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Strategic Perception and Strategic Complementarity: Rethinking Greek-Israeli Strategic Depth

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Introduction

Greece and Israel have progressively moved beyond conventional bilateral defence cooperation toward a broader strategic relationship encompassing defence technology, infrastructure, energy, regional connectivity and political coordination. The August 2026 “Achilles Shield” agreement, valued at approximately €3 billion, represents the most substantial defence agreement in the history of Greek-Israeli relations. It provides for a multilayered air-defence architecture based on Israeli systems, including David’s Sling, SPYDER and BARAK MX, alongside command-and-control capabilities, industrial cooperation and technological knowledge transfer (1).

The significance of this development extends beyond the acquisition of advanced military systems. It raises a broader question: can strategic depth emerge between two states whose strategic perceptions differ in how they understand power, security and the role of institutions?

This paper argues that it can. Strategic depth does not require strategic identity. It can emerge when different strategic perceptions generate complementary capabilities and those capabilities become sufficiently institutionalised to produce durable cooperation. Israel brings considerable advantages in military technology, operational experience and defence innovation. Greece combines military capabilities with EU and NATO membership, geographic position and a dense network of regional partnerships.

The central proposition is therefore straightforward: **strategic depth is produced when strategic difference becomes functional.**

1. From Strategic Culture to Strategic Complementarity

Realist approaches to international politics emphasise the importance of capabilities in an anarchic international system, where states must ultimately provide for their own security (2). Yet capabilities alone do not explain how states choose to employ them. Strategic culture refers to historically developed assumptions about the use of force, while strategic perception concerns how a state interprets its contemporary security environment and prioritises available instruments (3).

Israel's strategic outlook places particular emphasis on military readiness, intelligence, technological adaptation and operational capability. Greece also relies on military power and deterrence, but it operates within a different institutional environment, in which EU and NATO membership, international law, diplomacy and multilateral cooperation play a more prominent role.

These differences should not be reduced to a simple opposition between “realism” and “liberalism.” Both states use military capabilities, institutions and diplomacy. The difference concerns their relative weighting and the strategic functions assigned to them.

Institutions can nevertheless make such differences manageable by reducing uncertainty, structuring expectations and creating repeated interaction (4). The analytical question is therefore not whether Greece and Israel think about security in identical ways, but whether their different approaches can produce strategically useful forms of cooperation.

2. The Israeli-Turkish Experience: Why Convergence Alone Is Insufficient

The history of Israeli-Turkish relations provides a useful point of comparison. During the 1990s, Israel and Turkey developed extensive military cooperation involving training, defence technology and intelligence, supported by overlapping strategic concerns and a broadly compatible orientation toward the regional order (5).

The subsequent deterioration of the relationship demonstrates, however, that strategic similarity does not automatically guarantee long-term durability. Research on the relationship points to changing Turkish state identity, regional orientation and perceptions of the Middle Eastern order as important factors in the erosion of the earlier partnership (6).

The lesson is not that strategic convergence is unimportant. It is that convergence by itself may provide an insufficient foundation for resilience. A relationship becomes harder to unwind when its value is distributed across several functional domains and when cooperation generates institutional structures that survive changes in individual policies.

3. The Achilles Shield: From Procurement to Strategic Complementarity

The Achilles Shield agreement illustrates how strategic complementarity can be translated into concrete capabilities. The approximately €3 billion programme is not limited to the acquisition of individual weapons systems. It combines a multilayered air-defence architecture with command-and-control capabilities, industrial cooperation and the transfer of technological and operational knowledge (1).

Its strategic significance therefore lies in the way these elements are integrated. Greece gains access to Israeli defence technology and operational experience while incorporating these capabilities into its own national defence architecture. Israel, in turn, deepens a defence-industrial relationship with a state embedded in the European and transatlantic security structures.

The result is not strategic convergence, but a functional division of capabilities. Israeli technological and operational expertise is combined with Greek institutional and geographic assets.

