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Religious Conflict Between Israeli and Hamas: Naming of Weapons and Battles

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Abstract

This research underscores the critical role of language representations in warfare, showing how naming can be a robust instrument in psychological war and narrative construction. The paper analyzes the naming practices for weaponry and battles in the Israeli-Hamas conflict, stressing the extensive use of religious and ideological symbolism by both parties. Tracking the historical and cultural contexts behind these conventions, the researchers highlight the great impact of naming on the conflict as a whole. Studying the various names given to weapons and wars, the paper unveils the deeply-rooted religious ideologies and political discourse used by Israel and Hamas. The findings reveal that naming conventions are not random, rather they are strategic tools that aim at legitimizing and obtaining support, as well as reflecting the conflict's sociopolitical dimensions. The study also found that naming practices contributes to constructing identities and justifying actions in the Israeli-Hamas conflict, illustrating the interaction of physical and symbolic elements in military and ideological strategies. In conclusion, the study provides a new perspective on the interdependent relationship between language, history, religion, and warfare.

Keywords: Israel-Hamas Conflict, Religious, Naming, Weapons, Battles

INTRODUCTION

Israel and Hamas have had longstanding conflict represented by a series of battles and confrontations that ended with the Hamas's attack on the Jewish settlements around Gaza and taking a good number of hostage on October 7, 2023. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict dates back to 1948 when Israel occupied 77-78% of the Palestinian Land (Smith, 2013). This invasion resulted in subsequent geopolitical developments and tension in the Middle East region. Israel took the chance of the division among the Arab nations and had its second invasion to the rest of the Palestinian land in 1967, hence aggravating the tension between Israelis and Palestinians in specific and between Israel and the Arabs in general.

The Palestinian liberation movements started after the first war and continued until this day. Perhaps the greatest resistance faction was Fath which was mainly led by Yassir Arafat. However, after the establishment of the Palestinian authority, most Fath fighters turned into security police that were responsible for maintaining security in the West Bank, thus stopping any mutiny and Jihadi attacks against Israel (Saleh, 2003, pp.365-366). This led to the emergence of several resistance militias which played a significant role in the late 20th century. Since then, Hamas became the main enemy and threat to Israel which, in turn, escalated the conflict. To dismantle Hamas and capture or kill *all* its leaders, Israel had a series of military attacks on Gaza in 2008-2009, 2012, and 2014. However, on October 7, 2023 it was Hamas which became the first Palestinian militant group to initiate a real attack against Israel for the first time in the history of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

Given the emergence of the Israeli state on a Jewish religious background linked to the texts of the Torah, and the emergence of Hamas on an Islamic religious background represented by texts from the Quran and the Islamic religion (Saleh, 2003, pp.174-178), both parties used religious mottos in their battles as a religious justification for those battles because of their reflection and impact that exceed any ideology or goals. Part of the conflict between the two parts is how they referred to their weapons and battles. Sometimes, the same weapon or battle is named differently by each party. This article, thus, aims to provide an in-depth analysis of naming background of Israeli and Hamas weaponry and battles by exploring their historical and religious

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context. The paper argues that naming used by both sides reflects their diametrically different religious ideologies taken from the Jewish and Islamic doctrines respectively.

Religion and Politics

Al-Hafi (2023) states that religious patterns that arouse emotions facilitate the exploitation of the public. This is because when religion turns into a stable, binding and non-evolvable system of ideas, it represents the ideal formula for dictatorial regimes aspiring to perpetuate their acquisition. By subduing to these religious decisions, people refrain from thinking and debating.

Confirming what Al-Hafi proposed, we have seen entities and individuals over different ages using various forms of religious discourses for economic and political goals. Temples were used to make offerings, to assign priest as gods, sell 'forgiveness' letters and distribute 'Paradise' keys etc.

Islam constitutes the largest segment in the Arab region, despite the internal differences between Sunnis and Shiites. In Israel, by contrast, we find a difference between orthodox Jews and secular Jews.

Issa (2023) points out that political speech is intentionally directed to an intended audience to influence and convince them of the content of the speech. Political speech is not improvised but rather prepared in advance by experts specialized in different fields. Politicians produce certain phrases that may manipulate the ideas and opinions of the audience.

Dahman (2022) discusses the importance and dangers of using religion in the political field, as religion is an important pillar for the establishment of nations, and a major part of the lives of individuals and groups. Dahman argues that religion is a pivotal tool in the political recruitment of states and a strategy to reach desired goals within the political framework of states and entities that recognize religion as the basis for ruling. Thus, religious discourse is a major factor in the formation of individual and collective consciousness, as it is a form of social, ideological and civilizational motive. Notably, religious discourse may represent a specific viewpoint on religious or worldly issues or the defense and dissemination of a particular doctrine.

Dahman (2022) maintains that the overlap between politics and religion is rooted in the history of international relations through the politicization of all religious issues and the giving a religious dimension to all political issues. This, in fact, is embodied in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Khamis (2021, p.8) emphasizes that the relationship between religion and politics varies from one stage to another and from a place to another in accordance with the specificity of each society, and according to the vision of the ruling regimes. More importantly, religion can be used to sway public opinion, because it can be a strong deterrent or support force.

On the other hand, the Israeli Knesset goes through various conflicts including the division between religious Jews and secular Jews, as Israel is a state without a real identity until the moment, i.e. it cannot present itself as a secular state, or a religious one. This was evident with the arrival of Netanyahu as prime minister and the attempt to gain the support of the religious side by emphasizing that it is a religious war on Gaza. Netanyahu and the IDF minister repeatedly used biblical texts such as Amalekites, Judea and Samaria among others.

