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Strategic Narrative and War: How the United States Attempts to Manipulate International Audience about the Gaza War?

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Abstract This study examines how the Biden administration attempts to present the Gaza War to target audiences to advance US strategic interests in the Middle East. The examination employs the concept of strategic narrative, focusing specifically on its issue narrative type. During this conflict, Israel's military actions resulted in humanitarian casualties, leading to significant international criticism of the US for its unprecedented support of Israel's operations. Consequently, the Biden administration has made a significant effort to justify US decisions and behaviors regarding the Gaza War through a strategic narrative as a tool of foreign policy. The primary aim for the US in constructing a strategic narrative is to influence and shape the thoughts, decisions, and behaviors of its target audience. This research employs the qualitative narrative method to analyze essential strategic narratives and featured themes. The research concludes that the US primarily aims to legitimize Israel's military campaign in Gaza and justify its unwavering support for Israel before the target audience by emphasizing featured themes such as "war on terror," "national security," "regional deterrence," "survival of Israel," "massacre of Jews".

Keywords The Gaza War · the United States · Strategic Narrative · Foreign Policy · Public Opinion.

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Strategic Narrative and War: How the United States Attempts to Manipulate International Audience about the Gaza War?

Since the onset of the Great Recession in 2008, the structure of the international system has experienced notable transformations. During this period of systemic change, there has been a significant escalation in global and regional competition between existing great powers and emerging powers across various domains. There has also been a noticeable increase in the number of conflicts and wars indirectly involving great powers. Communication power is a crucial element of states' non-material capabilities in the age of digital communication. It is widely acknowledged that international political communication plays a pivotal role in the dynamics of power politics. Specifically, strategic narratives, as a subset of political communication, are recognized as valuable instruments in shaping foreign policy. Through the crafting of strategic narratives, great powers endeavor to persuade and influence international audiences regarding their foreign policy positions and actions amidst ongoing developments. In doing so, states seek to bolster their relative power capacities vis-à-vis rival states. In the realm of U.S. foreign policy, the strategic narrative is extensively utilized by American political leaders. The Gaza War is a case where the U.S. has employed a strategic narrative to guide its messaging to a targeted audience.

Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel caused a new war in the Middle East. Hamas has been designated a terrorist organization by several countries, including the United States, the European Union, Israel, and some Arab countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt). However, internationally, Israel's response to Hamas' attacks has been broadly acknowledged as disproportionate and exceeding stated purposes. There is widespread consensus that Israel has violated international law and committed acts deemed as crimes against humanity and war crimes during these military campaigns. Israel's recent military operation in the Gaza Strip has resulted in a severe humanitarian tragedy, including the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians(47,000 as of January 2025) and the displacement of approximately two million Palestinians. Concurrently, the United States has stood with Israel, offering unprecedented political, economic, and military support. In response to the global criticism of its unwavering pro-Israel stance, the Biden administration perceives it as crucial to clarify and justify its position to international public opinion. To achieve this, the administration has strategically employed narrative as a foreign policy tool, aiming to shape the perceptions of the international audience.

This study primarily seeks to analyze how the Biden administration make effort to influence and shape international public opinion regarding the Gaza War through the strategic use of narrative. Within this framework, the research aims to address two essential questions: Which strategic narratives does the Biden administration attempt to construct regarding the Gaza War? What main themes does the Biden administration feature in its strategic narratives? These questions are explored to gain insights into how the administration constructs and disseminates its narrative to convey its perspective and gain support for its policies related to the Gaza conflict. This study employs propositions and arguments of strategic narrative to identify key themes. The concept of strategic narrative provides a framework to analyze how great powers use strategic communication to influence and persuade a certain target audience toward achieving foreign policy objectives. By applying this framework, the study aims to uncover the underlying themes embedded within the Biden administration's narratives on the Gaza War, shedding light on how these featured themes are strategically crafted and communicated to shape international perceptions and support for U.S. policy

in the region. The main argument of the article is that the Washington administration seeks to justify and legitimize Israel's military operations in Gaza, alongside its extensive support, by reconstructing the social reality regarding the Gaza War.

The concept of strategic narrative has been significantly developed by Laura Roselle, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O'Loughlin through their influential works: "Great Powers Relations and Strategic Narrative" (2010), "Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order" (2013), and "Forging the World: Strategic Narrative and International Relations" (2013). They proposed that strategic narratives typically manifest in three forms: issue narrative, identity narrative, and system narrative. This study specifically focuses on the issue narrative type within the scope of strategic narrative theory. It excludes the examination of identity and system narratives. Furthermore, this research aims to investigate the narratives and themes constructed by the Biden administration rather than assessing their effectiveness on the target audience.