This distinction matters because the value of the relationship cannot be measured only by the military systems transferred. The more important question is what those capabilities enable the two states to do together beyond the bilateral defence relationship.

4. From Bilateral Cooperation to Regional Strategic Access

For Israel, the broader value of Greece lies in its position within European and transatlantic institutions and its network of regional partnerships. Recent scholarship on Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey identifies the growing importance of Greece and Cyprus in this context, including their diplomatic, military, economic and energy significance (7).

This gives the relationship a regional dimension that cannot be derived from defence cooperation alone. The Greece-Cyprus-Israel framework has progressively expanded into maritime security, sea lanes, critical infrastructure, energy and connectivity. The December 2025 trilateral declaration explicitly called for stronger cooperation in security, defence and military affairs, deeper cooperation on maritime security and the protection of sea lanes and critical infrastructure, while welcoming the establishment of a Maritime Cybersecurity Centre of Excellence in Cyprus (8).

A plausible alternative explanation is that shared threat perceptions are the principal driver of this cooperation. They clearly matter. They do not, however, fully explain why cooperation extends into defence industry, European institutional access, energy connectivity, infrastructure and regional frameworks. Strategic complementarity helps explain the cross-domain structure of the relationship and its potential durability.

The relationship can therefore be understood as a platform through which bilateral capabilities acquire wider strategic utility. Defence cooperation provides the foundation; regional connectivity and institutional links expand its scope.

5. From Strategic Partnership to Regional Security Partnership

The question, therefore, is how this broader strategic utility can be institutionalised.

The next step need not be the creation of a conventional military alliance based on an automatic mutual-defence clause. A more flexible model would be a **regional security partnership**: a structured framework for managing interconnected risks while preserving national decision-making autonomy.

The term is used here as an analytical category, not as the name of an existing treaty or institution.

Such a framework could institutionalise cooperation in intelligence and threat assessment, air and missile defence, counter-UAS capabilities, cyber security, maritime-domain awareness, protection of critical infrastructure, joint exercises, defence-industrial cooperation and rapid political or military consultation.

This would not require identical doctrines or identical threat priorities. Its purpose would be to institutionalise complementarity.

The proposal also has a broader regional context. In June 2026, Israeli Ministry of Defense Director General Amir Baram argued for a new regional security architecture and referred to a broader alliance stretching from India through the UAE to Greece and Cyprus. His statement does not establish a Greek-Israeli alliance, but it demonstrates that Greece and Cyprus are being considered within a wider Israeli conception of regional security architecture (9).

The analytical opportunity is therefore to move from bilateral capability development toward joint management of selected regional risks.

6. Connectivity Turns Infrastructure into Security

Energy interconnectors, telecommunications networks, maritime routes and logistics corridors increasingly connect economic and security interests. The Great Sea Interconnector is one example: its strategic concept links Greece, Cyprus and Israel to the European electricity system. The European Commission has recognised the project's strategic importance while also noting geopolitical and implementation risks (10).

The December 2025 trilateral declaration similarly connected energy and connectivity with regional resilience while emphasising the protection of sea lanes and critical infrastructure (8).

The causal mechanism is important: **connectivity creates interdependence; interdependence creates shared vulnerabilities; shared vulnerabilities create incentives for resilience and protection.**

This broadens the meaning of security cooperation. Protecting an interconnector, maritime route or communications network may require military capabilities, but it also requires cyber security, surveillance, emergency planning, intelligence sharing and coordinated crisis management.

Security therefore becomes linked to the resilience of the infrastructure through which regional cooperation itself operates.

7. Cyprus as Strategic Interface and Pressure Point

Cyprus occupies a distinctive position within this framework. It is simultaneously a geographical interface between Greece and Israel and a location where security, energy, maritime infrastructure and regional geopolitics intersect.

The presence of Turkish military forces in the Turkish-occupied areas of the Republic of Cyprus forms part of this wider security environment. Developments surrounding maritime activity and infrastructure projects demonstrate that strategic connectivity can also become exposed to geopolitical pressure.