Ibn Khaldoun (1992) referred to the issue of linking politics with religion stressing that the political arguments and statements that hide behind the mask of religion is a popular trade in intellectually backward societies. He also stressed that political conflicts must have a tribal or religious trigger in order for its leaders to motivate their followers to fight and die for the *tribe* or *religion*.

The dispute between the two sides is over the existential legitimacy of both parties. Therefore, we find the idea of the *tribe* present through the use of Israel of its ancestry and ethnicity, hence adopting the name of a prophet (Israel or Jacob) as the name of the state. Then, Israel switches to the Jewish religious idea to confront the Canaanite Arabs and their Islamic religious idea in Gaza. The conflict turns metaphorically as a conflict between the Torah and the Quran, which is evident by using the vocabulary of both books through war speeches and weaponry used. Hamas, further expressed its existential fundamentalism by giving their weapons the names of its leaders while Israel refers to Amalekites.

Thus, in this paper we shed light on how Israel and the Hamas use a dangerous intellectual weapon in promoting the conflict between the two parties, through political speeches heavily loaded with religious terms and texts, based on the sources of legislation of the Jewish and Islamic religions. We will see this through the use of the power of 'language', i.e. giving battles and weapons religious names.

An Eternal Conflict

Al-Hafi (2023) emphasizes that Zionist fundamentalism has exploited the idea of the divine promise in the Jewish scriptures to justify its occupation and make it historically acceptable, and that the approach taken in exploiting the sacred texts represents the utilitarian justification and superficial selection of texts, as there are texts that constitute a human basis condemning violence and establishing peace among people.

Tash (Nov 19, 2023) argues that the statements of the Israeli politicians contain many religious connotations, which will, in turn, lead to the outbreak of a religious war. According to Jewish tradition, *Amalekites* 'the giants' are the oldest people who ruled Palestine and they represent the worst forms of evil, and that they were destined to 'perpetual doom'. The conflict of Israel and the *Amalekites* is seen as 'a symbol of the eternal struggle between good and evil' as mentioned in the Samuel and Exodus Books in the Torah. In the opening session of the Knesset on October 16, Netanyahu compared the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas to a "war between darkness and light." This is due to this historical background, from which stems the belief of the extreme right and religious Jews today that the displacement of Arabs from Israel or exterminating them is a biblical commandment. This is because the *Amalekites* are originally an Arab tribe.

The chief rabbi of IDF, Avichai Ronsky, recommended the elimination of the people of Gaza in 2008 and referred to them as the *Amalekites*, "Do not have mercy on the Palestinian Amalekites" (Abu Shomer, 2014; Tash, 2023). According to the Torah philosopher Ovadia Yosef, the Sephardic rabbi, this term is used in reference to Arabs and non-Jewish races. He adds, "The Lord created Gentiles and Amalekites in the image of humans to serve only the Jews". He even went further by describing them as worms (Abu Shomer, 2014; Al-adam, 2023; Sohata, 2023).

Bsharat (2021: 90-93) points out that the leaders of the extremist religious movements believe in the necessity of eliminating everyone who poses a threat to the Jews, especially the Palestinians. The Jewish extremists define Arabs and Palestinians as "the *Amalekites* whom the Torah commanded the Jews to exterminate," and call for a brutal war against Arabs who reject the Jewish rule. Rabbi Israel Hess says, "The historical *Amalekites* are the same as the Palestinians". Haim Sori- the fierce defender of the Gush Emunim movement- tries to justify violence against Arabs by saying, "There are *Amalekites* in every generation. The *Amalekites* of our generation are the Arabs who stand in the face of reviving our national existence on the land of our ancestors".

It is clear that the *Amalekites* represent the pinnacle of evil in the Jewish tradition. Therefore, the term *Amalekites* found in the Torah is used by Israel today in reference to the peoples who threaten the existence of the Jews. This was evident in Netanyahu's speech to the Israeli soldiers in the recent war on Gaza when he said to them, "Remember what *Amalekites* did to you," as he considered this war between "the sons of light and the sons of darkness, and it will not end until light prevails over darkness" (Al-adam, 2023).

Let's, now, see how Hamas looks at Israel. In the speeches of politicians and war spokesmen such as Abu Obeida and Usama Hamdan, we find constant ridicule of Israelis such as calling them Nazis, magicians, murderers, criminals, and religious Zionist gangs. Palestinian spokesmen never call it Israel, but a Zionist occupier. Abu Obeida states that the Israeli version is an incorrect religious myth that calls for the extermination of Hamas (The military spokesman for the al Qassam, Al Jazeera live Jan 15, 2024). Hamas believes in its idea that the conflict with the Zionist enemy is a fateful civilizational conflict with ideological dimensions, and that the war against the state of Israel is an issue of existence. Hamas makes a distinction between the Jews as the people of the Torah and the occupier Zionist Jews who usurped their land, and thus must be fought (Saleh, 2003, p. 411).

In a nutshell, each of Israel and Hamas consider themselves the people of the land and each party looks at the other in derision.

Naming and the Construction of Identity

Names, in general, have interlinked associations with gender (Obasi et al. 2019), ethnicity (Edwards and Caballero 2008), class (Lindsay and Dempsey 2017), socioeconomic position (Bloothoof and Onland 2011). They may demarcate the person into particular social roles (Pilcher 2017; Betiang 2020) and affect how we perceive race (Gaddis 2017b) and faith (Madziva 2018). Names may have a direct impact on employability (Pascual et al. 2015) and professional competence (Mehrabian 1997).

