

Between Kinship and Calculus: A Comparative Study of Melian and Palestinian Expectations in Asymmetric Conflicts

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore the theme of abandoned allies in an asymmetrical war through comparing two cases charged with history, ideology and realpolitik – the Melians' expectations of Spartan intervention against the Athenian imperial designs during the Peloponnesian War, and Palestinian aspirations of Turkish support in their war against Israel. Integrating realism and constructivism, the study reveals that the strategic necessity clashes with the ethnic and religious solidarity and general rules of morality, justice and divine favor. Therefore, the small nations and marginalized communities undergo political disappointment and humanitarian crisis. Thucydides's account of Melian Dialogue and Palestinian expectations from Turkey against Israel demonstrate that ethnic, ideological and religious solidarity are subordinated to the strategic calculus. The results show that the moral appeals in the international relations are a weak case, and instruct the small nations and communities to broaden their support base instead of over-relying on a single power.

Keywords: Asymmetric conflicts, abandoned allies, Melian Dialogue, Palestinian expectations, Spartan intervention, Turkish support, Realism, Constructivism.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, smaller states and marginalized communities have attributed their expectations to ethnically, ideologically and religiously allied superior states. Such expectations are not always met with action, however. The history of Melos in 416 BCE and Palestine in the 21st century exemplify this dynamic where both smaller nations met a tragic destiny. The weaker state appealed to a stronger ally – Sparta and Turkey respectively, invoking a shared identity and moral justification. However, the stronger ally didn't act decisively, instead chose restraint to serve strategic interests rather than pursuing the principle of solidarity (Thucydides, 1919/400 BCE, Book, Chapters, 84-116, pp. 400-420; Hanson and Berkey, 2016, pp. 197-215; Yilmaz and Morieson, 2023; Bishku, 2024; Goren and Lindenstrauss, 2024, p. 115).

Melian Dialogue, the conversation recorded by Thucydides, dramatizes the conflict between Melos and Athens, revealing the crude nature of power politics. Melos was a small island nation, ethnically affiliated with Sparta, and refused to yield to the Athenian imperialism because of the idea that Spartan brotherhood and justice would protect them. The Spartan affiliation and calls to honor and divine justice were received with Athenian cynicism and, ultimately, annihilation. This episode has been used as a canonical foundation of realist thinking in international relations, in which the use of moralist arguments is subordinated to the strategic calculus (Morgenthau, 1954, p. 25; Waltz, 1979, p. 127; Wirtz, 2022).

In contemporary parallel, the Palestinian fights to establish state harbor expectations of backing by regional powers, especially Turkey. In response, Turkish leaders have also issued rhetorical support to the

Palestinian cause several times in reference to the notion of Islamic brotherhood, historical responsibility and the humanitarian grounds. However, as powerful words and symbolic gestures, Turkey has not intervened directly or terminated relations with Israel to serve its economic interests, NATO commitments and regional stability (Özcan, 2018; Daloglu, 2023; Bonzon, 2023). The disjunction between rhetoric and action is similar to the Melian experience, in which symbolic kinship didn't materialize into material support.

These are not accidents but recurrences in international politics: the conflict between normative obligations and strategic interests. The fact that collective identity based on ethnicity, religion or ideology should translate to military favor has frequently proved to be an illusion. Such disjunction has far-reaching psychological and political implications on the weaker actor – disillusionment, re-strategizing and, alternately, even existential breakdown. The Melian and Palestinian experience, thus, can be considered an educative case study in the analysis of the limitations of solidarity in asymmetric power relations (Gallo, 2009). This empowers the strong to do whatever they can and the weak are forced to bear whatever they can't is realist logic, dramatized by Thucydides in the Melian Dialogue, which reveals the ineffectiveness of moral appeals in the power vacuum (Buzar, 2025).

Likewise, the example of Palestinian resistance to Israeli securitization policies constitutes ontological counter-securitization when identity politics has been turned into a tactic to deal with structural asymmetry, and not a marker of solidarities (Jamal, 2020).

This paper explores political and psychological aspects of the essence of such unfulfilled anticipations. It poses the question: Why are mighty allies restrained although they support each other rhetorically and have identical identity? What have been the theoretical frames to this behavior? So what are the implications to modern diplomacy and struggle?

To address these questions, the research uses a dual-theoretical model – realism and constructivism. Realism assumes that states are rational actors who will act in terms of survival, power, and national interest. It considers international politics as the anarchic place where the morality is compromised for the strategic gain. Therefore, Sparta and Turkey behaved accordingly: they assessed that their security or interests were at risk by intervening and thus they did not act (Springer, 2024; Sharova and Cohen, 2025). Constructivism, in its turn, focuses on the contribution the shared identity, values and norms make in shaping state behavior. It asks the question of why symbolic appeals are made, the reception of these appeals and how the cultural or historical context applies in interpretation of solidarity (Bader, 2001; Ullah, 2025). To compare Melian and the Palestinian situations, the paper has shown how symbolic appeals which are based on shared ethnicity, religion and ideology tend to run against the grim realities of strategic decision-making.

Furthermore, the paper investigates the articulation of these dynamics by discourse and representation. In both instances, the losing side presented an account of moral righteousness – Melos by an appeal to justice and the goodwill of gods, Palestine by an appeal to the religious solidarity, ancient wrongs and international law. These were not just rhetorically beautiful flourishes but actually strategic weapons whose goal was to seek sympathies of the rest of the world and justify resistance (Liebeschuetz, 2013).

However, the allies' failing to respond materially exposes the fragility of discursive strategies too in the face of hard power. It also brings the ethical issues of the strong states that invoke solidarity and fail to deliver (Aras, 2002; Al Zo'by and Ben Labidi, 2025).

Furthermore, the comparative study of Melos and Palestine reflects the role of performative diplomacy. Turkey has been so vocal in support to Palestine, like Sparta was to Melos, and it has little interest to

intervene and more to do with domestic and regional purpose to serve. The realist studies of Melian Dialogue conducted by James (2024) argue that kinship-based alliance mask strategic restraint, revealing how symbolic rhetoric secures hegemonic interests rather than deliver on moral obligations.