Such developments should not automatically be attributed to a single Turkish objective. They nevertheless demonstrate the vulnerability of infrastructure crossing politically contested spaces. A March 2026 European Parliament parliamentary question, for example, raised allegations concerning Turkish obstruction of cable-laying activity; this should be treated as a parliamentary allegation rather than independent proof of intent (11).

This strengthens the case for maritime-domain awareness, cyber protection, infrastructure monitoring and crisis-management mechanisms within the broader partnership.

Cyprus therefore performs two functions simultaneously: it is an enabler of regional connectivity and a pressure point through which wider geopolitical tensions can affect that connectivity.

8. Managing Political Difference

Strategic depth also depends on the ability to manage disagreement. Greece does not share every Israeli position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while Israel does not necessarily share every Greek diplomatic preference. These differences need not automatically undermine security cooperation.

The relevant principle is **strategic compartmentalisation without strategic fragmentation**. States can maintain disagreement in one policy area while preserving cooperation in others when the functional value of the relationship remains sufficiently high.

The Israeli-Turkish experience again provides a useful contrast. The deterioration of a previously close relationship demonstrates the risks of excessive dependence on political convergence. A more diversified relationship, by contrast, can draw its resilience from multiple institutional and functional foundations.

Strategic depth should therefore be understood not as the absence of disagreement, but as the capacity to preserve strategically valuable cooperation despite disagreement.

9. Strategic Depth and Regional Balance

The long-term objective should not necessarily be a formal Greek-Israeli alliance. A structured security partnership could provide a more adaptable framework without creating an automatic obligation to enter every conflict on behalf of the other.

Its potential regional effect would derive from the cumulative resilience created by these mechanisms rather than from the formation of an exclusive bloc against another state. Better threat detection, greater interoperability, stronger infrastructure protection and faster crisis coordination can raise the operational and political costs of coercive disruption.

This distinction is important. A partnership built primarily around a common adversary may weaken if threat perceptions change. A partnership built around complementary capabilities and institutionalised resilience retains value even when the regional environment evolves.

The strategic sequence is therefore:

different strategic perceptions → differentiated capabilities → strategic complementarity → institutionalisation → joint management of regional risks → strategic resilience → strategic depth.

The final outcome would not be strategic identity. It would be a more capable regional security architecture in which different forms of power reinforce one another.

Conclusion

The strategic potential of the relationship therefore lies not in eliminating differences, but in organising them into a durable division of capabilities.

Israel contributes advanced defence technology, operational experience and defence innovation. Greece contributes European and transatlantic institutional access, geographic position and regional networks. The Achilles Shield agreement demonstrates how these assets can be combined without requiring either state to adopt the strategic logic of the other (1).

The Greece-Cyprus-Israel framework adds another layer by connecting bilateral defence cooperation with maritime security, critical infrastructure and regional connectivity (8).

The next stage could therefore be the gradual construction of a regional security partnership rather than a conventional alliance. Such a framework would not eliminate political differences or guarantee automatic strategic alignment. It would instead create mechanisms through which complementary capabilities could be employed together when interests overlap.

If sustained, this process could make Greece and Israel not merely closer partners, but a core security partnership within a wider Eastern Mediterranean architecture, with the potential to affect the regional balance by increasing resilience, connectivity and the costs of destabilisation.

Strategic depth is produced when strategic difference becomes functional. Regional influence emerges when that complementarity becomes institutionalised.

Endnotes

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- (5) Jonathan Ghariani, "Turkish-Israeli Relations: 'The Golden Years', 1991–2000," *Israel Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2024): 5–24.
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- (9) Israel Ministry of Defense, "Israel MOD Director General Baram: Israel Must Prepare for a New Regional Architecture as Iran Threat Grows," 30 June 2026.
- (10) European Commission, Answer to European Parliament Parliamentary Question E-000494/26, 16 April 2026.
- (11) European Parliament, Parliamentary Question E-001072/2026, "Türkiye obstructs cable-laying project once again," 16 March 2026.

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