

Doves, Hawks, Parrots, and Chickens: A Discourse Analysis of the Albanian Elite on the Israeli-Iranian Conflict

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Abstract

In the Albanian public sphere, discourse surrounding the Israeli-Iranian conflict reveals several distinct archetypes: the peaceful Dove, the belligerent Hawk, the imitative Parrot, and the conspiratorial Chicken. This paper analyzes the discourse of the Albanian elite regarding this conflict, examining their positions through the lens of cultural affiliations, political perspectives, and strategic concerns. Drawing on in-depth interviews with key members of the Albanian elite, the study investigates how their views on democracy, international law, and national interest shape their stances. The findings reveal a complex interplay between cultural identity, political alignment, and perceptions of regional security. Although these voices appear distinct, they are largely informed by a shared framework. The dominant perspective is that of the Parrot, which echoes the prevailing narratives of the international community, particularly those of the United States and the European Union. This tendency highlights a broader pattern where smaller nations like Albania, constrained by their geopolitical position, exhibit a limited capacity for independent critical engagement, opting instead to align their rhetoric with that of their more powerful allies.

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1 Introduction

This paper is based on the research project "Albania's Foreign Policy: Elite's Role and Perspective," conducted between September 2023 and June 2025. The study builds upon the foundational work of Dr. Kosta Barjaba's 1999 report on the Albanian elite, utilizing a similar methodology of in-depth interviews. Our research involved discussions with 90 members of Albania's contemporary elite—including political leaders, university professors, artists, writers, and journalists—to understand their composition, worldview, and foreign policy perspectives.

The following sections will first outline the formation and cultural leanings of this elite class, as this background is essential for understanding the lens through which they view global events. Subsequently, the paper will analyze their discourse on the Israeli-Iranian conflict, categorizing their responses into four archetypes—Dove, Hawk, Parrot, and Chicken—to reveal the underlying logic and influences shaping Albania's foreign policy orientation.

2 Profile of the Albanian Elite: Formation and World-view

2.1 Formation and Political Composition

The political elite that emerged during Albania's post-communist transition was largely a product of selection by the old establishment, which aimed to preserve its influence, rather than the result of an open competition of ideas. This new class was initially characterized by the strong participation of students and young intellectuals. However, representatives of the former political class gradually assumed powerful positions, often marginalizing the initial generation of reformers.

Intellectuals, particularly from the University of Tirana, were instrumental in leading the new political formations that emerged after the introduction of pluralism. While some intellectuals fully committed to politics, many others adopted a more reserved, pragmatic stance, often influenced by economic constraints that fostered an environment of conformism and political submission.

The political landscape became dominated by the Democratic Party (DP) and the Socialist Party (SP), leading to a bipolar power structure in the formation of the elite. Consequently, the electorate's behavior was often reactive, with votes cast against the incumbent government rather than proactively in support of a new alternative.

2.2 Cultural Affiliations

Interviews with the elite revealed distinct and overwhelmingly Western cultural affinities. Respondents were asked to which civilization and culture they felt most affiliated, indicating their first, second, and third priorities. The results, summarized in Table 1, show a clear hierarchy.

The table indicates that the Italian culture is the most frequently mentioned, followed by German and American cultures. French, Russian, and Greek cultures also feature prominently, while Scandinavian, British, Turkish, and Benelux cultures receive less attention.

Motivations for these affiliations included:

- **Italian:** Affiliation was driven by its "cultural and spiritual neighborhood," the widespread knowledge of the Italian language, and Italy's supportive role during Albania's transition. It was seen as an accessible model for the "Europeanization of Albania."
- **German:** Admired for its contributions to world culture, civic discipline, successful politics, and effective economic policy.