Alia (2007), Finch (2008), Rom and Benjamin (2011), Khosravi (2012), Pilcher (2016), and Wykes (2015) point out that personal names and surnames highly mark an individual's personal, ethnic and national identity. Rom and Benjamin (2011: 8) argue that when we hear a certain name, we subconsciously place that person in relation to local social hierarchies, hence assigning him/her a position between the center and the margins.

Pilcher (2016: 774) indicates that women in the UK, “usually change their surnames in line with traditions of patronymic naming, transgender people may change their names in order to ‘pass’, and ethnic minority individuals may change their names in order to better ‘fit in’ with the majority population, or to avoid prejudice and discrimination in employment”. Pilcher (2016:775) concludes that “our names are both constituted by and help to constitute our sexed and gendered selves, our racialized and ethnic identities and other identifications that make us both a unique individual and a culturally embedded and socially administered citizen”.

Alia (2007) further argues that names have *politics* and can make an individual or group relationships easier or more complicated. Names also may facilitate access to work and the ability to integrate into a certain society. Highlighting how names can demarcate insiders and outsiders, Alia argues that names may represent power relations and notions of discrimination. For example, Wood et al. (2009) argue that, in Britain's labor market, names could disadvantage individuals of particular racial and ethnic backgrounds as in the case of candidates with African and Asian names in comparison with stereotypically white British names.

In fact, there are considerable records of immigrants changing their surnames to make them sound like the native names in the host country, thereby reducing their ‘difference’ (e.g. Bursell, 2012 and Khosravi, 2012). By the same token, Fryer and Levitt (2003) argued that ‘Black’ names in the USA may have localized benefits in denoting ethnic or racial solidarity. Khattab and Johnson (2015: 502) contend that Muslims have been put in the spotlight, “to the extent that it is difficult to separate the impact of practicing Islam, appearing Muslim, or simply being a Muslim by birth, family, or community”. Khosravi (2012: 65) argues that “Muslim sounding names have ceased to be a mere marker of the Muslim identity and become a symbol of the ‘danger’ that the Islamic religion represents”. Khosravi suggests that the anti-Muslim prejudice in some Swedish communities made some Muslims change their names to more Swedish or European sounding names in order to avoid being marking as Muslim.

On the national and international levels, naming can be a type of media because of its social and political influence that may divert the public's attention and create new perceptions. It is one of the most dangerous influences on opinion-making. Naming directs the public's reactions by activating the connections between connotations and symbolism on the one hand and the concepts stored in the minds of the public on the other. Giving wars and weapons effective symbolic names may, thus, secure legitimate coverage and acceptance from the public. This is, in fact, a form of military marketing and manipulating of naming. It is an illegal control of the mind to form biased mental models (Conversi, 2016; Eledwy, 2021; How does Israel call its military operations [HDICMO], 2022).

Finally, there are three purposes of creating new strategic names: establishing social and historic relations, euphemizing facts, and legitimizing actions (HDICMO, 2022). In this paper, we will focus on the third purpose: legitimizing actions related to religious ideologies.

Naming of weaponry and battles between Israel and Hamas

We cannot list all the weapons used in the battles between Israel and Palestine as the two groups, especially Hamas, do not announce their weapons due to military and strategic reasons. Israel officially announces its weapons on its IDF platform except perhaps the weapons it got from the USA during the war on Gaza. On

the other hand, it is difficult to accurately determine the types of weapons that the Gazans possess in this war. Rather, we follow them according to what is published in short films, or official statements of the resistance mainly announced by Hamas spokesman, Abu Obeida.

Generally speaking, it seems that both of Israel and Hamas aim to gain support and sympathy from various sides and to ideologize these wars with a religious character as a type of adding legitimacy and absolute sanctity to war under what both sides call self-defense. In specific, The Israeli military and the Palestinian resistance represented by Hamas both employ Biblical and Quranic religious texts and stories in their war discourse to clearly state that the war has a purely religious ideology.

Recall that in this paper we argue that most of the names that both parties give to battles and weapons stem from specific military connotations and religious ideologies, aimed at having a mental impact as both parties claim that they have been the people of the land since ever. We will show that both parties name their weapons and battles after a founding figure, a sacred place, or a word or phrase in their holy books: The Old Testament and the Quran.

Israeli Weaponry and Battles

The Israeli naming conventions of weapons and battles are not directed only at the Palestinians, but are also directed at the internal Israeli public opinion in order to justify the military operations and create a certain mental image. Israeli naming is also directed to the Western world's opinion in order to create a directed image against the Palestinian. By doing so, Israel, in fact, is defending itself and its beliefs to gain sympathy.

It is noted that Israel does not always give *weapons* names with clear or direct religious connotations. Rather, it gives *battles* religious names. It is not strange for Netanyahu, then, to use religious terminology in the war and give it religious characteristics, as he wants to gain support from the religious parties to enable him to preside the Israeli Knesset. It is worth mentioning here that the voices of the religious parties, which aim to establish a religious state, are today louder than the secularist parties in the Israeli Knesset (Bsharat, 2021: 92-93).

The military weapons of Israeli army include a wide array of arms, armored vehicles, tanks, artillery, plans, helicopters, missiles, and warships. Some have ancient origins, especially from Biblical Hebrew. The Israeli military vocabulary as other vocabulary were adapted from Biblical or Mishnaic words, which no longer function in their original meaning.

Below are some of the Israeli weapons with religious connotations.