The research methodology employed in this study involves a case study analysis to examine how strategic narratives are formulated and used by political actors. I relied on qualitative narrative method to analyze comprehensive empirical material that closely reflected the Biden administration's narrative initiative. The study's empirical materials consist of press releases, remarks, speeches, addresses and statements related to the Gaza War with President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin. They are the main narrators of the US foreign policy attitudes and behaviors. The empirical materials were collected from the White House website. The collection of documents is limited to the first month following the outbreak of the war. The research is divided into two main sections: the first section establishes a conceptual framework by concentrating propositions of strategic narratives, and the second section specifically examines the U.S. strategic narrative concerning the Gaza War.

Conceptual Framework: How Do Strategic Narrative Work?

Strategic narrative is an emerging field of study in international relations. Governments can use the strategic narrative technique as one of the strategic communication tools to achieve their foreign policy goals and priorities in international politics. Ruling elites can transform communication into a foreign policy instrument to achieve their main objectives through relations and interactions with other states. This indicates that communication is a means used for a specific purpose in the process of inter-state interaction (Hallahan et al. 2007, 3). The most important factor that separates strategic communication from other types of communication is its design and implementation to serve a strategic objective. What gives a strategic dimension to any narrative is that it is constructed in accordance with states' specific foreign policy objectives. Hence, forms of communication that are not pre-planned, systematic, and goal-oriented are not considered strategic communication (Zaharna 2010, 6).

When we look at the use of narrative in the social sciences, it is argued that narratives affect people's perceptions of political reality and their reactions to political developments (Paterson and Monroe, 1998, 315-316). Narratives play a critical role in the course of determining political behavior and are constructed to explain political developments to the target audience. Social actors endeavor to reconstruct both themselves and the social structure by forming narratives (Suganami 1999, 179). Freedman (2006, 22) defined a strategic narrative as "a plot that provides convincing explanations and inferences to events". Freedman draws attention to the use of narrative for strategic purposes in military conflicts to break the legitimacy of the enemy's practices and argues that through narratives, public opinion is tried to be convinced "why military force should or should not be used". Antoniades et al. (2010, 5), on the other hand, define strategic

narrative as a communication instrument for constructing a particular meaning about the past, present, and future to acquire desired political goals. For example, Roselle (2006, 1), who analyzes the withdrawal processes of the US from Vietnam in 1975 and the USSR from Afghanistan in 1989 during the Cold War period from the perspective of strategic narrative construction, reveals that the administrations of these two countries made efforts to justify their foreign policy decisions and practices to the national and international public opinion by using the strategic narrative as a device.

By resorting to strategic narratives, political elites produce meaning for their decisions and behaviors that are questioned by national or international public opinion, aimed at making them explainable and understandable (Akdogan and Adıgüzel 2022; Akdogan, Küpeli and Gürler 2022.) In addition, ruling elites need strategic narratives to manipulate the debate and resolve uncertainty. Through strategic narrative, the target audience is informed about events and forms opinions and behaviors, while governments are able to justify political decisions that they think will not gain public support (Jankowski, 2013, p.12). Ringsmose and Börgesen (2011, 505-528) point out that if a political power produces an effective strategic narrative, it is more likely to gain public support for its military interventions. Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2015, 4) argued that a strategic narrative is a "purposeful communication practice" in which communicating power centers behave to reach their goals. Nissen (2015, 45) views the strategic narrative as a tool that helps to shape the past, present, and future of conflicts in order to gain and maintain power in international politics. Krebs (2015, 1-23), on the other hand, argues that the strategic narrative presents previous failures, current challenges, and possible futures with a specific cause-and-effect relationship and plays a functional role in making sense of international developments, defining the boundaries of legitimate politics, and shaping national security policy. Bilgin (2018,118), who defines strategic narrative as a fundamental instrument for obtaining the consent of the public in case of conflict and war, points out that obtaining the consent of the public provides governments with a great source of power and that strategic narrative is vital in gaining this power. Madisson and Ventsel (2021, 22) point out that strategic narratives are constructed for a purpose and used as a strategic tool. They underline that through constructed narratives, the meaning of conflicts is shaped in the desired direction and helps the target audience to make sense of the developments.