Lefteratos (2025) discusses the post-2012 diplomatic strategy of Palestine for the performative statehood, wherein nominal recognition and UN engagements are employed to simulate sovereignty under occupation. Through this, the rhetorical solidarity is turned into a kind of political theatre – indicating virtue but without cost. Prantl & Goh (2021) argue that rhetorical statecraft – flag diplomacy and symbolic recognition – can signify in strategies to legitimize the contested states, mainly within larger frameworks of 21st century diplomacy and political competition. Bilgic (2024) expands this dynamic further, arguing that states advocating humanitarian causes without committing material support, in fact, perform to seek status in international politics. According to Prantl and Goh (2024), the 21st century strategic diplomacy relies on symbolic gestures to maneuver in complex systems and situations, where material support is replaced with performative statecraft. The performative symbolic phenomenon is preponderate in international politics, where symbolic gestures substitute action. Therefore, for the resistance movements – struggling to navigate the complex landscape of international advocacy – it is crucial to understand the dynamic of performative politics, particularly when the recognition is delinked with action or material support.

Beyond academic interest, this comparison practically impact small nations, vulnerable communities and policymakers. It cautions against overreliance on rhetorical allies and prudence in alliance forming. In her critique of neo-realist regional diplomacy, Rehan (2023) demonstrates that symbolic gesture veil structural constraints that shape the state behavior. Furthermore, Heron (2025) develops a perspective of regional neo-realism, which argues that resource asymmetry and geographic pressures determine alliance behavior rather than ideological similarities. Emphasizing the need of diversified engagement in disputed regions, Norlyanti et al (2025) invokes Indonesian strategy against Russia, indicative of maintaining calculated autonomy rather than joining Russian camp.

The movements need to think critically about the interests and constrained capabilities of the potential supporters and realize that common identity does not necessarily mean material assistance. Hobson (2024) warns that the Universalist statements of neo-realism tend to obscure Western-centric beliefs that pervert the predictions of solidarity in postcolonial situations. They also need to build independent and internal resilience, resistance abilities and local endorsement and backing, and not to delegate their survival to external forces. This way, they will prevent the tragic end of Melos and soften down the disappointment of not expecting something promising.

Finally, the paper can contribute to the further investigation of the phenomenon of moral expectation and political calculation in asymmetric conflicts. Brankin (2024) stresses that the realist models, in particular, the models based on strategic restraint and state-centric power, provide a realistic perspective according to which one can look at Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its implications. It is a challenge of solidarity romanticism and a prediction of the strategic rationality of state behavior. Placing the Melian and Palestinian cases in the broader theoretical and historical context, it provides the perspectives of the long-standing questions of power and identity and resistance in international relations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Melian Dialogue in Classical Thought

The History of the Peloponnesian War by Thucydides remains a classic in classical political theory and the basis of the realist paradigm of international relations. The Melian Dialogue specifically justifies the

conflict between imperial Athens and the neutral island of Melos; thus, enabling to stress a distinct power imbalance, along with accentuating the limited effectiveness of moral appeals in combating competitive control on the strategic landscape. Some scholars like Morgenthau (1954, p. 25) and Waltz (1979, p. 127), consider this episode as canonical foundation of realist thought: states prefer survival and power over the ideas of morality, justice, friendship, ideological similarity, religious solidarity or ethnic affinity.

The refusal of Melos to surrender to the Athenian imperialism was based on a belief in godly righteousness, Spartan ethnic connections and the ethical justification to assert the neutrality. However, such appeals produced the usual response of cynicism in Athens, best summed up in a statement of Thucydides that the powerful actually do and the powerless will have and must have to bear (Thucydides, 1919/2009, pp.400-420). The destruction of Melos has been interpreted as a warning example of what may go wrong with idealism in international politics. Scholars like Doyle (1986) and others have reexamined the dialogue to explore the fallacies of liberalism, constructivism and the institutionalism; and thus, the enduring relevance of realist scepticism is reaffirmed.

The psychological and rhetorical elements of the Melian position have also been questioned in the modern scholarship. An example is Lebow (2003) who argues that the position of the Melos is an ideal tragic misunderstanding of the nature of power relations based on cultural arrogance and blind trust in the intervention of Sparta. The fact that Sparta did not intervene, even though it had common, Dorian roots and was nominal in their alliance, is a reassurance of the realist claim that the shared identity, ethics and divine justice are secondary to the strategic needs. In turn, this episode serves as a historical template to study the loss in connection between rhetorical solidarity and material support.

Palestinian Diplomacy and Turkish Rhetoric

The Israeli-Palestinian crisis has produced a vast and varied amount of scholarly literature, enriching the fields of international relations, Middle Eastern studies, and political communication. The scholarship centers on the role of regional powers, especially that of Turkey. With the coming of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey has presented itself to be an active supporter of Palestinian rights, often criticizing Israeli actions and advocating humanitarian interventions. Erdoğan frequently appeals to Islamic brotherhood, the Ottoman heritage, and moral duty, which constitute a way of making Turkey a self-evident ally of the people of Palestine (Taşkın, 2019).

Nevertheless, according to the scholars such as Khalidi (1997, pp. 63-118) and Bayraktar (2019), there is a gap in the rhetorical posture of Turkey and the strategic action taken. Turkey has maintained both economic and diplomatic relations with Israel regardless of the strong language and the symbolic gestures such as hosting Hamas leaders and sponsoring aid flotillas. In fact, Turkey's NATO membership, regional strategic necessities and economic interdependency with Israel limit its capability to intervene on the side of Palestine. This disconnect between oratory and action is a repeated occurrence in international politics, where performative solidarity usually masks strategic inaction (Yilmaz, 2020).

This tension has been amply addressed by the constructivist scholars. According to Wendt (1999, pp. 1-44, 215-22, 309-319) identity, norms and values influence the state preferences and behavior but do not override the state's material interests. The Islamic identity of Turkey and historical relations to Palestine create normative expectations of assistance; the normative expectations are, nevertheless, weighed according to a realist approach towards the cost-benefit analysis. This turns out to be some kind of rhetorical entrapment where states show solidarity without action (Hopf, 2002, pp. 3-18, 71-74, 268-273).

