



BRILL

Military Naming Practices of Palestinian Factions in Reactive Response to Israeli Incursions and Aggressions

Oqab Jabali | ORCID: 0000-0003-1156-6205

Language Center, Faculty of Humanities and Educational Sciences,
An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine

Corresponding Author

oqab.jabali@najah.edu

Hanadi Dwikat | ORCID: 0000-0001-8148-3216

Public Relations Department, Faculty of Modern Media,
Arab American University, Ramallah, Palestine

hanadi.dwikat@aaup.edu

Munther Saeedi | ORCID: 0000-0003-4912-9000

Language Center, Faculty of Humanities and Educational Sciences,
An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine

munther.saeedi@najah.edu

Received 22 July 2024 | Accepted 1 August 2024 |

Published online 7 November 2024

Abstract

This article explores the military operation-naming practices of Palestinian factions in response to Israeli aggression, analyzing their strategies and their impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dynamics. The research uses the War Normalizing Discourse (WND) theory as a framework and draws from Islamic tradition, official Hamas documentation, publicly disseminated materials, and insights from Arab intellectuals. The results show that the names chosen for military operations by Palestinian factions hold deep symbolic, cultural, and emotional significance, aiming to recruit fighters, gain public support, and maintain resilience. Understanding these naming practices provides valuable insights into the complex Israeli-Palestinian conflict and

the intricate interplay between the nomenclature of battles conducted by Palestinian factions and Israel's military operations.

Keywords

Hamas – Israeli-Palestinian conflict – military operations – operation names – War Normalizing Discourse (WND) theory

1 Introduction

Palestinians are frequently subjected to violence and insecurity, highlighting the complexity and humanitarian implications of asymmetrical conflict. Asymmetrical conflict in Palestine refers to the uneven power dynamics and military capabilities between the Israeli state and Palestinian factions (Gallo and Marzano 2009). Israel has advanced military technology, resources, and international support, while Palestinian factions like Hamas and Islamic Jihad have limited resources. The conflict dates back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with competing claims over historic Palestine (Jabali 2022). Israel's military dominance has led to numerous wars, uprisings, and violence, further deepening the asymmetry between the parties. Palestinian factions have resorted to guerilla warfare, suicide bombings, and rocket attacks as a means of resistance, which have been seen as acts of terrorism (Brym and Araj 2022).

In the fabric of human existence, words have a special ability to influence outcomes and shape destinies. Our words determine how our lives turn out more than simply our actions (Pennebaker et al. 2003). They reflect our feelings, thoughts, and aspirations. The impact of words on our perceptions, behaviors, and interpersonal relationships has been extensively researched and valued, from classical philosophical insight to contemporary psychological understanding. A profound connection between the spoken and unspoken, the explicit and implicit, is revealed by the complex interactions between language and human existence (Ibid); much of what human language conveys is implied rather than explicitly articulated (Gelman and Roberts 2017) through propositional content (Mannheim 2015).

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been a protracted and entrenched conflict that is characterized by violent cycles and territorial disputes (Salah and Shaath 2023). Different Palestinian factions have emerged in response to Israeli incursions and assaults, each with distinctive names for their armed

conflicts (Hatuqa 2022). Military operations carried out by Palestinian factions have evolved into a defining feature of resistance against Israeli incursions in the ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel (Hadad 2021). These military operations are distinguished not only by their tactical choices and goals, but also by the names given to them. The names of these operations were not chosen randomly; rather, they have a significant impact on the narratives and ideologies that support the Palestinian resistance movement; Palestinian factions use naming efforts to establish equal participation, gain legitimacy, and challenge Israel's powerful image by presenting opposing war narratives (Ibid). They convey the ideologies, plans, and goals of the factions in their resistance to the Israeli occupation and have considerable symbolic and rhetorical weight (Alsoos 2021).

Discourse plays an important and multifaceted role in asymmetrical warfare. Discourse, or the language, narratives, and symbols used by conflict actors, is critical in shaping perceptions, justifications, and motivations for violence (Stepanova 2008:17). Discourse is a powerful tool used by both sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly by Palestinian factions, including but not limited to, Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Discourse is a powerful tool for resistance movements to legitimize their actions and portray their struggle as a righteous cause. Palestinian factions often use historical and nationalist narratives to justify their resistance against Israeli occupation and perceived injustices. This rhetoric shapes the conflict's perception and understanding, with both sides contesting narratives to gain sympathy and support. Discourse also serves as a means of empowerment, as it allows rivals to present themselves as formidable adversaries to stronger competitors (Barry and Doherty 2017). Defiance and provocation are also possible through discourse, challenging the legitimacy of the Israeli state's actions (Monshipouri and Motameni 2000). Discourse can have significant psychological effects on both combatants and civilians, with the Israeli state using discourse to instill fear and project military strength (Kienzler 2019). Media and propaganda play a crucial role in disseminating and amplifying discourse in asymmetrical warfare, swaying public opinion and building support for their cause (Steuter and Wills 2009:76).

