

In the Shadow of October 7th—Challenges to Israel–Greece Relations

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While the Israeli–Greek partnership has flourished in recent years, the ongoing war since October 7, 2023, has introduced new complexities that test the resilience of this relationship. Although Greece has expressed steadfast support for Israel and condemned the atrocities committed by Hamas, it has also joined other Western allies in voicing concerns over the war’s duration and the lack of a clear strategic objective. A unique aspect that should concern Athens is Turkey’s escalating anti-Israel rhetoric, which may also signify Ankara’s growing risk tolerance.

Over the past few decades, the relationship between Greece and Israel has undergone a profound transformation, shaped by changing political landscapes. In the 1980s, under Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou, Greece stood out as one of Israel’s harshest critics within Europe, closely aligning itself with Arab states and actively supporting the Palestinian cause. Diplomatic ties between the two countries were virtually non-existent, and it was not until 1990—under Prime Minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis, the father of Greece’s current prime minister—that Greece became the last European state to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel.

In 2010, the relationship between Greece and Israel experienced a pivotal and unexpectedly rapid shift when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and then Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou—son of the former Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou—forged a close bond. This connection played a key role in reshaping Greece’s stance toward Israel. The shift was further accelerated by the deterioration in Israeli–Turkish relations following the 2010 flotilla incident and the potential for energy cooperation, particularly in natural gas exploration and related infrastructure projects.

Since then, Israel and Greece have cultivated a strategic partnership characterized by multidimensional cooperation across various fields, including defense, energy, tourism, trade, technology, culture, and innovation. Both nations share similar perspectives on regional challenges and opportunities, with a common goal of fostering stability, security, and prosperity. This shared aim is also reflected in their

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trilateral cooperation with Cyprus. The three countries are also jointly promoting the Great Sea Interconnector project (formerly known as the EuroAsia Interconnector).

Defence has emerged as a cornerstone of Greek–Israeli relations, highlighted by numerous joint exercises and procurement agreements, such as the establishment of the International Flight Training Center in Kalamata, operated by Israel’s Elbit Systems, and Israel Aerospace Industries’ acquisition of the Greek defense company, Intracom Defense (IDE). These developments underscore the deepening military cooperation and growing synergy between the two countries. In a July 2023 interview with *Kathimerini*, Eli Cohen—then Israel’s foreign minister and now the minister of energy—[reaffirmed](#) the strength of the strategic partnership between Greece and Israel, as well as their trilateral cooperation with Cyprus. He stressed that this partnership was “rock-solid” and remained unaffected by external factors, including Israel’s improved relations with Turkey as of that date, prior to the outbreak of the war in Gaza.

The surprise attack by Hamas against Israel on October 7 2023, generated a significant wave of solidarity for the State of Israel within Greece. In the immediate aftermath of the attack, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis condemned the atrocities and [traveled](#) to Israel, stating that he came “not just as an ally, but as a true friend.” He emphasized Greece’s commitment to Israel’s right to self-defense in accordance with international law, assuring Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Israeli people, “you can count on our support and our help.” Similarly, Greek President Katerina Sakellaropoulou characterized the actions of Hamas as war crimes, hosted families of Israeli hostages in Athens, and endorsed the “Bring Them Home” movement.

In the early months of the war and in subsequent periods when many foreign airlines canceled flights to Israel, Athens International Airport became a significant [hub](#) for Israeli airlines, facilitating the return of Israelis who were stranded abroad and needed to report for military reserve duty. Moreover, after Turkey imposed a complete trade ban on Israel in May 2024, some Turkish products began arriving in Israel [via Greece](#) to circumvent the restrictions.

However, since October 7, Greece has also increasingly taken a more cautious approach, indicating that while the bilateral relationship with Israel remains significant, geopolitical shifts and domestic considerations may be influencing its strategic calculations. Following Greece’s initial display of support, its rhetoric evolved, mirroring a broader trend among many EU member states. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis [expressed concerns over](#) the “proportionality” of Israel’s military response to Hamas’s attacks, suggesting that Israel’s allies must convey “hard truths” about its military operations in Gaza.

While in the days immediately following Hamas's terrorist attack, Greek media shared supportive messages, the focus quickly shifted to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, which has since dominated coverage, including on the national broadcaster ERT. As a result of widespread concern over civilian suffering, Israel is frequently described as a "terror state committing genocide." This view is now prevalent among the Greek public, which complicates the alliance between Greece and Israel. A concrete form of public resentment was manifested both in June 2024 and in October 2024, when the ENEDEP union (Union of Cargo Handling Workers at the Piers of Piraeus), affiliated with the Communist Party, prevented the loading of cargo with ammunition destined for Israel.