Eitan Drone

IDF announced the use of *Eitan* drone in its recent war on Gaza, and this drone carries explosive missiles (Al-Matraqa, 2023; New details about the bombs "MK-84": This is how America participated in the Gaza massacres[NDB], 2023). *Eitan* is assembled in the factory of Merkava (Delivery of advanced armored personnel carriers to the infantry forces of the Israeli army [DAAPCIFIA], 2023). The drone is also known as "Haroun TB" and "Haroun 2" or "Mahatzes 2" and is capable of flying for 36 hours (DAAPCIFIA, 2023; Israel unveils new drone that can fly to Gulf [IUNDCFG], 2010). It is worth mentioning here that "Eitan" in Hebrew means 'spiritual strength'(ReformJudaism.org. (n.d)).

Eqdah 'revolver'

Shafir (2015:354) states that the meaning of this root in Biblical Hebrew is 'be kindled, kindle' as in "A fire is kindled in mine anger" (Deuteronomy 32:22). The root also exists in other Semitic languages, as Aramaic *qedaH* 'kindle', and Arabic *qadaHa* 'strike fire'. "*EqdaH* 'revolver' as a word was unused for almost 3000 years, until Eliezer Ben Yehuda (1858-1922), the famous reviver of Spoken Hebrew, suggested in 1896 to use it for 'gun.'" (Ibid).

Rove 'Gun'

RVH as a root means 'shoot' in Biblical Hebrew. The word was started to be used by the writers of *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment movement, European Jews in the 18th-19th centuries. It appears in Genesis 21:20

“And God was with the lad, and he grew. And he dwelt in the wilderness, and became, as he grew up, an archer.” “The ordinary compound for 'archer' in Biblical Hebrew is *dorchey qeshet*, meaning 'bow benders', and the signification of *dorchey* is 'tread' and *qeshet* is 'bow.' In this verse, the compound is *rove qashshat*, meaning 'one shooting the bow.’” (Shafir, 2015:354-355).

TotaH ‘Cannon’

TotaH appears in the Old Testament in the book of Job 41:21. The King James Version translated is as to 'dart'. However, the Jewish classical interpretation is "a sort of weapon" or "a weapon that fired stones". "In fact, the root YTH does not exist in Hebrew, but is found in Arabic WTH, meaning "beat with a club, chastise." From this root, Arabic derived *mittaHa* 'club.'" (Shafir, 2015:355).

Margema ‘Mortar’

The word *margema* appears in the Old Testament in the book of Proverbs 26:8 “As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so [is] he that giveth honour to a fool” King James Version translated *margema* to 'sling.' This weapon was perhaps a big slingshot, which fired a stone-heap in one shoot. Shafir (2015:356) points out that “the root RGM in the sense of 'stone, kill by stoning' exists in many Semitic languages, e.g., Arabic *rag'ama* 'throw stones at, revile, curse,' Aramaic *regam* 'stone,' Ethiopian 'curse'.

Merkava

An Israeli-manufactured tank that fits 4 soldiers. Most references mention that *merkava* means a ‘cart or chariot’ (Merkava and the tiger in 2023: Weapons that tarnished the reputation of the Israeli weapon [MT], 2023). However, TRT Arabia pinpoints that *merkava* or *merkabah* in Ezekiel (1:4-28) represents the ‘Lord’s chariot that roam the desert to impose the Lord’s kudos (The Merkava: Israeli pride crushed by Palestinian resistance [MIPCPR], 2023). In fact, Arabic also uses the word *merkabah* to refer to ‘vehicle’. Perhaps, *merkabah* with silent ‘h’- underwent a phonological change to become *merkava* as both ‘b’ and ‘v’ sounds are labial. The word comes from the Arabic root *RKB* ‘to ride’.

Hamis Weaponry

Hamis movement appeared with the 1987 intifada, and the movement initially defined itself as a wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine. It also goes back to the movement of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, known as the Palestinian Mujahideen (Saleh, 2023: 237; Saleh, 2003: 373). Hamis believes that liberation will come at their hands and that they are among the few whom Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) preached about, the righteous and faithful who will fulfill the promise of God and the word of Islam. They will stand firm before the Jews and they will take back Palestine and the holy land of Muslims. Hamis considers its battles against Israel religious and it calls war against the Jewish state *jihad*. (Al-Ali, 1998: 113-114).

It is apparent that Hamis uses names and symbols with religious and political connotations for its weapons much more than Israel. This might be attributed to the ideological background of the movement, which identified itself as Islamic with national goals tied to the land of Palestine. As we previously mentioned, there is a divide between religious and secular Jews in the state of Israel, and this explains the lesser use of symbolic terms and phrases compared to Hamis.

Hamis utilizes Quranic phrases with strong reflections and high impact on the targeted audience because the religious sentiments have a profound influence on public opinion in the Arab region. The use of concepts such as *shuwa:th* ‘fire’, and their religious and historical connotations in Islamic heritage reflects the power of language and discourse that Hamis is trying to convey in this conflict.

Regarding the use of the names of leaders, it serves as a confirmation of the movement's continuity and its connection to Islamic religious ideology associated with martyrdom. Hamis wants to tell Israel that they, as martyrs, do not truly die. Even if their bodies die, they will always be there.

The weapons that Hamis in Gaza launches at Israel include rockets and mortar shells. The short- and medium-range rockets, which constitute the majority of rockets fired by Palestinians, are all locally manufactured and given a variety of names but are generally referred to as Qassam rockets. As mentioned previously, Hamis

rockets are locally made, and are considered primitive compared to the missiles of armies in the world today (Esposito, 2009). In the following section, we will focus only on the weapons that have a religious reference.