It can be said that the concept of the strategic narrative in international politics has reached a systematic dimension thanks to the studies published jointly or individually by Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle at various times. Miskimmon et al. (2013, 13-14) defined strategic narrative as a foreign policy means used by governments to shape the thoughts and behaviors of the target audience on the one hand and to manage perceptions and impressions of developments, actors' identities, and the international system on the other. In other words, a strategic narrative is viewed as a functional means employed by political leaders to expand their sphere of influence and create a favorable discourse environment. Any strategic narrative not only defines the identities of political elites and the goals they want to achieve but also determines the obstacles to achieving these goals and how to overcome them (Roselle et al. 2014, 76). Furthermore, Miskimmon et al. (2017, 6;50) defined strategic narrative as a means by which political actors attempt to construct shared meaning about developments in international politics in order to shape the attitudes and behaviors of national and international public opinion. If the political power uses a strategic narrative effectively, it gains both the opportunity to justify its own behavior in the face of the target audience and the opportunity to influence the target audience's behavior. As a result, a strategic narrative is a foreign policy instrument used by political elites to influence, guide, and shape the attitudes and behaviors of the national and international community about a particular development. By producing a strategic narrative, political actors aim to explain and legitimize their decisions, attitudes, and behaviors regarding any issue, development,

and actor. Through strategic narrative analysis, we can observe how political actors attempt to convince others about their political vision. Strategic narratives ensure that states in any strategic alliance have a common understanding of facts and values (Snyder 2015, 171).

A strategic narrative has three stages: formation, projection, and reception. Formation refers to how the narrative is constructed and by which political elites operate. Projection refers to how narratives are put into practice through various means of communication. Reception focuses on the impact of the narrative on the target audience (Miskimmon, O'Lougling and Roselle 2017, 9). In order for any strategic narrative to be produced (formation) and put into practice (projection), a strategic narrative triangle environment is needed in which certain actors interact with each other. In other words, in a strategic environment where there is a strategic narrative, there are two main actors and a subject of interaction that interact with each other. As seen in Figure I, a simple strategic narrative has three basic elements. The first element of a given strategic narrative triangle is the narrating actor. Each strategic narrative is the product of a constructive political center that designs and implements it in line with a specific strategic objective. The narrative-producing actor is referred to as the narrator in this study. Thus, the narrator refers to the political actor who forms and implements the strategic narrative.

The second element of the strategic narrative triangle is the narrated event. Each strategic narrative can be constructed about an event or an actor. Political actors construct strategic narratives about specific events or actors. Efforts are made to present the event to national and international public opinion in the direction of political interests. Therefore, the government can reconstruct social reality by distorting or emphasizing certain aspects. Likewise, the identities of the actors involved in the event can also be constructed and presented to the target audience by the political power developing the narrative. For example, political, economic, and military cooperation and disputes in international relations can become the subjects of narrative. Events and phenomena such as war, conflict, peace, alliance, cooperation, competition, order, negotiation, revolution, and coup d'état constitute the main narrative topics. Again, states, non-state actors, and individuals involved in these international developments can be the subjects of narrative.

Figure 1

Strategic Narrative Triangle



The third element of the strategic narrative triangle is the target audience. Political elites construct strategic narratives to guide and shape the thoughts, decisions, and behaviors of a specific mass or group. Therefore, each strategic narrative has a recipient, which is referred to as the target audience (Freedman 2015, 24). Each strategic narrative is developed for a target audience selected for a specific political purpose. The strategic narrative process is not initiated before the target audience is identified. First, the target audience is identified, and then a narrative is developed in accordance with this target audience. In narrative formation, the target audience is divided into two parts as internal audience and an external audience. The internal target audience refers to political and social actors within the sovereignty of the state. For example, political elites in power can develop narratives by identifying society, rival political movements, and opposition groups as the target audience. The external target audience refers to the international environment outside the sovereignty of the state. Here, the external target audiences are mostly states and international organizations, which are the main actors of international public opinion. Political elites may construct a marginalizing strategic narrative about the states and alliances/coalitions/blocks of states that their own

country defines as rivals or enemies. A similar pattern of behavior can be exhibited for friendly and allied states or blocs of states. As a result, while the strategic narrative produced for the domestic audience is an output of the national political power struggle, the strategic narrative produced for the external audience is an extension of the international power struggle.

In this section, we focus on the types of strategic narratives. In order to identify and classify constructed strategic narratives, I use a model developed by Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle (2017). According to the model, there are three different types of strategic narratives. The first one is called the issue narrative. The course of explaining development in the national or international political environment to the national or international public is characterized as an issue narrative. There are three stages of an issue narrative: issue definition, causal relationship, and solution suggestion. In the first stage of the issue narrative, the event is defined by identifying the alleged victims and perpetrators of the development and by emphasizing certain characterizations and thematic elements. What needs to be considered here is how the event is defined. In the second stage, the causal relationship of the event is determined. In line with a specific strategic objective, the causes and consequences of the event are tried to be revealed. In the third stage, solutions are proposed for the event. Undoubtedly, the proposed solution is a biased prescription prepared in the interests of the political elites who produce the narrative.