In addition, another strategic weakness by the Palestinian leadership has been seen in their dependence on symbolic allies. The appeals to pan-Islamic or pan-Arab solidarity often do not have concrete consequences which leave the Palestinians vulnerable to changes in geopolitical wind. The Melian experience is reflected on this relationship when faith in kinship and justice was tragically mistaken (Naser-Najjab, 2020, pp. 3-5, 17-19, 183-187).

Realism and Constructivism in International Relations

The Melian and Palestinian case analysis is based on the theoretical discussion between realism and constructivism which offers an ample argumentation. The theory of realism delineated by Morgenthau (1954, p. 25), Waltz (1979, p. 127) and Mearsheimer (2001) assume that states act in an anarchic world as rational actors, striving for survival, power and national interest. The scholars further argue that though the constructivist assumptions of identity, morality, norms, values, ideological similarities and history are valued in the international relations, the states regard the realist assumption of pursuit of national interest as the first priority. Therefore, compared to the national interest and the national security, the constructivist assumptions of norms, values, morality and ideology are rendered irrelevant.

Constructivism, in its turn, questions the material determinism of the realist theory. Finnemore (1996, pp. 1-25, 129-154), Adler (1997) and Wendt (1999, pp. 1-44, 215-221, 309-319) promote the idea that international politics is socially constructed and influenced by common ideas, identities and norms. States are culturally constructed to act from and interpret based on historical accounts and cultural identities, rather than simply as a material incentive. With this approach, it is possible to take a closer look at rhetorical solidarity, symbolic appeal, and emotional aspects of diplomacy.

The new scholarship has attempted to reconcile schemes which have seen identity and interest as not necessarily mutually exclusive. Checkel (1998) suggests that there should be a middle ground in which norms should affect strategic behavior, but not to dictate it. This perspective shows that Turkey's support to Palestine is based on narratives of identity, and also Sparta's expected support to Melos was based on identity, but it was limited by the realist calculations. The impossibility of intervening is not the dismissal of solidarity as such, but necessitates survival and stability.

The psychological aspect of expectation and disappointment is another dynamic that is revealed in this hybrid method. Sharing the identity, the weaker party makes a moral claim that clash with the strategic gain of the stronger side very often. The disillusionment met by Melos and Palestine is a battle between normative aspiration and political reality. Thus, researchers such as Mercer (2005) address the role of emotions, trust, and betrayal in international interactions; therefore, contributing to the analysis of the rhetorical abandonment aspect of international relations.

Discourse, Symbolism, and Strategic Miscalculation

Supra-theoretical, the scholarship deeply looks into the discursive and symbolic aspects of alliance-building. In the Melian and the Palestinian cases, the weaker parties had created rhetoric of ethical claim, Melos with cries to heavenly justice and ethnic ties, Palestine with appeals to historic injustice and Islamic unity. These accounts serve not just as rhetorical flourishes but as tactically used instruments that create an external social reservoir and programs of legitimization.

The impracticality of such discursive strategies is revealed by the failure of allies to respond to them in a material manner, however. One more scholar, Ganz (2024, p. 45) assert that discourse creates the possibilities of action, but cannot replace power. Performativity of solidarity, particularly in media

diplomacy era, produces a spectacle of solidarity that does not necessarily have a tangible effect. The Turkish televised denunciations of Israel, similar to Sparta's silent kinship with Melos, are not commitments to tailor the strategic equation, but to mobilize the domestic and regional political support (Milliken, 1999).

This vast body of literature warns against the overreliance on the rhetorical allies and requires the independence-seeking or resistance movements beware of the constraints the realism places on the big powers. According to Barnett (1999), diplomacy must offer a balance between the normative appeal and material help. The movements also should critically examine the interests and limitations of the potential allies, and always bear in mind that collective identity doesn't necessarily mean the physical support (Acharya, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

This research uses a dual-theoretical frame – realism and constructivism – to gauge the political and psychological impact of rhetorical abandonment on the small nations and oppressed and repressed communities during asymmetrical conflicts. The juxtaposition of a historical Melos situation with the modern day Palestinian plight provides the nuanced understanding of the rules and roles of oratory and intervention that help form alliances, expectations and constraints.

Realism: Strategic Rationality and the Primacy of Power

Realism, one of the major and early international relations theories, presupposes that the world is anarchic, lacks international central authority; therefore, the states act rationally to focus on survival, power and national interest rather than other concerns. Hans Morgenthau, a classical realist, (1954, p. 25) insist on the national interest primacy, instead of the moral considerations. He further argues that the political ethics should be grounded in prudence, as opposed to the idealism. The structural realists such as Waltz (1979, p. 127) further contend that the uneven distribution of power sets limitations and restrictions on state behavior, and view the production of results according to the state capabilities rather than state intentions and identities.

The fact that Sparta did not intervene on the side of Melos is seen through a realist lens, as a calculated move. Although Melian had strong cultural and ethnic roots with Sparta, the Spartan decision to refrain from entering the war was made according to the fact of Spartan strategic exhaustion, domestic unrest and fear of escalation. Thucydides' record of this episode states the reality that Athenians acted out of brutal pragmatism and Melos demonstrated naïvety. Appeals to the divine justice and kinship were flagrantly ignored by Athenians who stressed that the international affairs are conducted not by morality, but by power. This realist interpretation of Thucydides implies that Melos misjudged the character of the interstate relations, and believed in symbolic relationships that didn't serve Spartan purpose of strategic advantage. Moreover, the recent scholarship confirms by contending that Thucydides is not, in fact, an orthodox representative of realism, but he elaborates the niceties of power, morality and political imperatives (Wassermann, 2023).

Similarly, given the realist imperatives, the Turkish support to Palestinians is also limited to rhetoric. Although Israel has conducted several and numerous operations against Palestine, Turkey has confined itself only to the verbal condemnation. The Turkish restrained behavior against Israel is dictated by the realist terms of seeking of national interest – economic ties with Israel, its NATO membership and regional stability.

Realistically, the actions of Turkey are in line with the self-preservation logic and prudence strategy. Rhetoric can be influenced by the impulse of moral outrage or ideological affinity but cannot override the calculus of cost and benefit, as recent studies have demonstrated existing tensions between ideology posturing and pragmatic policy, especially following the attempts of Justice and Development Party to seek strategic autonomy in foreign policy towards Israel (Altunisik, 2024).

