

# **Framing and Foreign Policy Legitimacy: Greece's Communication Strategy on the Israeli- Gaza Conflict**

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## **Abstract**

**The war in Israel and Gaza presented Greece with a diplomatic challenge. This article examines how Greece framed and legitimised its position through political communication. Using a qualitative research method, it analyses selected government statements and media reports, based on Entman's framing model and assessed on strategic narrative and legitimacy discourse. The findings indicate that Greece emphasised humanitarian principles and adherence to international law, while avoiding to accredit responsibility. Strategic narratives positioned Greece closer to Western driven diplomatic solutions. The analysis shows how framing, narrative construction and legitimisation operate concurrently in foreign policy communication during crises. The article contributes to discussions on political communication and foreign policy legitimacy, highlighting the challenges in terms of geopolitics states face.**

Key words: Strategic Narratives, Legitimacy, Framing Theory, Gaza War

## **1. Introduction**

The Israeli Gaza war's aftermath was thousands of innocent people and children killed, displaced and forced out of their homes, while their lives were torn apart; It reshaped international diplomatic agendas and exposed the long standing complexities of foreign policy communication within the EU, where member states must balance normative commitments, strategic and geopolitical interests and domestic pressures. Among these member states lies Greece. Greece had been traditionally sympathetic towards Palestinians, but in the last decades it aligned more closely with Israel in an attempt to tighten their security ties and partnerships regarding energy resources (Tziampiris, 2014). Although Greece has built, and continues to do so, a strategic alliance with Israel, at the same time has also expressed solidarity for the Palestinian people (Tziarras, 2016). These competing

pressures demand a particularly delicate governmental communicative handling, as Greece is set to navigate a sensitive diplomatic landscape.

How Greece responds to this is not only a matter of foreign policy; a big part of it is rooted in accomplishing a successful political communication and establishing a legitimate and acceptable response that will essentially satisfy the public.

This article examines Greece's communication strategy during the recent Israeli-Gaza conflict, with a particular attention to how the Greek political discourse framed and legitimised the narratives in order to achieve balance and acceptance from the public internationally and domestically. The analysis will focus on selected government statements and press releases issued during the war. The focus will particularly be on the framing choices made by state actors in order to evaluate how Greece justifies and legitimises its position during this conflicting time. The two main research questions will focus on how the Greek government frames the conflict in its official communication, and secondly to what extent do these statements use legitimacy strategies to balance geopolitical alignment with Israel and a commitment to humanitarian principles. This article will contribute further to the analysis on how legitimacy is constructed during times of conflict.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Geopolitical context of the region**

To understand the theoretical and geopolitical foundations that lie behind Greece's communication strategy, it is crucial to first and foremost examine the specific geopolitical context of the region. Literature shows that the Greek government's statements towards the conflict are based on long term strategic cooperations and a need to maintain the international status-quo. Understanding this context will help later with understanding the communicative strategies that were used to achieve legitimacy.

Over the past decade Greece, Cyprus and Israel have built what Tziarras (2016) cleverly calls a "comfortable quasi alliance" based on some common strategic interests, but most importantly naming Turkey as the destabiliser of the region. As Grigoriadis and Tsourapas (2022) note, contemporary Greek policy towards the Middle East is shaped by the dual

imperative of maintaining Western alignment while responding to Turkish regional initiatives. Energy resources and territorial border delimitation have further determined existing tensions. According to Tziampiris (2014) after the rise of Turkey there was a power shift that directly affected the strategic relationship that was built and intensified later in 2010-11 between Greece and Israel. Over the past decade, Greece has systematically strengthened its partnership with Israel, particularly as regional instability and declining relations with Turkey created opportunities for diplomatic repositioning (Lindenstrauss and Polikarpos, 2019). Sotiriou (2020) then argues that the proliferation of maritime borders setting efforts and the trilateral cooperation initiatives between Greece, Israel and Cyprus reflect a broader strategic cooperation grounded principally in security concerns and legal frameworks in order to align with international law frameworks. Similarly Stergiou (2024) argues that although some of these agreements and projects are symbolic they hold a significant geopolitical value, shaping a strategic partnership and reinforcing sovereignty.

This explains why Greece maintains diplomatic cooperations with Israel much less during periods of crisis. The need to keep stability in the region is often strategically shaped through communication in order to preserve legitimacy. To quote Stergiou “cooperation is not a choice but a necessity in order to survive” (Stergiou, 2024).