The second type of strategic narrative is the identity narrative. During their power struggle, political actors attempt to establish superiority over rivals or enemies by engaging in identity construction. Identity construction defines the self and others, whether in domestic politics or foreign policy. For instance, in the foreign policymaking process, political elites refer to their own country as anti-war, pro-peace, and respectful of human rights. On the other hand, they may refer to rival/enemy states as pro-war, anti-peace, and human rights violators. By engaging in such identity construction, states attempt to legitimize their foreign policy decisions and practices in the eyes of international public opinion, especially their allies. On the other hand, the foreign policy attitudes and behaviors of rival/enemy states are portrayed as illegitimate.

The third type of strategic narrative is the system narrative. The system narrative defines the regional and global systems of states. With the system narrative, states aim either to preserve or restructure the existing order. Therefore, in the international political climate, the system narratives of status quo states and revisionist states may come into conflict. The system narrative fulfills four different functions (Roselle 2017, 57). The first part is the system description. At this stage, the following two questions are tried: What is the system? How does the system work? By answering these questions, a regional or global system can be constructed at the rhetorical/discursive level. The second is actor identification. Actor identification answers who are the main actors in any given system. The third component of the system narrative is threat identification. Threat identification tries to reveal which actors are challenging the system. It also identifies which actors assume responsibility, respect, and contribute to the system. The fourth is role identification. This refers to the roles that the actors play in the system. This study focuses on the type of issue narrative.

On the other hand, apart from the above-mentioned studies, some studies have been critical of the concept of strategic narratives recently. The main reason for this is that existing studies neglect the reception dimension of the strategic narrative. Scientific studies have begun to be conducted on whether political elites' strategic narratives can produce effective results in the eyes of the target audience. Some studies on the effectiveness of strategic narratives are as follows: Szostek (2017), Schmitt (2018), Hagström and Gustafsson (2021), and Van Noort and Colley (2020). The main conviction gained from these studies is

that the strategic narratives are not directly received and automatically accepted by the target audience. Several national and international dynamics (such as master narratives, local myths, ontological security perspectives and individual linkages) may affect the degree to which the target audience is influenced by the narrative.

Finally, there is a need to emphasize what distinguishes the concept of strategic narrative from other political communication tools, such as public diplomacy, framing, and propaganda. Although all these concepts have close and interchangeable meanings, there are nuances between them. Public diplomacy is a means of political communication used by a state to explain itself to and understand the people of other states. It also refers to a long-term process implemented through tools such as student exchange programs, language courses, and cultural programs (Hunt 2016). Propaganda, which has a long history of use by states, is the attempt to manipulate the thoughts of the masses through certain symbols, news and rumors (Lasswell 1927). Framing, on the other hand, is the transfer of a certain reality to the text by emphasizing certain aspects, thus defining a problem, establishing a causal relationship and making a moral evaluation (Entman 1993; Akdogan, Uğuş and Yılmaz 2021). On the other side, strategic narrative, is an effort to legitimize the attitudes and behaviors of the state in foreign policy regarding political and military conflict in the field of international politics in the eyes of both its own people (national public opinion) and other states (international public opinion). This is a short-term political communication tool used in the process of achieving a strategic goal determined in foreign policy (Freedman, 2006). Moreover, unlike others, strategic narrative has three different types: identity narrative, system narrative and issue narrative (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle(2017). The concept of strategic narrative has drawn attention to the field of war and conflict studies (Schmitt 2018). It has been used to examine the significance of the persuasion of contemporary conflict and how military campaigns are presented to international and national audiences (De Graaf, Dimitriu and Ringsmose 2015).

Case Study: How Does the United States Reconstruct Social Reality?

On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched Operation Al-Aqsa Flood against Israel and in response, Israel launched Operation Iron Swords in the Gaza. It is referred to as the Gaza War. This study examines the strategic narrative constructed by the United States regarding the developments during the Gaza War. As stated in the introduction, the focus is on the issue narrative part of the strategic narrative formed by American political elites about the Gaza War. Just as there is a narrative triangle exists in every strategic narrative process, a similar situation exists here. In this case, the narrating actor is the United States, the narrated event is the Gaza War and finally the target audience is the Middle Eastern states in particular. The Middle Eastern states have been divided into two groups as such strategic partners and strategic enemies. In the narrative, while Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar and Egypt are viewed as strategic partner, Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis and Iran are considered as strategic enemy.

As stated in the conceptual framework section, political elites apply to strategic narratives to justify the states' foreign policy attitudes and behaviors before defining the target audience and to shape their political thoughts and decisions. For this reason, strategic narratives are produced in the direction of the states' foreign policy interests. Thus, the thoughts, attitudes and behaviors of the target audience are tried to be directed and shaped in accordance with the strategic interests of the state. This process occurs not only by emphasizing some aspects of the social reality, but also by covering some aspects of it and even distorting them. This process means that social reality is reconstructed in accordance with certain strategic goals.