Realism therefore offers a strong explanatory instrument as to why states do not normally deliver on rhetoric commitments. It has amply revealed that shared identity and moral obligations can be usually abandoned in the face of state's core interests. Both the Melian and the Palestinian scenarios show the ugly reality of solidarity being often sacrificed on the subject of strategic necessity in realism.

Constructivism: Identity, Norms, and Symbolic Expectations

Constructivism is a contrasting theory of realism. Its assumptions are grounded in norms, values and ideological bonds in international relations and politics. Constructivist theorists don't view the states as strictly rational actors; they believe that identities, norms and shared narratives influence the state behavior. The renowned Constructivist scholar Wendt (1999, pp. 1-44, 215-221, 309-319) famously asserted that "anarchy is what states make of it", suggesting that states are not essential colliding billiards, but socially interact. Finnemore (1996, pp. 1, 25, 129 154) elaborates further on the role of norms and shared identity in shaping the state behavior.

The constructivists view, the appeals of Melos to the kinship empire of Spartan were not irrational in nature but based on culture and norms. The Melians, like Sparta herself, being fellow-Dorian and allies of the Peloponnesian League, thought Sparta morally and fraternally were obliged to go to their aid. They shared a common identity and they believed in righteousness, divine blessings that influenced their expectations. The Spartan inaction was not only a strategic disappointment, but a symbolic betrayal – a rupture in the moral justification of alliance; as recent scholarship sheds light on the importance of inter-communal identity and normative expectations as the factors influencing Melian appeals and Spartan inaction (Koutsoukis, 2023).

Similarly, the constructivist dynamics characterize the Palestinian position. Palestinian leaders and people have been relying on Islamic solidarity, historical injustices, and humanitarian grounds to seek support from the regional powers, especially from Turkey. Erdoğan uses Ottoman-era legacy, Islamic brotherhood and moral responsibility to strengthen the perception that Turkey is a natural ally of Palestine. This type of discursive practice forms a normative desire of support, and it is reinforced through identity sharing and public proclamations. The recent constructivist interpretations underline that the symbolic interaction between Turkey and the Palestinian cause is an identity-oriented foreign policy and not a decision aimed at pure strategic analysis (Aydin- Düzgit & Rumelili, 2021).

However, the expectations constructivism generates are also exposed to frailty. Identities and norms are not absolute, they are argued over, interpreted, and politically used. The Islamic identity of Turkey can create rhetorical solidarity yet its foreign policy is influenced by various normative commitments – regional stability, economic growth and alliance obligations. This disjunction between discourse and action is indicative of a conflict in Turkey's identity narrative and the foreign policy driven by strategic restraint (SpecialEurasia, 2025).

Constructivist theorists such as Hopf (2002, pp. 3-18, 71-74, 268-273) claims that identity influences the state behavior. In Palestinian case, Turkey as a Muslim majority state and the regional power feels pressure to uphold Palestinian position, but its rival interests and norms delineate boundaries to operate within. This

leads to a kind of rhetorical entrapment, where states can say they are in solidarity, but don't commit material support. This dynamic reflects the Melian experience where imaginary kinship was not converted into material support.

Integrating Realism and Constructivism: A Dual Lens

Although the realism and constructivism perspectives are distinct, this paper combines both in order to understand the intricacy of the rhetorical abandonment. Realism elaborates what keeps states away from direct intervention: strategic burden, system pressures and power imbalances dictate the decision making (Barkin, 2023). Constructivism, in its turn, illuminates the origins of such appeals: shared identity, normative expectations, uniform world views and homogeneous narratives establish a claim of solidarity (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998).

To analyze the topic while applying more than one single theoretical framework, the reductionism is sufficiently reduced. The study recognizes that the states' action is warranted by both the material interests and ideological homogeneity, the interplay of both produces the gap between expectations and reality. The rhetorical appeals made by Melian and Palestinians were not illogical and unsound; they were based on norms; however, strategically illogical and unsound – abandonment, disillusionment and annihilation ensued.

This model also explores to comprehensively understand the psychological and emotional dimensions of international relations. The holding back of military support by allies renders not only strategic loss but also generates symbolic trauma. When the allies repudiate and dismiss the kinship and moral claims, the feelings of humiliation, betrayal and existential untenability are engendered. The scholars like Mercer (2005) have studied the influence of emotions and feelings on diplomacy, arguing that the allies' abandonment negatively impact the shared identity, trust and plays a profound blow on the resistance movements.

Implications for Resistance and Diplomacy

The combination of constructivism and realism propositions generates practical implications on the diplomacy and the resistance movements of the marginalized communities and the small nations. It warns against total dependence on rhetorical allies and realizes the need of strategic pragmatism in alliance-making. Movements should carefully assess the interests, potential and limitations of the potential allies, as a shared ethnicity doesn't guarantee joining the war in support (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2023). Simultaneously, it should be understood that as how the shared ethnicity, narratives, values and norms form the expectations and how the symbolic appeals simultaneously help and ditch (Ogbajie et al., 2023).

Thus, this approach enables a thorough understanding of the international relations, which combines both the material and symbolic, and strategic and emotional dynamics. This dual theoretical approach provides a framework which facilitates to understand not only the state behavior but also the expectations, frustrations and alliance-recalibrations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper employs the qualitative comparative research methodology to investigate the phenomenon of abandoned allies in asymmetrical wars, studying the two historically and politically distinct cases: the annihilation of Melos in 416-BCE and modern day Palestinian struggle. The comparative analysis enables the understanding of as how the small nations and weaker communities attach expectations of solidarity

with the stronger ally based on the shared identity and as how the stronger ally responds or fail to respond, operating within the constraints of strategic necessity and the normative obligations.

Case Selection and Justification

The selection of Melos and Palestine cases is based on the purposeful sampling, which illustrates the tension between rhetorical solidarity and strategic restraint. In both cases, the small, weak nation appeals to the strong ally – Spartan and Turkey respectively – grounded in the ethnic, religious and ideological solidarity. Both the requesting nations received only rhetorical and diplomatic sympathy but not a military intervention, and resultant abandonment and disillusionment. The Melian situation provides a classical powerful foundation for realist assumptions, whereas the Palestinian case offers a modern prism to the constructivist inquiry (Neumann et al., 2023).