Al- Qassam Missiles

These missiles were named after the Palestinian resistance movement known as the Al-Qassam Jihadist Group (the Jihadi Organization), which was founded by Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam in 1925, and is considered the first secret jihadist organization in Palestine. After the death of Sheikh al-Qassam, the group was known as the al-Qassam Group or the Qassamists, and they raised the slogan: “This is jihad of victory or martyrdom” (Saleh, 2003: 373). In fact, Hamas military spokesman, Abu Obeida, always ends all his speeches with this statement which reflects the movements’ deeply rooted Islamic ideology. They look at war as an-always-winning event: either they win the war or they are killed and become martyrs, i.e. winning the hereafter.

Al-Qassam rockets (4th version ranges between 15-17 km.) are made from metal tubes that are easily obtained and available to the general public, and filled with explosives and propellants that are in most cases made from household materials at hand such as sugar and fertilizer. Nonetheless, these rockets must contain TNT which is most likely smuggled into the Gaza Strip from Iran, Lebanon or Syria, or extracted from unexploded shells belonging to the Israeli army (Esposito, 2009: 4-8).

Al-Yassin shell (Hamas Military Media, 2023)

On October 10, 2023, Hamas announced that it developed an anti-armor missile during the Battle of Al-Aqsa Flood. It is an RPG shell developed from the Russian "Tandum 85" missile used in the 2009 Battle of Al-Furqan. *Al-Yassin* is a tandem projectile that contains two or more stages of explosion and fired from a shoulder-mounted RPG cannon. Its maximum speed is 300 meters per second and it can penetrate steel iron 60 cm. beyond the outer armor (QBeyTM, 2023). Shot at an angle of 45°, the shells were made to destroy military vehicles, as they now destroy the *Merkeva* the *Panther* (QBeyTM, 2023; MT, 2023), and (MT, 2023).

Notably, these missiles were called “Al-Yassin” after the movement’s founder, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, a paralyzed Palestinian religious figure. (*Al-Qassam Brigades explains how the "Yassin 105 tandem missile" works* [QBeyTM], 2023). This weapon, among others, is given a prominent figure’s name as a kind of legitimizing the fight, and giving spiritual strength to the fighters as their leaders died for the same cause.

The Sejjil 55 missile and the Ababil drone

Sejjil 55 appeared for the first time in 2012 (Zatmasr, 2023). It has a range of 55 km (From Al-Assif to Al-Yassin [FAA], 2023). Notably, the word *Sejjil* ‘petrified clay’ is mentioned in the Holy Quran in Surat Al-Fil ‘The Elephant’. “This Surah, as its name indicates, refers to the well-known historical event that happened in the year of the birth of the Prophet Muhammed when Allah protected Ka’aba against the attack of the army of pagans- led by Abraha Al-Ashram- who, riding on the backs of elephants, came from Yemen intending to destroy it” (al-islam.org). The translation of the five-Aya Surah explains why Hamas chose this name.

1. “Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?”
2. “Did He not make their stratagem go awry?”
3. “And He sent upon them birds in flocks,”
4. “Pelting them with stones of petrified clay,”
5. “Thus He made them like straw eaten up.”

Ababil drones, used by Al-Qassam in the 2014 aggression, were inspired by the same Surat, where the ‘birds in flocks’ *Ababil* are mentioned (Zatmasr, 2023).

Thus, Hamas used *sejjil* to refer to this divine punishment ‘petrified clay/ slate stones’, as if telling Israel troops that you will be pelted with stones as the companions of the elephant. The word *Ababil* ‘flocks of birds’ indicates the big number of the missiles that Hamas may ‘stone/ bomb’ Israel with. This, in fact, has become true when Hamas launched hundreds, if not thousands, of missiles on different Israeli territories including Tel Aviv at the beginning of the Toufan Al-Aqsa war.

Al-Quds 101 missile

It has a range of about 16 km. The name refers to one of the three sacred cities for Muslims: Mecca, Al-madina Al-munawwara and Al-Quds 'Jerusalem'. The first two are in Saudi Arabia, while the third is in Palestine. Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third most sacred mosque for Muslims, is in Jerusalem, hence the sacred nature of Al-Quds. Israel claims that Solomon's temple is located beneath the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, hence the holiness of the city. By naming this 16-km missile Al-Quds 101, Hamas wants to send a clear message to its enemy that our war against you is based on a religious ideology: we defend ourselves and our holy mosque in this holy city (Esposito, 2009).

The Ayyash Missile

This missile was first announced in 2021, and has a range of 250 km, and can reach Tel Aviv and Safed in the north (FAA, 2023; The most prominent rockets used by the Palestinian resistance [MPRUPR], 2023.). It was first used in the war on Gaza (Oct 2023). It had been developed from the Iranian missile 'Fatih 10' (Halawa, 2023; MPRUPR, 2023.). The missile is named after Yahya Ayyash (born on March 6, 1966) who was the chief bombmaker of Hamas and the leader of the West Bank battalion of the *Izz ad-Din al-Qassam* Brigades. Thus, he was nicknamed as the 'Engineer'. The bombings he planned resulted in the death of around 90 Israelis. He was assassinated by Shin Bet on 5 January 1996. As *Ayyash* was one of the resistance figures, Hamas named the best missile it made after him (MPRUPR, 2023; Halawa, 2023).