The developments that took place during the Gaza War, which is a social reality, are narrated to the target audience by American political elites on the axis of the US political, economic and military interests in the Middle East. When the official statements of the American political elites are analyzed, it is observed that the US constructed four main strategic narratives regarding the Gaza War. In addition, each strategic narrative is strengthened by featured themes. Table I shows the constructed strategic narratives and their featured themes, that are identified by the study. The featured themes and sending strategic messages in the narrative will be evaluated. Thus, with the narrative, the US responds to the existing and potential questions that cause questioning in the minds of the target audience, which need to be answered, and tries to obtain legitimacy for its political decisions and behavior.

Table 1

The Main Strategic Narratives and Featured Themes of the Biden Administration

Number	Constructed Strategic Narratives and Featured Themes
1	Strategic Narrative: Israel was obliged to carry out a military operation in the Gaza Strip Featured Themes: 1. Fighting terrorism 2. Israel's September 11 3. National security 4. The Genocide of Jewish and anti-Semitism 5. The right of self-defense
2	Strategic Narrative: The United States must support Israel's military operation in the Gaza Strip Featured Themes: 1. Fighting terrorism 2. National security 3. Strategic partnership 4. The tragedy of the Holocaust 5. Democracy and the rule of law
3	Strategic Narrative: The United States must increase its military presence in the Middle East Featured Themes: 1. Not allowing the attack to be used to advantage 2. Deterring hostile states 3. Strengthening the US regional posture 4. Defending Israel
4	Strategic Narrative: Civilians are losing their lives in Gaza because of Hamas. Featured Themes: 1. The use of civilians as human shields by the Hamas 2. Hiding of the Hamas militants in civilian areas. 3. Terrorist attacks by the Hamas

Number	Constructed Strategic Narratives and Featured Themes

Source: The table has been formed by the author by reviewing American political elites' statements, remarks and speeches.

The first strategic narrative for which the US is trying to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the target audience is about " Israel was obliged to commit a military operation in the Gaza Strip". This part of the strategic narrative produced by the Washington administration serves to justify Israel, the US strategic partner in the Middle East, in the face of international public opinion. The US strategic narrative attempts to justify Israel's attacks on Gaza by emphasizing five featured themes. The first theme is "fighting terrorism". Israel's attacks on Gaza are presented to the target audience as measures taken and activities carried out as part of the "war on terror". For example, President Biden, in his first statement on the Hamas attacks on October 7, started his speech with the statement "People of Israel are under attack orchestrated by a terrorist organization Hamas" (Biden, October 7, 2023a). In a similar vein, during the visit of Israel, Secretary Blinken stated that "this was just one of Hamas's countless acts of terror" and he included Israel's military operation within the scope of "fighting terrorism" (Blinken, October 12. 2023a). In a later press release, Blinken said on Israel's operations, "Israel is conducting operations in Gaza." Why is this happening? Because Hamas carried out terrorist attacks on innocent civilians" (October 13, 2023). Moreover, in various statements by Biden, Blinken and Austin, it is underlined that "innocent people are being massacred by terrorist militants in Israeli territory and that there is no legitimate reason for terrorism whatsoever (Biden, October 9, 2023; Blinken, October 20, 2023; Austin, October 7, 2023a).

The second featured theme used by the US to justify "why Israel is attacking Gaza" is "Israel's 9/11". Hamas attacks are associated with the US administration's involvement in ISIS and al-Qaidah and are described as "Israel's 9/11" (Biden, October 18, 2023b, Blinken, October 12, 2023c). Establishing similarities in thought and action between Hamas and terrorist organizations prepares the grounds for legitimacy for Israel's military operation against Gaza and aims to prevent it from being questioned. The third featured theme is "national security". It is argued that Hamas' purpose of existing is the destruction of the state of Israel and the murder of Jewish people (Biden, October 10, 2023a and Blinken, October 12, 2023a). Explaining this issue, Blinken makes the following claim: "What Israel is doing is not retaliation. What Israel is doing is defending the lives of its people ... trying to ensure that this cannot happen again" (Blinken, October 13, 2023). Therefore, the strategic message sent to the target audience is that Tel Aviv cannot tolerate the presence in Gaza of an organization that seeks to destroy the state of Israel and to massacre Jews.

The fourth featured theme is "Holocaust and anti-Semitism". In the first half of the 20th century, reference is made to the massacre of Jews, and it is claimed that Hamas' main goal is to murder Jews. In order to strengthen this claim, the October 7 attacks are portrayed as a Holocaust-like massacre of Jews. (Biden, October 18, 2023b; Blinken, October 14, 2023). Through this theme, by referring to the genocide and anti-Semitism that Jews have been subjected to before, a strategic message is produced that the Hamas attack is not a simple terrorist attack but a mass elimination attack against the Jews, and therefore, the Israeli state cannot remain silent. In other words, Israel's disproportionate response to Hamas' attacks, including the occupation of Gaza, the deaths of thousands of people and the displacement of millions of people, is tried to be justified through the claim of "a new Jewish genocide attempt".