The dual-case approach aligns with the comparative historical analysis (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003, pp. 5-13, 15-17, 33-41), allowing to identify a pattern across time, context and space. The case contrast supports theory-building through variations in a temporal, cultural and geopolitical situation, and also provides alliance behavior in context of interplay between material and symbolic forces.

Data Sources

The study draws on a combination of primary and secondary sources, selected for their relevance, credibility, and interpretive richness.

Primary Sources

- To study Melian situation, the Peloponnesian War Thucydides (Thucydides, 1919/2009, pp. 400-420) recorded serves the foundational purpose. The Melian Dialogue is not only a war history document but also philosophical reflections on the primacy of power, justice and diplomacy.
- In the Palestinian case, the official statements of Turkish government leaders, especially those of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan are analyzed to examine the patterns of solidarity with Palestine. The Turkish stand on Palestine is expressed in the Turkish leaders' statements to the UN General Assembly, national political meetings and global conferences (Taşkın, 2019).
- UN resolutions, diplomatic statements, policy pronouncements concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are used to place Turkey in the context of the existing international standards and legal frameworks (Bayraktar, 2019).

Secondary Sources

- Theoretical literature of Morgenthau (1954, p. 25), Waltz (1979, p. 127), Wendt (1999, pp. 1 44), Finnemore (1996), and Adler (1997) puts foundation to the theories of realism and constructivism.
- Other than Thucydides, scholars such as Kagan (2003, pp. 351-357) have further study the Peloponnesian war to offer deeper understanding of Spartan behavior of strategic restraint and the imperial ambitions of Athenians.
- The works of Khalidi (1997, pp. 63-118) and Yilmaz (2020) have elaborated on the contemporary Middle Eastern diplomacy, Turkish foreign policy with especial reference to the Israel-Palestine affairs and the politics of rhetoric.

- Furthermore, the media reports and the policy briefs of organizations such as Al Jazeera, the International Crisis Group and the Foreign Ministry of Turkey have further expanded the debate on the current discourse and strategic developments in the region of Middle East.

Analytical Framework

The study employs a multi-layered analytical framework combining discourse analysis, strategic analysis, and comparative matrixing.

Discourse Analysis

The phenomenon of abandonment is also study from the perspective of discourse analysis, as how the weaker ally constructs, demonstrates and mobilizes rhetorical appeals. In both cases, the weaker allies – Melos and Palestine – respectively framed their appeals grounded in Dorian kinship and Islamic solidarity. Additionally, the normative principles, ethnic connections and historical ties were also invoked. The study of Milliken (1999) has investigated comprehensively as how discourse generates expectations and creates resonance; even they have little strategic utility. Also, the analysis covers the dimension of performative rhetoric made merely to attract domestic and international audience, without kinetic action. The speeches and statements of Melian and Turkish leadership include the divine justice, godly favor, brotherhood and historical grievances (Hopf, 2002, pp. 3-18, 71-74, 268-273).

Strategic Analysis

The strategic analysis, the one more layer of analysis, is applied to view that why the big allies refrain from intervention despite their rhetorical support. The inquiry involves the examination of cost-benefit calculus, economic interests, alliance commitments and regional stability as concerns of Sparta and Turkey. The study draws on the realist assumptions advanced by Waltz (1979, p. 127) and Mearsheimer (2001) to assess as to what extent the systemic pressures and the national interest override the normative commitments.

For Sparta, failure to assist Melos is contextualized in overall environment of the Peloponnesian war, internal political divisions and provocation of Athens. To Turkey, the membership in NATO, trade ties with Israel and the regional strategic ambitions were the sources of restraint. These constraints create the disjunction between discourse and behavior.

Comparative Matrix

A comparative matrix is constructed to juxtapose expectations and outcomes across both cases. The matrix includes variables such as:

- Type of rhetorical appeal (ethnic, religious, ideological)
- Nature of ally's response (verbal support, symbolic gesture, material action)
- Strategic constraints (military, economic, diplomatic)
- Outcome for the weaker actor (intervention, abandonment, recalibration)

This matrix enables pattern recognition and theory refinement, revealing how symbolic appeals often collide with strategic realities. It also supports the integration of realist and constructivist insights, showing that identity-based expectations are normatively powerful but strategically fragile (Barkin, 2024).

Ethical and Interpretive Considerations

The study follows the strict ethics of representation and impartiality, as the Palestinian case is highly sensitive. To avoid bias, the sources are triangulated, and the rhetorical analysis is put in a broader geopolitical context. The study doesn't seek to validate the claims; it is an attempt to understand the process of expectations and abandonment.

Interpretively, the research identifies the limitations of textual study to capture lived experience. Although the speeches, documents and policy statements may formulate the elite discourse, there is a possibility that the elite discourse may not represent the grassroots and informal diplomacy. Therefore, to provide depth to the analytical frame, the future research should incorporate the ethnographic data, participatory observation or interview.

Methodological Contribution

The methodology applied contributes to the scholarship in the field of international relations in a dual-theoretical framework linking past with the contemporary occurrences. It underscores the value of qualitative comparative methodology to uncover the strategic compulsions and symbolic dimensions in alliance behavior. The study also emphasizes the role of discourse and identity in expectations construction, even though the expectations are usually subordinated to the strategic calculus.

The theoretical integration of realism and constructivism extends the study beyond binary paradigms to comprehensively cover the theme and trend of rhetorical abandonment. This theoretical combination formulates a theoretical model facilitating to study contemporary analogical cases, e.g., the Kurdish appeals to regional powers, Balouch broadening of support base against Pakistani state from India to Afghanistan and Israel, aligning with other domestic and regional non-state actors and Diaspora as well, or post-colonial African states' expectations of solidarity – where identity and interest intersect in a complex way.

RESULTS

Melos and the Spartan Silence

The situation of Melos provides a robust case of disjunction between rhetorical expectations and the strategic calculus Thucydides dramatized in the history of Peloponnesian war. Melos, a small Dorian island state, refused to Athenian imperialism, expecting Sparta a kin state would ensure protection. The Melian invoked divine justice, godly favor and cultural ties with Sparta as a fellow Dorian state and the leader of Peloponnesian League have dual-obligation – moral and strategic to intervene (Thucydides, 1919/2009, pp. 400-420).