## **2.2 Framing Theory**

Having established the geopolitical context that shapes Greece's decisions on policy and its strategic alignment with Israel there needs to be an analysis on how this policy positioning is communicated. Foreign policy is not solely decided on strategy; a big part of it is structured through carefully constructed and legitimised discourse. Here, framing theory plays a pivotal role. Goffman and then later Entman, pioneers in the field, introduced framing theory in (1974), which later became an integral part of political communication. Entman, describes framing as the selection and emphasis of certain aspects of reality through four functions: defining a problem, finding the causes, making moral evaluations, and suggesting possible treatments. For him, absence or obstruction of information is analytically as important as presence (Entman, 1993). That way we can assume that in a time of crisis everything a government does or does not say in its communication can be considered framing. Almakaty takes it one step further to the digital media age expanding the classic framing theory. He argues that algorithms work as echo-chambers prioritising emotionally charged, attention

grabbing frames for engagement (Almakaty, 2025). Ardèvol-Abreu's review about framing theory in communication, highlights that foreign policy communication is a form of frame building (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015).

### **2.3 Strategic Narrative construction**

While framing theory offers a valuable insight into how politicians selectively highlight certain aspects of reality while downplaying others. However, it does not explain how these messages are constructed on a communicative level; This is where strategic narrative theory becomes relevant.

According to Livingston and Nassetta (2018) framing theory and strategic narratives are two tools that are inherently interlinked and form together the framework of international political communication. In international relations there are plenty of factors that play an important role; language, ideas, meaning and shape, apart from material power. In their research Livingston and Nassetta (2018) lay out the difference between the two. Framing theory refers to how specific issues are presented to shape perception and interpretation. More on an issue specific, micro-level lens, whether strategic narratives operate on a broader geopolitical, macro-level explaining how states and political actors construct shared understandings of the past, present and future to influence international legitimacy. It is a struggle over identity . Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle (2014), in their book named Strategic narratives, argue that Strategic Narratives are a way for political actors to extend their influence, manage the public's expectations and alter the environment they operate in. Similarly, Freedman (2014) adds to the concept of Strategic Narratives, that politicians use them to influence the behaviour of others and get them to buy into their strategy which also corresponds with Boin et al. (2009) and their belief that crises lay the ground for a framing contest. In line with Demertzis' constructivist approach to political communication, which views communicative acts as value based processes of constructing meaning, framing choices in foreign policy discourse can be understood as deliberate attempts to shape political reality (Tsiros, 2002).

Political actors follow scripts to guide audiences to a specific discourse. and use them to achieve political objectives, according to ÓTuathail (Miskimmon et al., 2014). Similarly, Antoniadis et al. (2015) analyse how strategic narratives are used to establish and maintain influence in an international system, particularly during periods of conflict. Tsagkroni and

Dikaios (2024) add on recent research that in an era of constant crises occurring, political actors rely even more on framing and strategic narratives, manage perception and justify decisions.

### **Legitimacy in Foreign Policy Communication**

While strategic narratives explain how states construct meaning to have all the aces to influencing audiences, the effectiveness of these narratives strongly depends on whether they are deemed legitimate (Hurd, 1999). Without legitimacy, narratives they fail to convince. As Hurd (1999) argues, legitimacy is a social process through which actions become accepted as appropriate or desirable norms from society. Accordingly, foreign policy is not secured merely claiming material power, but also when having discourse validation, a component Tallberg and Zürn (2019) argues is a requirement for legitimacy in an international governance setting. Tallberg and Zürn (2019) in their review construct a theoretical framework to analyse how state actors gain, lose or sustain legitimacy. According to them, legitimacy, when done appropriately, offers a level of authority, whereas legitimation is seen as a communicative and behavioural process. Through their work they bridged authority with legitimacy and communication. These three when combined form a dynamic, strategic system where one is needed to sustain the other. Consequently, when states create strategic narratives, these must align with framing and societal norms (Livingston & Nassetta, 2018). Legitimacy arises when policy actions resonate with the audience they are targeting. Schmitt (2018) reinforces this belief; he states that narrative credibility relies on moral grounding across different levels of communication.

State communication is also shaped by media logic. Mediatisation is not only about using the media; it is rather about how the media shape the operation, decisions and communicative behaviour of public sector organisations. Therefore legitimacy depends on how content is delivered because audiences evaluate governments based on media embedded expectations (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2020).

In conclusion, narratives are a tool for persuasion but it is legitimacy that determines if those narratives are going to be accepted, granting consecutively states the authority to act.

### **3. Methodology**

Building on these theories, the following empirical analysis focuses qualitatively on how Greece communicates its position on the war through selected government statements and media reports. The examples discussed include a statement made at the UN Security Council's meeting by H.E. Ambassador Evangelos Sekeris on May 13th 2025, secondly an article by Kathimerini in which Greece applauds the "historic agreement" over Gaza from October 2025 and lastly an article by news outlet Al Jazeera on October 2023, which frames Greece as closely aligned with Israel.

Using the four stage model that Entman proposes on framing analysis, namely Problem definition, Causal interpretation, Moral Evaluation and Treatment Recommendation to identify the framing for each document, this analysis identifies the framing choices present in each of the documents. After that, there will be an evaluation of each article based on strategic narratives and legitimacy.