The fifth featured theme is "self-defense". In all statements made by the Biden administration, it is pointed out that Israel has the right to defend itself and that this is an obligation for a state, and the attacks on Gaza are considered as self-defense and thus a legal basis is created (Biden, October 9, 2023; Austin, October 7, 2023b). In fact, Blinken summarizes this situation as follows: "The State of Israel has not only the

right, but also obligation to defend itself, its people and its values" (Blinken, November 3, 2023b). In another speech, Blinken said, "We believe that Israel has not only the right but the obligation to defend itself against barbarity" (Blinken, October 20, 2023). Blinken also emphasized that Israel has the right to defend itself, just as every state has the right of self-defense, and that no state would tolerate such an attack (Blinken, November 3, 2023a). In conclusion, it is underscored that all necessary measures and steps should be taken to defeat Hamas and ensure that such an attack never happens again.

The second strategic narrative that the Biden administration tries to legitimize in front of the target audience is “The US must support Israel’s military operation in the Gaza Strip”. Since the first day of the Gaza War, the US has provided Israel with strong political, economic and military support. This support has been characterized in the speeches of political leaders as "unwavering assistance", "ironclad support", "rock solid support" and "strong commitment". It is underlined that the US stands with Israel in the Gaza War. During his visit to Israel, Biden said, "I wanted to be here today for a simple reason: I wanted the people of Israel, the people of the world to know where the United States stands" (Biden, October 18, 2023d). Likewise, during his visit to Israel, Blinken said "I am here quite simply with message, and that is: The United States stands with Israel today, tomorrow, every day" (Blinken, October 12, 2023b).

The explanation of the US support to the target audience is attempted through five featured themes. The first featured theme is the "fighting terrorism". In his statement on October 7, the day of the attack, Biden said, "the United States stands with the people of Israel in the face of this terrorist assault, Israel has the right to defend itself and its people" (Biden, October 7, 2023). Similarly, in his speech to Jewish leaders at the White House, Biden stated that "America cannot be silent in the face of these unconscionable attacks" (Biden, October 12, 2023). It is also emphasized that all countries should condemn and stand against Hamas because it is a terrorist attack and innocent people are being massacred (Biden, October 9, 2023). It is warned that everyone who wants peace and justice should condemn Hamas and that if this is not done, terrorism will target people not only in Israel but also in every corner of the world (Blinken, October, 12, 2023a). As can be seen, the US is trying to prevent the bloc fighting against Israel from expanding its front, while expressing its desire to expand the front of the war against Hamas. Pointing out that Israel is now exposed to terrorist attacks similar to the terrorist attacks that the US suffered on September 11, 2001, it is emphasized that "the response of the U.S. would be swift, decisive and overwhelming" (Biden, October 10, 2023). In a speech evaluating the Gaza War, Biden justified why unconditional and unprecedented support was given to Israel by saying, "You know, history taught us that when terrorists do not pay a price for their terror, they cause more chaos and death and more destruction"... for this reason "We can't stand by and stand silent when this happens" .... "We must make sure that they have what they need to protect their people" (Biden, October 20, 2023).

The second featured theme is "national security". The Biden administration emphasizes that Israel's national security means the national security of the United States. Biden explained this as follows; "This is not about party or politics. This is about the security of the world, the security of the United States" (Biden, October 10, 2023a). Therefore, it is necessary to take urgent action to meet the national security requirements that Israel needs. It is also emphasized that when Israel was established, the US was the first country to recognize it and did so in just 11 minutes, referring to the fact that Israel’s security has been provided by the US since its establishment (Biden, October 7, 2023a). The meaning of Israel for the US is reflected in Biden’s statement: "If Israel didn’t exist, we would have to invade it" (Biden, October 18, 2023b). This highlights the importance of Israel’s establishment and continued existence for US strategic interests in the Middle East.

The third featured theme is "strategic partnership". The Washington administration stated that Israel is a state in the Middle East that has strategic partnership with the United States and that the United States should support Israel as part of its security commitments to its strategic partners (Blinken, October 12, 2023c). The fourth featured theme is "the Holocaust". This theme highlights that Jews have paid a high price for being subjected to genocide and anti-Semitism, and the Hamas attack has produced a similar victimization. In the 20th century, it is emphasized that the world watched the genocide of the Jews, but this time, the US would not remain silent. In addition, it is stated that Israel was established to create a safe zone for the Jews of the world, and it is argued that Hamas is trying to destroy this Jewish state (Biden, October 18, 2023b). It is stated that Hamas' attacks bring back bad memories of the mistreatment of Jews. Thus, Blinken, who visited Israel, emphasized his Jewish identity with the statement "I come before you not only as the United States Secretary of State, but also as a Jew" (Blinken, October 12, 2023a), referring to the fact that they stand by Israel as a Jewish state.

