regional stability.

This balanced positioning allows Romania to combine strategic firmness with diplomatic prudence, simultaneously consolidating Euro-Atlantic cohesion and its relevance in the European security debate.

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Guiding principles: human resource development, professionalism, respect and dialogue, and responsibility for the community.

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- Training and further education of diplomats and other trainees;
- Deepening the research and expertise dimension on regional and functional issues;
- Operating the RDI as a think-tank of the MFA;
- Integration of the RDI into an international network of similar relevant institutes.

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