However, in the Melian Dialogue, the Athenian representatives dismissed the Melian pleas with brutal clarity. Their argument was that power, not justice governs the international relations and that Melos essentially submit to the Athenian will or face annihilation. The Athenians openly rejected the notion that Sparta would intervene, assessed the Spartan constraints – internal political polarization, strategic fatigue and geographic distance. The outcome of this realist reasoning is upheld in the course of history: Sparta remained passive (Kagan, 2003, pp. 351-357).

Consequently, the Melos meets the disaster. Athens besieges the minor Island nation, murders men and enslaves elderly, women and children. The kinship-based expectations proved catastrophic. Melos reliance on ethnic solidarity and morality – rather than a solid defense alliance and military preparedness – proves

fatal and resultant annihilation. The outcome demonstrates the realist assumptions that states pursue self-preservation rather than oblige the principles of morality, and that the small actors misread the interests and limitations of big powers risk their existence (Morgenthau, 1954, p. 25; Waltz, 1979, p. 127).

Palestine and Turkish Rhetoric

Though placed in a vastly different geo-political context, the contemporary parallel to the Milian scenario is the Palestinian case. Especially, since the beginning of 2000s and Gaza wars, Turkey has been vehemently supporting Palestinian rights. Among Turkish leadership, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been fiercely condemning Israeli actions, invoking humanitarian grounds, Islamic solidarity and Ottoman-era responsibility. Furthermore, in his speeches, Erdoğan has been positioning himself as the leader of the Muslim world, committed to protect the Palestinian honor (Taşkın, 2019).

Despite championing Palestinian cause, Turkey has ever failed to intervene militarily or even cut off diplomatic and trade with Israel. The bilateral trade between Israel and Turkey has been ever growing, and Turkey has still remained NATO-member, which prevents unilateral action against Israel. Also, domestic political polarization, regional stability concerns and economic interdependence limit Turkey's capacity to act decisively (Bayraktar, 2019; Yilmaz, 2020).

Given the constraints, Turkey has reduced its support to only rhetoric – rather than action. Turkey has hosted Hamas leaders, strongly condemned Israel and funded humanitarian aid but has refrained from military backing. The Islamic solidarity, historical brotherhood expectations based on Ottoman heritage and religious identity don't translate into action. For Palestinian, symbolic support without kinetic action couples with disappointment.

The gap between rhetoric and reality reflects the Melos experience. Similarly, as Melos miscalculated the Spartan priorities, Palestinians have also overestimated the Turkish power to confront Israel.

The constraints Turkey faces are not a moral failure but strategic necessity, consistent with realist theory. However, the unmet expectations profoundly impact Palestinian, shaping their perceptions of betrayal and abandonment (Khalidi, 1997, pp. 63-118; Roy, 2007).

Lately, the US President Donald Trump's 20-point Hamas-Israel ceasefire and hostage-release plan has brought the brutal 24-month Israel-Hamas asymmetrical war to halt, which was triggered by Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel. The Trump-brokered Gaza ceasefire and hostage-release plan – which lacks international legal endorsement – makes no reference to the independent, sovereign and distinct state of Palestine (Al Jazeera, 2025). As the ceasefire plan neither affirms the people of Palestine the right of self-determination, nor incorporates in it the framework for the Gaza-West Bank unification, the Middle East peace and conflict experts contend that the ceasefire plan constitutes temporary truce rather than a lasting solution, warning that violence is likely to re-erupt (Asif, 2025).

In fact, the Trump-brokered cease fire plan was announced on Oct 10, 2025 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, barely 26 days prior, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) released findings of its sixtieth session, convened under the theme of "legal analysis of the conduct of Israel in Gaza pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of the Genocide". The findings of the report concluded that, by all the established legal definitions of genocide, the state of Israel has committed the genocide in Gaza. According to the report 60,199 human were killed, of whom 18,430 were children and 9,735 were women (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2025, p. 7).

In the light of intense aerial bombardment by Israeli forces on Gaza over the preceding 24 months, Hamas expressed scepticism regarding the credibility and the durability of the Trump-brokered ceasefire initiative. To facilitate implementation, President Trump enlisted the diplomatic support of Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, whose longstanding ties with Hamas positioned Ankara as a critical intermediary. Despite operational fatigue, Hamas initially resisted the ceasefire and hostage-release proposal. However, under direct pressure from Erdoğan – widely regarded as Hamas’s principal patron – the group acquiesced. Erdoğan subsequently signed the agreement, assuming the role of co-guarantor (Nakhoul, Gumrukcu, & Toksabay, 2025; Rogers & Reuters, 2025).

According to Nakhoul, Gumrukcu, and Toksabay (2025) and Rogers & Reuters (2025), Erdoğan’s endorsement of the plan served Turkey’s broader geopolitical and defense interests: countering balancing Arab rivals such as Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt, advancing negotiations for U.S. F-35 and F-16 fighter jets, and seeking relief from the U.S. sanctions impeding the acquisition of Russia’s S-400 air defense system. The move also signaled Ankara’s aspirations to revive Ottoman-era influence across the region. As strategic necessity, President Erdoğan aims to suppress the threat of Kurdish insurgency emanating from Syria by advocating the integration of U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) into the Syrian national army. Turkish authorities remain concerned that continued U.S. support for the SDF could deepen its operational and ideological ties to the Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK), which Ankara designates as a terrorist organization.

Although president Erdoğan played a pivotal role in persuading Hamas to accept the ceasefire plan and he himself assumed the position of co-guarantor, Israel resumed aerial bombardment, resulting in around 400 fatalities and numerous injuries. Ankara’s response, however, remained limited to diplomatic condemnation (Newsroom, 2025, para. 2). Just as Spartan abandoned Melos to its tragic fate amid the Athenian invasion, President Erdoğan of Turkey has similarly been criticized for compromising the profound human sacrifices made by Palestinians in their pursuit of an independent state.