The fifth featured theme is "democracy and law". In this narrative, it is emphasized that Israel and the United States are governments with democratic political systems and therefore differentiate themselves from other states. It is claimed that Israel is a country that is governed by the rule of law, that respects international law, humanitarian law and the law of war. For this reason, the perception that anti-democratic groups such as Hamas, which are governed by "the rule of terror", is an organization to be established to destroy Israel is being formed (Biden, October 18, 2023b; Blinken, October 12, 2023c). On the other hand, by stating that Israel is a state that was built 75 years ago on freedom, justice and peace, it is tried to explain that Israel stays away from anti-democratic practices. Biden expresses this during his visit to Israel as follows; "The United States stands with you in defense of that freedom, in pursuit of that justice, and in support of that peace today, tomorrow and always." We promise you" (Biden, October 18, 2023c).

The third strategic narrative in the US documents is "the US must increase its military presence in the Middle East". Immediately after the start of the war, the United States deployed additional aircraft carriers and warships, as well as fighter planes and air defense systems, to the Eastern Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf, which are the maritime areas surrounding the Middle East. In the narrative, the following featured themes come to the fore in the justification for increasing the military presence. 1. To prevent Israel's enemies from turning Hamas' attacks into an opportunity and carrying out an attack. 2. To prevent the spread of the conflict in the region. 3. Strengthening the regional deterrence of the USA (reinforce deterrence posture, bolster regional deterrence). 4. To restore regional security and stability. 5. Showing the strong support of the USA in Israel. (Biden, October 7, 2023b; Austin, October 8, 2023; Austin, October 14, 2023). Biden used an expression such as "let me say again to any country, any organization, anyone thinking of taking advantage of this situation, I have one word: Don't, Don't" (Biden, October 10, 2023). The US warned Israel's enemies and demonstrated its determination to respond with extreme caution.

The fourth strategic narrative constructed by the Biden administration is " Civilians are losing their lives in Gaza because of Hamas". In Israel's attacks on Gaza, civilians are also targeted, and civilian settlements, hospitals, schools and places of worship are bombed. In the first month of the war, the number of civilians killed in Israeli attacks exceeded 10,000. It can be seen that the USA is trying to influence the international public opinion regarding the deliberate targeting and killing of innocent Palestinians by Israel. There are three featured themes in this strategic narrative: The use of civilians as human shield by the Hamas, the hiding of Hamas militants in the civilian areas and terrorist attacks of the Hamas. The reasons for killing civilians in Israeli attacks are Hamas' terrorist attacks and the use of civilians as human shields by Hamas.

(Biden, October 18, 2023b). Blinken expresses this situation as follows: “Terrorist groups like Hamas have no concern for innocent human life, they intentionally use innocent human life to hide behind, to use human shields, civilians are going to suffer in conflict” (Blinken, October 20, 2023). In fact, it is claimed that the al-Ahli Hospital, which was attacked by a missile by Israel on October 17 and hundreds of people were killed, was attacked by Hamas. (Biden, October 20, 2023) It is claimed that Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people, does not serve their rightful causes, and offers nothing but terror, destruction and bloodshed to the Palestinian people (Biden, October 9, 2023.

Conclusion

This study aims to analyze the strategic narrative adopted by the United States concerning the Gaza War, focusing specifically on the issue narrative type constructed by the Biden administration. The study focuses on the subjects on which the Biden administration has produced legitimacy and which themes it has featured in doing so. Each strategic narrative is formed and projected to advance the strategic interests of the respective states. Since the end of the Second World War, the United States’ primary strategic interest in the Middle East has been to defend strategic partners that align closely with its interests and to deter and punish hostile regional actors. In this context, the U.S. collaborates with its strategic partners in the region to uphold the prevailing regional order while managing relationships with rival or adversarial states. Israel holds significant strategic importance in U.S. Middle East policy, leading to consistent U.S. support for Israel to defence its political, economic, and military capabilities against regional adversaries, including non-state actors. The Gaza War falls within this strategic framework. This study observes that the strong U.S. support for Israel’s military campaign, which faced substantial international criticism, prompted the Biden administration to use a strategic narrative as a tool for political communication.

To begin with, it should be noted that the strategic narrative created by American political leaders is a component of the US Middle East policy and is constructed in accordance with its strategic interests in the region. During the research process, it was observed that the issue narrative crafted by the Biden administration tries to shape the thoughts and behaviors of the target audience not only by emphasizing a certain aspect of the Gaza War but also by distorting a certain aspect of it. The Biden administration intentionally focuses on the day of the Hamas attack on October 7th and draws attention to the human tragedy. Therefore, the crimes against humanity, war crimes and massacres committed by Israel in Gaza in the days following the Hamas attack are deliberately ignored. Therefore, Israel's operation in the Gaza Strip and the US's unconditional and unlimited support for it are tried to justify and legitimize.