Table 1: Cultural Affiliations of the Albanian Elite (Total Mentions)

Culture	Total Mentions
Italian	80
German	58
American	44
French	30
Russian & Eastern European	26
Greek	22
Scandinavian	12
British	12
Turkish	12
Benelux	10

- **American:** Respected for its high cultural standards and its perceived pragmatic foreign policy.
- **French:** Appreciated for its high standards of human rights, cultural values, and the distinguished role of its diplomacy.
- **Greek:** Viewed as a model for transitioning from dictatorship to democracy and for its devotion to nationalism. Despite official political tensions, the elite expressed personal closeness to and respect for Greek culture.

3 Elite Perception of Foreign Policy Priorities

The Albanian elite’s perception of foreign policy is profoundly shaped by these cultural affiliations. The interviews revealed a strong inclination towards Western values and strategic priorities. When asked to identify the most critical challenges for Albanian foreign policy, the elite responded as follows:

[leftmargin=*]NATO policy alignment (31%) Furtherance of European integration (22%)
Regional cooperation (18%) Approaches to particular countries: Italy, Greece (14%)

This focus on Western integration and alignment provides the essential context for understanding their perspectives on distant, yet globally significant, conflicts such as the one between Israel and Iran.

4 Avian Metaphors: Perspectives on the Israeli-Iranian Conflict

From the interviews, four distinct discursive frames emerged regarding the Israeli-Iranian conflict, which we categorize using our avian metaphor: the Dove, the Hawk, the Parrot, and the Chicken. Each perspective reflects different facets of the elite’s worldview.

4.1 The Doves: Voices for De-escalation

The Dove represents a perspective that emphasizes diplomacy, de-escalation, and the universal application of international law. This viewpoint, while less common in our findings, advocates

for a balanced approach that holds all parties accountable and prioritizes civilian safety. Doves like Fatos Lubonja are critical of military preemption and seek solutions through negotiation and international mediation.

A representative dovish sentiment, expressed by a professor of international relations, argued that, “While Iran’s actions are deeply concerning, any just response must itself adhere strictly to international law. A preemptive strike, however strategically justified, risks a catastrophic regional war. The international community, including Albania, should be calling for immediate de-escalation, reinforcing diplomatic channels, and ensuring humanitarian principles are upheld for all populations affected, rather than endorsing a military solution that could prove more devastating than the problem it seeks to solve.”

4.2 The Hawks: Advocates for Preemptive Security

The Hawk embodies a more assertive stance, advocating for robust action against perceived threats. Hawks prioritize national and alliance security, viewing military intervention as a potentially necessary tool for achieving stability. This perspective is characterized by a belief in the efficacy of force to neutralize imminent dangers and protect strategic interests. The hawk’s justification is often framed in the language of democracy and human rights, though frequently applied with selectivity.

First is the Pro-Western Security Hawk, who views the conflict through the prism of alliance security and international order. This perspective, often found among defense and policy analysts, prioritizes neutralizing threats to Western strategic interests. For example, one security analyst strongly articulated this position: “Respect for international law is the key criterion. Iran has repeatedly violated the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to which it has been a party since 1970. The IAEA concluded that Iran’s nuclear program is not for civilian purposes. Furthermore, Iran has established, armed, and trained militias in Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon, using them to attack rival states. Through the Houthis, it has tried to block the Red Sea, a vital artery for the European economy. These actions make Iran a systemic and dangerous violator of international law, justifying a preemptive response.”

A second, and often overlapping, perspective is the Anti-Islamic Cultural Hawk. This viewpoint frames its aggression not just in strategic terms but through a cultural and civilizational lens. Proponents of this view depict Iran as the embodiment of a backward and hostile “Islamist” threat that is fundamentally incompatible with Western democratic values. Their hawkish stance is thus a defense of a perceived secular, European identity against a monolithic religious enemy, using the conflict to reinforce anti-Islamic and anti-Iranian narratives.