Storm Torpedo 'Al-Assif'

It is a locally made, self-propelled water missile that is launched from a submarine or ship from under or above the water. It is slow compared to the missile due to its heavy head of explosives. It has a camera, steering device and fins (FAA, 2023). Linguistically, *Assif* 'stormy' is an adjective that is mentioned in the Holy Quran: Surat Yunus, Aya 22:

“It is He who enables you to travel on land and sea until, when you are in ships and they sail with them by a good wind and they rejoice therein, there comes a storm wind and the waves come upon them from everywhere....” (<https://myislam.org/surah-yunus/ayat-22/>)

As the Aya context shows, the word *Assif* collocates with the word *ri:h* 'wind'. However, unlike *riya:h* 'wind', *ri:h* is used for wicked destroying winds. The bad connotation percolates to the adjective *assif*. The collocation 'stormy wind' is used to describe how the Lord destroys ships in seas and oceans especially after calm wind. Therefore, describing their torpedo as *assif* 'stormy', Hamas delivers two messages: our conflict with you, Israel, is religious; and we will destroy you as this destroying wind (Zatmasr, 2023).

Al-Rantisi or "R 160" Missile

This missile was developed by Qassami troops, and was used for the first time in 2014. It was named after one of the founders of Hamas, Abdulaziz Al-Rantisi, and has a range of 160 km (MPRUPR, 2023). The letter R refers to Rantisi, who was assassinated in a raid in 2004 (Saleh, 2023: 228).

Shuwa:th

This device is the most famous explosive device directed against tanks (Aljazeera Mubasher, 2023). It is made of copper and turns into an arrow-like shape that enables it to penetrate vehicles, tanks, and iron armor 38 cm. thick. It weighs about 3.5 kg and has high accuracy when fired from a close range (Report: MTV Lebanon Channel, 14-12-2023; Sky News: Article/12-12-2023; Zatmasr, 2023). *Shuwa:th* 'smokeless flame' (Al-Qurtubi: 532) is the fire mentioned in the Holy Quran, "Against you will be sent thorns of fire and copper, but you will not be victorious" (The Most Gracious: verse 35).

Rujum

This is a short-range missile with a 114-mm caliber. It is mentioned in the Holy Quran, Surah Al-Mulk as a description of the meteors that pursue devils. "And indeed, We adorned the lowest heaven with stars like lamps,

and made them as missiles for stoning eavesdropping devils, for whom We have also prepared the torment of the Blaze.” (Quran: Al-Mulk: Verse 5). *Rajum*, as a name, fits well with missiles as it shoots enemies with stones.

Mutbbir ‘Completely Destroying’ Missiles

The name of this missile is inspired by the word *Tatbeer* ‘complete destruction’ mentioned in Surat Al-Isra which has a religious connotation about the divine promise of the afterlife and the demise of the occupying state (Zatmasr, 2023). “If you act rightly, it is for your own good, but if you do wrong, it is to your own loss. And when the second warning would come to pass, your enemies would be left to totally disgrace you and enter that place of worship as they entered it the first time, and utterly destroy whatever would fall into their hands” (The Holy Qu’ran, Surat Al-Isra’: 7).

This Aya is addressing the Israelis, and promising of destroying everything they worked hard to build and establish. By calling this missile *mutabbir*, mentioned in another derivative in the same Aya, Hamas sends a robust message to the Israelis that they will be completely destroyed. (Al-Qurtubi: 282).

Most of these ten weapons are mentioned in the speeches of Abu Obeida, the military spokesman for the Qassam Brigades/ Hamas, and the speeches of Abu Hamza, the military spokesman for the Al-Quds Brigades in the recent war on Gaza. Those speeches start with verses from the Quran, followed by the weapons used to confront the Israeli troops along with their casualties. Again, those weapons are given religious names (mostly from the Holy Quran) or leaders’ names as a kind of legitimizing the fight and encouraging the fighters to endure this religious war. (The speeches of Abu Obeida and Abu Hamza are found on YouTube platform, or the Al Jazeera website and news channels since October 7, 2023). The focus of the religious dimension of the war is also evident in the speeches of Hamas political figures and leaders- such as Ismail Haniyeh, Usama Hamdan- whose speeches are full of Quranic verses, prophet Hadiths, and religious symbols.

Wars and Battles

According to the military expert Major General Wassef Erekat (Sky News, The Iron Swords [IS], 2023), naming military operations is a recent practice that occurred during World War I at the hands of the Germans, and it quickly spread among other countries during the two world wars. The radio helped those resonant big names that have a psychological effect to be well-known to everyone with the aim of influencing public opinion and spreading enthusiasm among the forces and scaring the opponent and weakening their spirits.

Here, too, we find that Israel and Hamas gave different names for the same wars and battles in order to reflect their ideologies and doctrines. We will refer to the war/ battle’s year and show how each side named it.

On the side of Hamas names, the common denominators were related to Jerusalem and Aqsa Mosque. The purpose was to mobilize the Palestinian people and the Islamic nation and unify them around Aqsa Mosque against their enemy, Israel (Saleh, 2003:264).

On the other hand, Israel also had religious common denominators such as the *Amalekites* ‘the giants’, which is linked to the historical conflict mentioned in the Torah between the people of Palestine and the sons of Israel. Here we quote the Israeli PM Netanyahu’s statement in a press conference on Oct 28, 2023: “The Torah tells us, ‘Remember what *Amalekites* did to you’ (Samuel Book:3:15:1). Yes, we remember and we fight.” This is a reference to what the Arab *Amalekites* did to the sons of Israel in a war that took place thirty centuries ago. This indicates that the Israeli authority label the ongoing war as a ‘religious war’.

Torah points to “the continuation of Israel’s war against *Amalekites* ‘the giants’. According to the Book of Exodus (17:16), the Lord places His hand on His throne and swears that the war with the *Amalekites* will last for generations.