Comparative Matrix of Expectations and Outcomes

To synthesize these findings, the study constructs a comparative matrix highlighting key dimensions of rhetorical appeal and strategic response:

| Dimension | Strategic response | |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| | Melos & Sparta | Palestine & Turkey |
| Shared Identity | Dorian Heritage, Peloponnesian League | Islamic Identity, Ottoman Legacy |
| Rhetorical Appeal | Justice, divine favor, kinship | Human rights, religious duty, Historical Responsibility |
| Strategic Constraints | War Fatigue, Geographic Distance, Internal Politics | NATO Membership, economic Ties, Regional Stability |
| Ally’s Response | Passive Silence, No Intervention | Symbolic Support, no direct action |
| Outcome | Melos destroyed | Palestine remains under occupation |

This matrix reveals a consistent pattern: rhetorical appeals based on identity and morality generates expectations of support, but strategic constraints often prevent material intervention. In both cases, the weaker actor constructs a narrative of entitlement, while the stronger ally calculates risk and refrains from action. The result is rhetorical abandonment – a phenomenon where symbolic solidarity fails to translate into strategic commitment.

The Emotional and Political Consequences

For both – Melos and Palestine – beyond strategic outcomes, there are major emotional and political consequences. For Melos, the Spartan restraint was not merely a tactical failure but a symbolic betrayal. The Melians believed in a system the morality, justice and kinship govern; however, their annihilation embodies the failure of this system. The Melian tragedy Thucydides recorded and other medieval and modern realist theorists expounded further caution against moral naivety in international politics (Lebow, 2003).

Likewise, to Palestinians, the Turkish support creates emotional landscape. Erdoğan’s speeches affirm the Palestinian identity and resistance. However, symbolic affirmation bereft of military intervention, breeds frustration, disillusionment and skepticism. This dynamic of behavior affects the mobilization on the grassroots level where communities recalibrate the expectations and alliances (Mercer, 2005).

In both situations, the rhetorical abandonment creates rupture between expectations and reality, interest and identity and strategy and morality. This divide is not merely theoretical – it constructs the lived experience, political behavior and the course of the resistance movements.

DISCUSSION

Interpreting Rhetorical Abandonment through Realism

The findings of this research reaffirm the realist propositions that states chose power, state survival and national interest over moral obligations and ethnicity-based solidarity. In both cases, the powerful allies – Sparta and Turkey – observed restraints over direct military action against Athens and Israel respectively, reading system constraints and cost-benefit calculations. This state behavior is consistent with the realist assumptions propounded by Morgenthau (1954, p. 25), Waltz (1979, p. 127) and Mearsheimer (2001) who argue that anarchy and national interest govern the international politics.

The Spartan inaction to the Melian pleas mirrors the calculated risk assessment. Taking on Athens militarily would have menaced the Spartan internal stability and strategic position. Similarly, the Turkish posture reduced merely to the rhetoric against Israel is based on the NATO obligations, economic interdependence, and regional ambitions. In both scenarios, the strategic necessity subordinates identity and rhetoric. Thus, the results warn against the romanticizing alliances based on the shared identity, culture and religion. Realists educate that the states don’t act out of humanity – they are moved only to secure their interests. For weaker states, the rhetorical appeals must be based on the strategic realities, not on the idealistic assumptions.

Constructivist Insights: Identity, Norms, and Symbolic Power

While the realism explains inaction, the constructivism helps understand why the rhetorical appeals are made and why they resonate. Constructivist researchers like Finnemore (1996, pp. 11-25, 129-154), Adler (1997) and Wendt (1999, pp. 144), 215-221, 309-319) assume that norms and shared identity and narratives

constitute state behavior. In both situations, the solidarity claims the small actor makes on the stronger ally are grounded on norms and shared ethnicity, identity and religion and historical ties.

Melos placed faith in the normative order and rule-based system that bound Sparta to help Melians, while Palestinians invoked historical and religious obligations to extract Turkish support. The appeals made are not irrational – they reflect expectations deeply rooted in ethnicity, norms and religion. The constructivism teaches how the shared identity shapes diplomacy, public opinion and emotional capital.

However, constructivism also exposes the sustainability of symbolic power. Ethnicity and norms are disputed, and strategic needs neutralize their effectiveness. Islamic brotherhood creates symbolic and rhetorical solidarity in Turkey for Palestinians, but it can't override the Turkish geo-political and economic interests. Likewise, the Dorian heritage couldn't compel Spartans to intervene when the cost was high. The result is gap between normative expectations and military help – a theme validated in constructivist analysis (Checkel, 1998; Hopf, 2002, pp. 318, 71-74, 268-273).

The Interplay of Realism and Constructivism

Integrating realism and constructivism, this study gives a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of rhetorical abandonment. Realism educates why states don't act; constructivism explains why they should act. The dialectical tension between the two paradigms reveals complex nature of international relations, where identity and interest operate simultaneously.

The dual-theoretical approach also expounds the psychological dimension of diplomacy. When the big allies fail to deliver on rhetoric, the psychological impact can be immense. The feelings of betrayal, humiliation and existential vulnerability ensue, shaping recalibration of political behavior and resistance. Thus, international politics experts, especially Mercer (2005) highlight the importance of the emotion in the international politics; thus, propose that the rhetorical abandonment is not merely a strategic failure but a psychological trauma.

Implications for Resistance Movements

The findings of this study carry important lessons to the resistance movements and vulnerable communities. The research cautions against overreliance on rhetorical allies. Although common identity and moral rhetoric generate symbolic support, the symbolic support doesn't guarantee material support very often. The movements must critically assess interests and constraints of the potential allies, recognizing that strategic realism usually prevails.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the phenomenon of rhetorical abandonment by comparing two historically and geopolitically distinct cases: Melos and Sparta in classic antiquity and Palestine and Turkey in the contemporary Middle East. Temporally and contextually vastly distinct, both cases produce identical results – the weaker actors harbor expectations rooted in shared identity, moral obligations and identical narratives, only to meet inaction from their powerful allies. This incongruity between rhetoric and action underscores the dialectical tension between normative ideals and realist constraints in international relations.

The Melian situation Thucydides dramatized embodies the crude nature of power politics. Relying on kinship, morality and divine justice, Melos misjudged the Spartan strategic calculus and paid the final price. Unencumbered by morality, the Athens acted swiftly to preserve their imperial interests. Culturally similar

to Melos, Spartans held back – calculating high cost of intervention proved shared identity alone is insufficient to act. Similarly, in modern diplomacy, Palestinian situation unveils the limits of rhetorical support. Despite basing Palestinian cause on Islamic brotherhood, Turkey has consistently observed cautious to secure its geo-political interest, economic ties and alliance obligations rather than engaging Israel militarily, what sets the pattern of symbolic support without intervention.