It has been observed that the Biden administration has structured its issue narrative on the Gaza War around four strategic narratives as seen in Table I. In essence, the U.S. issue narrative aims to preemptively address existing and appearing queries within international public opinion. These identified strategic narratives constitute the key findings of the research. The first strategic narrative is “Israel was obliged to commit a military operation in the Gaza Strip” In response, the U.S. constructs a narrative designed to justify Israel’s air and ground operations in Gaza. This narrative aims to nullify any questioning by the target audience regarding Israel's behaviors. The narrative seeks to mitigate or eliminate questioning through featured themes such as "war on terror," "Israel's September 11," "national security," "massacre of Jews," and the "right of self-defense." These themes collectively portray Israel as a victimized actor. Consequently, Israel is depicted as a state engaged in a struggle for its survival against a terrorist organization bent on destroying the Jewish state and perpetrating atrocities against Jews. Accordingly, the narrative portrays Israel’s military intervention in Gaza as an imperative aspect of this righteous struggle.

The second strategic narrative is “the US must support Israel’s military operation in the Gaza Strip”. Criticism from the international community toward Israel’s targeting of civilian settlements in Gaza and the forced displacement of Palestinians by Tel Aviv has placed the U.S. in a position of secondary responsibility for Israel’s actions deemed as crimes against humanity and violations of international law. Consequently, U.S. political leaders endeavor to justify their support for Israel through narrative and persuade the target audience of the legitimacy of their stance. This narrative emphasizes several featured themes including "fighting terrorism," "national security," "strategic partnership," "Holocaust tragedy," and "democracy and the rule of law." According to this narrative, U.S. support for Israel is framed as a response to shared challenges, such as terrorism that threatens both nations, a commitment to security with a key regional partner, protection of Jewish communities from threats of massacre, and defense of democratic values and international legal norms.

The third strategic narrative is “the US must increase its military presence in the Middle East”. As soon as the Gaza War began, the US began to increase its military presence by deploying additional warships and aircraft carriers in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. Therefore, the narrative sends a strategic message to hostile states for Israel and the US by focusing on increased military presence. The main message is that Israel is not alone in the region and any hostile states or non-state actors do not attempt to take advantage of the Hamas attack. The main aim is to preserve the regional balance of power in favor of the US and Israel. The narrative is constructed on featured themes including “deterring hostile states”, “preventing the escalation of conflicts”, “strengthening the US regional posture”, “defending Israel”, and “avoiding exploitation of attacks for strategic advantage”. Accordingly, the narrative posits that the increased US military presence in the region is justified as a defensive measure aimed at maintaining regional stability, security, and the existing balance of power.

The fourth strategic narrative is “civilians are losing their lives in Gaza because of Hamas”. The Biden administration asserts that civilian casualties in Gaza are primarily attributed to Hamas’ practice of using civilians as human shields, hiding of the Hamas militants in the civilian areas and terrorist attacks, rather than deliberate targeting by the Israeli government. This narrative attempts to influence public perception by framing Hamas as responsible for the deaths of innocent Palestinians. This strategic communication aims to shape how the target audience views the conflict, portraying Hamas as the principal cause of civilian casualties in Gaza.

As a result, this study supports the argument in the literature that ‘states use strategic narrative as a foreign policy tool in line with their national interests’ through a case study. There are two elements that give the study originality. First, regarding the national interests of the United States, American political elites do not hesitate to produce official narratives in support of their allies that violate human rights and international law. Political lieders attempt to reconstruct social realities in line with strategic goals of the foreign policy. The second is the adaptation of the concept of strategic narrative to a contemporary study, which contributes a new case study to the literature. This research, using the qualitative narrative method, aims to make an empirical contribution to the case study literature. However, it should be noted that this study does not claim to make a theoretical or conceptual contribution or criticism to the literature because it is a case study. What is done here is to adapt an existing conceptual/theoretical framework to a new case. In addition, this study does not address the reception dimension of the strategic narrative but focuses only on the formation and projection aspects. In other words, whether the strategic narratives constructed by the Biden administration produce an effective result for the target audience is beyond the scope of the

study. This situation can be considered a limitation or deficiency of the study. Therefore, furder studies can make a scientific contribution to the literature by conducting studies that measure the effectiveness of the strategic narratives produced by the Biden administration on the target audience. In addition, to make this study more qualified, different strategic narratives can be identified by analyzing American high-level political elites' social media accounts and traditional media texts focusing on pro-political power.

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