According to Abu Halawa (2016), and Badr (2018) 27% of the names of the Israeli military campaigns between 1948-2007 were inspired by nature, 38% were inspired by religious heritage and the Torah in particular, while the rest of the names go back to common and recognized Hebrew considerations. This is also confirmed by *Israel* newspaper’s article that summarized the results of a group of studies regarding the same issue (Nisenbaum,

2018). In light of the wars from (2007-2023), we can safely claim that the percentage related to religious heritage and the Torah has greatly gone up as we will show shortly.

The 2008 war (12-27-2008 to 1-18-2009)

This conflict marked the first major Israeli military operation against Hamas in Gaza. Israeli forces targeted Hamas militants, rocket launch sites, and infrastructure. The use of air and ground forces aimed to degrade Hamas capabilities and suppress rocket attacks on southern Israel. Israel called this war ‘*Cast Lead*’, while Hamas called it the ‘*Furqan Battle*’, one of the names of the Holy Quran. Furqan is also a name of a Surah in the Holy Quran and it has several meanings: the standard; the separator of the right and the wrong; the victory; the evidence; and the morning. This indicates that Hamas looked at this war as a victory and that it will separate the right (them) from the wrong (the Israelis).

Abu Halawa (2016) states that the Israeli name, ‘*Cast Lead*’ was adapted from a children’s hymn by the Jewish poet Haim Bialik, known and nicknamed as ‘the national poet’. This hymn was written on the occasion of the Feast of Torchlight (Sukot), which is one of the new Jewish holidays.

The hymn says:

“And my teacher gave me a bulb
 Made of cast lead
 Do you know what in what honor?
 In honor of the Feast of Torches”

The Feast of Torches is considered one of a national and religious holiday (Abu Halawa, 2016), and the army’s use of this term is due to Jewish stories and legends that when the sacred golden vessels were taken out of the Temple, they turned into lead, which is associated with the story of the Jewish Barkokhia, as a reference to cleansing the land of Hamas militants (Abu Halawa, 2016; Saleh, 2023:256-257).

The 2012 War

This eight-day conflict saw increased use of precision airstrikes, targeting Hamas leaders and military installations. The IDF also focused on disabling Hamas’s long-range rocket capabilities. The operation sought to reduce the immediate threat to Israeli civilians. Israel called it ‘*The Pillar of the Cloud*’ which is a term taken from the Torah and related to the loss of the Jews in the Sinai desert for 40 years during the time of Moses (Atallah, 2016). Figuratively, it means “heavenly punishment,” in reference to the loss and uncertainty (Abu Amer, 2012; Abu Halawa, 2016). Thus, Israel is telling Hamas militants that their punishment will be heavenly. Hamas, on the other hand, called it *Hija:rat as-Sejjil* ‘The Shale Stones’ (burnt fossilized clay), while the Al-Quds Brigades, the military wing of the Islamic Jihad Movement, called it *Al-Bunyan Al-Marsoos* ‘Solid Structure’. Both names have religious connotations as they are taken from the Holy Quran (Saleh, 2023:257; The Arroyo Rand Center, 2017.) The ‘shale stones’ are the stones that the Lord struck the people of Prophet Lot due to their homosexuality. The ‘solid Structure’ is a description for believers: “Verily, Allah loves those who fight in His Cause in rows (ranks) as if they were a solid structure”. (Holy Quran, Surat As-Saff: 4).

‘*The Pillar of the Cloud*’ was mentioned in the Torah in (Exodus, chapter 13, verses 21-22): “And the Lord went before them by day in a *pillar of cloud* to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The *pillar of cloud* by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people”. It is also mentioned in the Book of Exodus (chapter 14, verses 19-20). “Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel’s army, withdrew and went behind them. The *pillar of cloud* also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long”.

The 2014 War

This is a major conflict that lasted 51 days, and witnessed intensive airstrikes, ground incursions, and naval engagements. The IDF aimed to dismantle Hamas's extensive tunnel network, which posed a significant threat to Israeli communities near Gaza borders. This operation resulted in a high number of casualties on both sides and drew international attention to the ongoing conflict. Israel called this war *'The Steadfast Edge'*, while Hamas called it *'Al-Asf Al-Ma'kool'* 'an empty field of stalks of which the corn has been eaten up by cattle' (Saleh, 2023:257-258; Atallah, 2016; The Arroyo Rand Center, 2017). Hamas's name is taken from the Holy Quran, Surat Al-Fil, 'The Elephant', verse 5. "Thus, He made them (the companions of the elephant) like straw eaten up". Using this name, Hamas is threatening Israel that it will become like straw eaten up in this war.

The Israeli naming of the *'Steadfast Edge'* goes back to the story of Balaam bin Baorah, mentioned in the Book of Numbers, chapter 24, verses 21-25: "And he looked on the Kenite, and took up his discourse and said, "Enduring is your dwelling place, and your nest is set in the rock. Nevertheless, Kain shall be burned when Asshur takes you away captive. And he took up his discourse and said, "Alas, who shall live when God does this? And Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword and took possession of his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as to the Ammonites, for the border of the Ammonites was strong. And Israel took all these cities, and Israel settled in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all its villages" (Abu Halawa, 2016; The Arroyo Rand Center, 2017).

The rock mentioned in the verses is the literal translation of the meaning of the name *'steadfast edge'* in Hebrew (Abu Halawa, 2016; The Arroyo Rand Center, 2017). Israel, thus, wants to deliver the message to Hamas that it will always be like a steadfast edge that Hamas will never conquer. The other dimension of the name, as Abu Halawa (2016) argues, goes back to the rabbis who believed that it was a biblical prophecy that came in Psalm 91. The prophecy speaks of the destruction of a Palestinian city, which the rabbis suggested was Gaza.