Both cases corroborate the realist assumptions that states behave to preserve survival, gain power and strategic ends.

The normative and identity-based appeals influence the discourse, but hardly override the strategic interests. The weaker actors are needed to recalibrate their expectations. They must make alliances not only on the basis of shared values but also evaluate the strategic interests that shape the state behavior. As seen in the cases of Melos and Palestine, the dependence on solidarity leads to the fatal consequences.

Nevertheless, realism alone is inadequate to explain the persistence and emotional resonance of rhetorical appeals. Constructivism offers an additional source as how shared identities, common narratives and norms shape the diplomatic conduct and public perceptions. Not only in strategic needs but also the expectation of support is deeply embedded in ethnic affinities, common narratives and religious and normative solidarity. Melos laid faith in a system morality, justice and kinship governs; Palestinians appeal to Islamic solidarity. These narratives don't materialize yet are of compelling nature. They demonstrate how actors assess international events, garner support and manufacture legitimacy.

Thus, interaction between realism and constructivism offers a subtle understanding of rhetorical abandonment. Realism elaborates why the allies fail to intervene; constructivism reasons that why allies' inaction feels like betrayal. Furthermore, this dual-theoretical approach emphasizes the symbolic and psychological aspects of diplomacy. When allies fail to act, the emotional consequences – humiliation, betrayal and existential fallibility – can be deep. These feelings redirect not merely diplomatic strategy but also popular mobilization, political identity and resistance narratives as well.

For marginalized communities and small nations, the consequences are both instructive and sobering. First, they must identify the constraints of rhetorical solidarity. While emotionally affirming, the rhetorical support doesn't guarantee military backing. The resistance movements must assess the strategic analysis of big allies, examine their rhetoric along with their power, constraints and will for action. Second, in face of rhetorical abandonment, they are strongly advised to build resilience, alternative sources of support, domestic capacity and redefine narratives make the agency more than dependency.

Third, researchers and practitioners should be willing to question the place of rhetoric in international politics. Rhetorical abandonment is not just an inability to act, but an inability to expect, which is conditioned by memory of the history, identity politics and normative discourse. This phenomenon must be viewed as an interdisciplinary affair spanning the field of political theory, history, psychology and cultural studies. Future studies may consider more cases, and how the media and public opinion help, or how rhetorical abandonment affects the dynamic of the long-term conflicts and peace-building process.

In conclusion, Melos and Palestine debacle demonstrates reoccurrence in inter-state relations: the bondage of friendship usually crumbles in the face of strategic realism. While ethnicity and rhetoric produce expectation of support, they don't ensure action. The psychological and political consequences of this gap are deep, shaping the course and contours of resistance movements and global diplomacy. By combining the insights of realism and constructivism, this study advances a framework for understanding the concept of rhetorical abandonment – not as an incidence but as an integral feature of international politics. The

communities, scholars and policymaker seeking to navigate this complex landscape of global solidarity and strategic engagement must recognize this reality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The situations of Melos and Palestine analyzed under the broader theoretical assumptions drawn from realism and constructivism, the following recommendations are prescribed for the resistance movements, policymakers and scholars to navigate the complexities of rhetorical alliances and strategic engagement.

Strategic Realignment

The resistance movements should not choose allies merely on the basis of shared identity and rhetorical solidarity but on the capacity and will of the allies to act. Given the Spartan and Turkish silence, ideological solidarity doesn't necessarily ensure intervention. The movements must examine the political will, defense capacity and diplomatic flexibility to act significantly. This needs sober assessment of ally's foreign policy necessities, domestic constraints and international commitment. The strategic recalibration may need shifting expectations from symbolic partners to the allies with tangible power and proven will to act.

Diversified Diplomacy

The overdependence on a single ally – especially one mired in geopolitics – causes strategic debacle. The resistance movement must diversify the support base, engaging a wide range of regional and international actors. Multiplying the allies enhances the potential of securing material support, amplifies visibility and decreases the overreliance on a single actor. This strategy involves reaching out to non-state actors, diasporas community, international organizations and transnational human rights advocacies networks. The diversification enables movements triangulate support base, create pressure points at multi-levels and forums of diplomacy and enhance resilience in the times of rhetorical abandonment.

Symbolic vs. Strategic Support

A clear distinction should be made between symbolic support and strategic support. The symbolic acts such as speeches, flag displaying, diplomatic visits and aid funding can boost morale and confidence, but don't endorse strategic support. The movements must formulate criteria to assess the level of support such as military intervention, economic sanctions, diplomatic backing and legal support. The evaluation of depth of support would reduce disillusionment and would help devise effective strategy. Additionally, the distinction between symbolic and strategic support would encourage allies act beyond rhetoric to engagement, establishing accountability in international relations.

Education and Awareness

To educate the small nations, marginalized communities, activists and policymakers about the preeminence of realism, the past cases such as Milian tragedy should be incorporated in curriculum. Understanding the precedence of realism and the limits of identity-based expectations, the movements would be inoculated from false expectations and rhetorical manipulations. The educational programs must involve workshops, popular lectures and curriculum development which would discuss the interactions of realism and constructivism, psychology of abandonment and anatomy of international alliances. This scholarly grounding empowers the communities to understand the diplomatic behavior in a subtle and clear way.

Local Empowerment

Ultimately, for resistance movements the most sustainable strategy lies in building internal resilience. Although external support aids, dependency makes movements vulnerable to rhetorical abandonment and psychological trauma. Local empowerment comprises developing institutional capacity, producing local leadership, investing on education and working on economic self-sufficiency. Furthermore, it involves creating indigenous narratives that accentuate agency, dignity and self-rule. Locally empowered community achieves resilience despite of diplomatic fluctuations, and maintains momentum regardless rhetorical abandonment.

FINAL NOTE

These recommendations are not prescriptive blueprints. They represent strategic orientations – invite contextualization, reflection and adaptation. Each movement operates in respective time and location; therefore, they should tailor strategies accordingly. However, the core theme remains: while emotionally compelling, the rhetorical solidarity can't override strategic necessity. Recognizing this reality – and strategizing accordingly – is critical for navigating chaotic waters of international politics with clarity, endurance and purpose.

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