Conversely, a third and more distinct stream is the Pro-Islamic Militant Hawk. This perspective is rooted in a pan-Islamic, anti-imperialist, and often anti-Zionist worldview. These Hawks view the Iranian regime not as a threat, but as a vanguard of resistance against Western and Israeli aggression in the Muslim world. Figures such as historian Olsi Jazexhi exemplify this position. His discourse champions Iran as a defender of Islam and Palestinians, calls for solidarity against what he terms “the Zionist regime,” and frames any action against Iran as an attack on all Muslims. This militant stance advocates for an aggressive ideological and geopolitical alignment with Iran, viewing confrontation with Israel and its allies as a religious and anti-colonial obligation. While diametrically opposed to the anti-Islamic Hawks in its reasoning, this view similarly concludes that a forceful, non-conciliatory approach is necessary.

4.3 The Parrots: Echoes of the West

The Parrot is the most prevalent archetype. It does not generate an independent position but echoes the dominant narratives of its primary international allies, namely the United States

and the European Union. The Parrot’s discourse is characterized by the repetition of official talking points without deep critical engagement.

This was exemplified by a deputy of the Democratic Party, whose statements illustrate this mimicry. First, the Parrot reduces the conflict to a simple binary: “In the Albanian public debate, a prevailing notion has been the contrast between Israel, a democracy... and Iran, a theocracy... as a consequence, the reasoning goes, Albania should stand with Israel.” This framing directly mirrors the “community of values” rhetoric common in Western capitals.

Second, the Parrot’s timing and content are reactive. The same source noted that Albania’s official alignment with Israel came with significant delay, “on the fourth day of the conflict, after the opposition and regional governments... had already spoken out.” The statement, when it arrived, simply reiterated the “major EU capitals’ formula... that Iran must not possess nuclear weapons, that Israel has the right to self-defense, and that a diplomatic solution is preferred.”

Finally, the Parrot’s attempt to engage with complex legal questions reveals a superficial understanding, borrowing concepts without internalizing them. When grappling with the legitimacy of a preemptive strike, the source stated: “Some voices in Europe... insist that by striking first, Israel violated international law... However, in Israel’s case, we are dealing with a preemptive strike... The ‘Caroline Rule,’... allows striking first when clearly threatened.” This invocation of a niche legal doctrine appears less as a considered legal analysis and more as the adoption of a convenient external justification. The discourse then pivots to a broad, romanticized call for regime change—“Iranians deserve liberation from a bloodthirsty regime... a nation with an ancient and rich culture, known to us through Omar Khayyam”—concluding that the ideal outcome is the forcible elimination of Iran’s nuclear potential, after which “at least we could have peace and stability.”

4.4 The Chickens: A Discourse of Conspiracy

While less frequent, the Chicken represents a conspiratorial perspective. This view is characterized by a belief in hidden agendas and the manipulation of public opinion by powerful actors. Chickens often see the Israeli-Iranian conflict as a smokescreen for larger geopolitical games, suggesting that the true motives of Western powers are not aligned with the interests of smaller nations like Albania. This fringe viewpoint dismisses mainstream analyses as propaganda.

A typical sentiment was expressed by a journalist such as Alfred Cako, who suggested that, “The media narrative around the Israeli-Iranian conflict is heavily influenced by Zionist interests and a world-controlling elite. Iran is being punished for not kneeling to these global Jewish elites.” This perspective substitutes geopolitical analysis with conspiracy, highlighting a smaller, more paranoid undercurrent in the discourse.

5 Conclusion

The analysis of the Albanian elite’s discourse reveals that while the songs of the Dove, Hawk, and Chicken can be heard, the aviary is dominated by the Parrot. In practice, the Hawk’s arguments and the Parrot’s echoes often merge, as both align with the strategic positions of the United States and the European Union. This alignment reflects a broader dynamic where smaller nations like Albania, deeply invested in the process of Western integration, may lack the political space or institutional capacity to formulate a truly independent foreign policy.

The cultural affinities for Italy, Germany, and the US, combined with a political history that encourages conformity, create fertile ground for adopting external narratives. The elite’s discourse on the Israeli-Iranian conflict is therefore less an analysis of the conflict itself and more a reflection of Albania’s position within the geopolitical hierarchy. The birds in Tirana

sing with a Western accent, demonstrating that for a small state navigating a complex world, the safest song is often the one written by the leader of the flock.