The 2021 war against Al-Sheikh Jarrah Neighborhood

This Israeli operation lasted for 11 days and was called 'The Wall Guard', while Hamas called it *'The Sword of Jerusalem'* as a result of the tense events in Jerusalem and the violations against Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and against Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Israeli name came in the prophecy of Isaiah in the sixty-second chapter, paragraphs 6-7: On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen who will not always be silent all day and all night. "O, you who remember the Lord, do not be silent, and do not let him be silent." Eledwy (2021) argues that 'these guards' will not be silent about the Israelis killing of the Palestinians to achieve their goal of controlling all of the Palestinian land.

Oct 7, 2023 War

The current war is the bloodiest between the two parties. On the 7th of October 2023 Hamas and other Islamic militants attacked the settlements around Gaza and took around 300 hostages. They also killed around 700 Israeli soldiers and officers. In reaction to the attack, Israel bombarded the city of Gaza for 121 days so far during which more than 27000 people (mostly women and children) have been killed (From *'Iron swords'* to *'Genesis war'* [ISGW], 2023). Israel named this war *'The Iron Swords'* (ISGW, 2023; An Israeli meeting to change the name of the war [IMCNW], 2023). Perhaps Israel wanted it to be like the Crusade battles since the armies at that time were famous for their use of heavy iron swords during the First Crusade to Palestine and the famous Jerusalem massacre in the year 1099 AD. The owners of the iron swords defeated the Fatimids (Egyptians) who ruled Jerusalem at the time.

However, some contend that the motive and significance of Israel's choice of this name is not decided yet (IMCNW, 2023), while Halawa (2023) links the name to the type of the heavy weapons used in this war, as Israel used destructive and advanced weapons of Israeli and American make.

In contrast, the Islamic movements called this war *Toufan Al-Aqsa* 'the Al-Aqsa Flood' (IMCNW, 2023). The name has religious connotations in the soul of Palestinian and Arabs, as the name refers to Al-Aqsa Mosque and the unjust attacks against it. The spokesman of the Political Bureau of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), Ismail Haniyeh (2023) stated that "we have warned the world and the fascist Israeli government

against harming Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem. We warned Israel not to play with fire and not to cross the red line. However, Israeli cabinet were deaf and blind". Rjoub (2023) states that the Islamic movements usually use terms such as *the line of fire* and *the red lines* to refer to Jerusalem, and this explains the name Al-Aqsa flood. Rjoub adds that the Islamic movements insist on using Jerusalem in the naming of the wars against Israel for a number of considerations, including the religious dimension of the city and the Palestinian Arab-Islamic identity. Muslim and Christian Arabs share that same view of Jerusalem, and thus the naming came as a response to the repeated violations of Al-Aqsa and Jerusalem.

On the other hand, it seems that Israel's real reason for naming it the *'Iron Sword War'* was not clear due to the element of surprise. Some Israeli newspapers and Kan channel suggest that this name is temporary and the government was not lucky to choose this name. Kan channel also reported that Israel intends to hold a meeting at the end of December 2023 and the beginning of 2024 to change the name of the war. There are three proposals, all of which have biblical implications (IMCNW, 2023; Al-Daihi, 2023)

- A. The Genesis War, which is believed to be the most likely name, and it is the name of the biblical book that the Jews finish reading on a day known as "Simchat Torah," which is the holiday that Israel celebrated on October 7, 2023.
- B. Simchat Torah War: It is the holiday in which the annual Torah reading concludes.
- C. Wind War: It is a translation of the Hebrew name *mashiv haruach* 'the blowing of the wind'. It is a part of a short prayer for rain recited by Jews during Simchat holiday.

Al-Daihi (2023) confirms that the reason for this name change by Netanyahu is his desire to turn the war into a religious war after 121 days of the war in Gaza, which is an attempt to mix the war with biblical and religious matters in order to preserve the desired goals of that war.

The Genesis Book talks about the land being empty. Netanyahu believes that the Jews will start over, and perhaps this is what explains the connection of this war with the amount of destruction in Gaza. The book goes back to the first stories, starting from the story of Noah and the two deaths, all the way to the story of Abraham and Isaac, which carries the idea of religious inheritance to the sons of Israel. The implication of that book to the Jews is that "we need to begin again. The land is ours based on the Old Testament and our inheritance of the land of our ancestors". This message is conveyed clearly through Netanyahu's religious speeches to Israeli soldiers (Atallah, 2023)

Atallah (2023) maintains that the reason for changing the name after all 121 days of war in Gaza is a message to the other side that the war will continue as no one changes the name of a war after 4 months of its commencement.

CONCLUSION

This study emphasized the significant role of language in shaping perceptions during wars between Israel and the Palestinian resistance represented by Hamas. The analysis revealed the complex use of language in conflict, showing how weapons and battles' names became laden with connotations that impacted the public's views. In specific, it showed that names given to weapons and operations are powerful tools in changing people's mindsets. The use of religious and ideological terms by both parties aimed to rally support and influence the legitimacy of their wars and various military campaigns. The paper highlighted the power of nomenclature in warfare and its critical role in the narrative and ideological wars. Therefore, understanding such naming conventions is very important for comprehending the broader sociopolitical forces and religious foundations of conflicts and wars. They unfold on different levels, attempting to portray the war as an inherent historical, cultural and religious conflict, narrowing it down to a war between Judaism and Islam. Simultaneously, the struggle between the two parties to assert the rightful ownership of the land was extensively expressed through media, military, and political discourse.

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