On September 18, 2024, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution calling for Israel to "bring to an end without delay its unlawful presence" in the so-called "Occupied Palestinian Territory," with a deadline of 12 months. This proposal was supported by 124 countries, [including Greece](#) and Cyprus, which disappointed Israel, given that both countries are considered friendly nations and close allies. Greece's vote was likely influenced by two key factors: its commitment to "Greece's undivided support for international law" as represented by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and its impending non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council beginning January 1, 2025.

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis's approach to the war between Israel, Hamas, and Hezbollah has notably shifted. Nearly a year later, in an interview with Christiane Amanpour on CNN on September 24, 2024, Mitsotakis's tone had changed significantly. He placed responsibility on Israel for the lack of a ceasefire, asserting, "we made it very, very clear to our Israeli friends that there were opportunities to get to a ceasefire . . . and those opportunities were not taken." He added that "as long as you don't have a ceasefire in Gaza, the hostages will not be released. You will have a necessary loss of life, compounding already on the humanitarian catastrophe that has taken place. And you will always give Hezbollah a reason to continue firing rockets into Israel."

Additionally, in his speech at the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly, although the Greek prime minister [stated](#) that Greece has supported Israel since the beginning of the war, his remarks were tinged with criticism. Mitsotakis emphasized Greece's support for Israel's right to self-defense while simultaneously calling on all parties, including Israel, to reduce tensions as Israel began its response. His insistence that a full-scale war in southern Lebanon must be avoided "at all costs" suggests a belief that Israel should exercise restraint in responding to Hezbollah's ongoing provocations. Notably, he refrained from mentioning Hamas or Hezbollah directly.

Mitsotakis also made it clear that Greece “fully supports an immediate 21-day ceasefire,” which ran counter to Israel’s policies at this time. Furthermore, he advocated for a two-state solution as the only path to peace and stability in the region, implying a call for the international community to exert pressure for the establishment of a “functioning and sovereign Palestinian state,” which contrasts with Israel’s current government policies. Mitsotakis was supposed to meet with Netanyahu on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting, but the meeting did not take place as Netanyahu chose to shorten his visit due to escalating tensions with Hezbollah. The foreign ministers of Greece and Cyprus held trilateral talks with their counterparts from Egypt and Jordan in New York. The last trilateral meeting between Israel, Cyprus, and Greece at the level of foreign ministers took place in April 2023, and at the level of heads of state in September 2023.

Still, following the events on October 1, when Iran attacked Israel directly with missiles for the second time, and a Hamas terror attack in Jaffa resulted in casualties, including a dual Greek–Israeli citizen, Mitsotakis strongly [condemned](#) the Iranian attack and reaffirmed Greece’s support for Israel. While Greek officials are likely to maintain an inconsistent stance toward Israel’s actions in the multi-front war, Israel can still rely on Greece for its basic sympathy. However, Greece’s support weakens when Israel’s actions are regarded as controversial in the international arena—a pattern also seen in Israel’s relations with other friendly Western states.

What is more unique to the Greek case is the connection to Turkey. Since the outbreak of the war, Israel’s relations with Turkey have reached a low point, which could, in theory, have prompted Israel and Greece to strengthen their ties further. Yet, beyond the above-mentioned criticism of certain Israeli actions in the war, the strengthening of ties between Israel and Greece has not occurred, also due to a rapprochement process between Greece and Turkey, which began following the tragic earthquakes in Turkey in February 2023. Still, Turkey’s [threatening rhetoric](#) against Israel and its preposterous accusations that Israel has [expansionist](#) aims against Turkish territory should also raise concerns in Greece. Turkey’s willingness to exacerbate an already volatile situation suggests that it has a high level of risk tolerance, which may manifest itself on other fronts as well, as was the case in 2019–2020 in the Eastern Mediterranean. Various instances at the time resulting from Turkey’s provocative steps in what it sees as disputed economic waters, included a [mini collision](#) that occurred between Greek and Turkish warships. In this respect, it should be remembered that the 2010 flotilla incident was seen as problematic in Greece also because it seemed to imply a more assertive Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean. Hence, Turkey’s threatening rhetoric against Israel may not end there.

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