#### **4. Analysis**

##### **4.1 Al Jazeera (2023)**

- Problem definition: Greece's shift on policy and close alignment with Israel, "Greece has emerged as a key supporter of Israel...apparently at odds with public opinion"
- Causal Interpretation: Shift because of energy resources, partnerships in defence and general mistrust towards Turkey, "When in 2020 Greek-Turkish relations...defence industry."
- Moral Evaluation: Contrast between government's actions and public opinion, "While just 18.4 percent are in favour of a pro-Israel position, 11.5 percent want Greece to be openly pro-Palestinian"
- Treatment: While it does not directly propose a solution the partnership between Israel and Greece is a way to navigate conflict in the region.

##### **Strategic narratives**

The article clearly presents Greece as a strategic partner alongside Israel, despite Greece's once "pro Palestinian" stance. Thus this article reinforces the narrative that Greece shifted its position in the Eastern Mediterranean region to serve its own interests.

## **Legitimacy**

From a legitimacy perspective it is evident that this policy shift goes against domestic public opinion, who favours neutrality. The image that Greece is trying to portray in the media is that of a strong ally to Israel. This contrast may pose a challenge domestically and thus the article reveals that, in terms of communication, the Greek government must manage multiple challenges, that of its citizens, to the EU and to the partners regionally.

### **4.2 Official Diplomatic Communication: UN Security Council Statement (May 2025)**

- Problem definition: Describes the situation as a “humanitarian crisis” and notes that there is lack of access to food, water and medical supplies while specifically mentioning that amongst those affected are children and vulnerable populations.
- Causal Interpretation: Violence is ongoing due to hostilities and diplomacy deficiencies. He also implies implicitly for the situation to Hamas
- Moral Evaluation: Civil protection is “non-negotiable” under international law, referring to the Geneva Convention and mentions “basic human rights” protection
- Treatment: calls for “safe, unconditional humanitarian aid”, immediate ceasefire and release of hostages, obedience to international law and that the solution Egypt suggests is “a good starting point”

## **Strategic Narrative**

The statement constructs a strategic narrative where Greece stands as a supporter of stability, distancing itself from further escalation of the war. There is emphasis on dialogue, “two- state solution” and permanent ceasefire, which sets Greece as a promoter for de-escalation. While it refers to protection of civilians and adherence to international law from both sides, the statement is in favour of the diplomatic efforts of Egypt, Qatar and consecutively the US. This way Greece is distancing itself from direct involvement but is in clear favour of the Western diplomatic approach.

## **Legitimacy**

In this statement legitimacy is established through alignment to following the international law and humanitarian principles (Hurd, 1999). The ambassador's statement is cleverly positioned between adhering to international norms and a concern for Palestinian people.

### **4.3 Kathimerini (October 2025)**

- Problem definition: The article defines the situation as a “major breakthrough”. Through the language used it emphasises that a “historic breakthrough was made”, which elevates the moral significance of the event
- Causal Interpretation: It shows a breakthrough in negotiations under the US’s contribution and shows Israel's affirmativeness to discuss regarding the war
- Moral Evaluation: Greece’s response is positive pointing out that Greece is “ready to contribute...the region.”
- Treatment: The article quotes the Greek Ministry of Foreign affairs declaring it “imperative that...towards peace talks.”

#### **Strategic Narrative**

This article is another example of Greece being in favour of western diplomatic efforts and ready to assist the implementation of those, maintaining this image of responsible mediator and supporter of international diplomatic norms.

#### **Legitimacy**

Once again legitimacy is constructed through direct reference to diplomacy and humanitarian laws. By supporting the ceasefire the statement's article stays consistent with supporting international laws and this way Greece balances its alignment with Israel with broader expectations on stability in the region.

## **5. Discussion of Findings**

The above analysis of the selected government statements and media article indicates that Greece’s communication regarding its foreign policy on the war in Gaza lies between supporting international humanitarian concerns and a strategic position in favour of Israel. It is evident that although the resources used frequently mention civilian suffering and instability as problems the focus is on implementing EU and UN expectations that favour Israel and not Gaza in this situation. This position is connected to Bjola & Kornprobst’s argument in their book *Understanding International Diplomacy*. Greece uses framing to

maintain balanced relations with Israel, Palestine and the EU performing legitimacy through relational diplomacy (Bjola and Kornprobst, 2018).

## 7. Conclusion

Evidently, Greece's governmental communication throughout the war reflects a calculated diplomatic effort to preserve its strategic cooperations while adhering to the international humanitarian laws. Through framing, Greece highlights civilian suffering and the urgency of aid and a solution, yet avoids assigning direct blame. The emphasis on law and humanitarian language suggests an attempt to legitimise policy choices in line with international expectations while maintaining diplomatic flexibility. In doing so, it demonstrates how framing, narrative building and legitimacy cooperate in foreign policy communication during times of conflict. Future research is needed through wider media representations or comparing Greece's positioning with other EU member states to better understand how legitimacy is managed in complex geopolitical environments.

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