This study examines the complex dynamics of the Palestinian resistance movement by scrutinizing the names associated with factional military operations. It seeks to understand the Palestinian people's desire for self-determination and emancipation by probing the underlying ideologies and goals that support these names. The investigation, based on sociopolitical framing theory and the reactive principle, examines how these labels influence public views and interpretations of the conflict, including the symbolic

methods used to justify force use in the Palestinian context. Within the confines of this scholarly article, we posit that military naming constitutes a valuable and efficacious mechanism aimed at subverting the adverse connotations inherently linked to particular military endeavors.

Put simply, the researchers aim to answer the following questions: 1) How do Palestinian factions frame their military operations through the names chosen for resistance against Israeli incursions; 2) What are the underlying ideologies and objectives reflected in the names of Palestinian factional military operations, and how do they impact public perceptions and interpretations; 3) How does framing theory help in understanding the symbolic meanings and rhetorical strategies employed in naming military operations and its implications for the broader conflict dynamics?

2 Theoretical Foundation

A deeper understanding of the political and ideological significance of the military names used by Palestinian factions, namely Islamic factions, during the wars with Israel can be attained by applying the War Normalizing Discourse (WND) theory (Benford and Snow 2000). The theory provides a useful method for identifying the hidden objectives and messages that Palestinian resistance movements try to spread by giving their military operations names. The objective of war discourse is to downplay the negative impact of war (Atawneh 2009) by presenting it as a commonplace and unremarkable aspect of life (Brekke 1989:81). The theoretical foundation of WND consists of three major strategies: euphemism, naturalization, and justification (Gavriely-Nuri 2009). They include:

1. Euphemism – aims to color the social object in positive tones, in terms of its appearance, character, or valuation;
2. Naturalization – aims to represent the social object as a force or event independent of human agency, or as an inevitable outcome of the laws of nature;
3. Justification – aims to depict the social object as just, rational, and worthy of support (p. 125).

Furthermore, the naming of military operations against Israel can be examined through the lens of the reactive principle. Given their military inferiority to Israel's well-equipped forces on the battlefield, Palestinian factions may seek alternative avenues to assert their legitimacy and challenge Israel's dominance. One such method is the naming of their military operations. Palestinian factions use naming efforts strategically to defy and undermine the official names

given to military operations by the Israeli state. They hope to broaden the battlefield beyond physical confrontations by engaging in a symbolic struggle for legitimacy and recognition.

These Palestinian factions may present themselves as equal and legitimate players in the conflict through their chosen names, attempting to shape the conflict narrative in their favor. This symbolic warfare allows them to project their actions beyond the battlefield, influencing public opinion and gaining domestic and international support. This naming strategy can be interpreted as a form of resistance, allowing Palestinian factions to assert their agency and establish a presence in the larger political landscape.

3 Literature Review

In 2019, Ofra Hadad carried out an in-depth investigation to elucidate the intricate practice of military operation-naming by violent, non-state actors. The primary objective of this strategy was found to be the dissemination of wartime perceptions, skillfully wielded to mobilize public opinion in their favor. The study advanced a compelling argument, positing that these actors strategically challenge and subvert the official names ascribed by their enemy counterparts. By doing so, they effectively transcend the confines of the physical battlefield, orchestrating a multifaceted conflict that extends into other domains. In this way, they craft a narrative that positions themselves as legitimate and formidable participants, subtly reshaping the dynamics of the struggle.

In another study, Gavriely-Nuri (2009) undertook an extensive investigation into the military nomenclature employed by Israel for the purpose of designating military operations, weaponry, and units. The study meticulously examined 239 Israeli designations associated with military operations and weaponry, uncovering a range of persuasive tactics employed and utilized to effectively shape public perception and sentiment concerning contentious military undertakings and the development of weaponry.

In his seminal work, Lindquist (2003) undertook a profound dissertation endeavor to unravel the intricacies of the Arab-Israeli conflict, with a keen focus on its entanglement with language (p. 143). Employing a meticulous examination of newspaper front pages, the researcher discerned substantial dissimilarities in how acts of violence were perceived by the Israeli and Palestinian factions. This thought-provoking study accentuated the pivotal role that language plays in shaping the narrative surrounding the conflict, elucidating the stark contrasts in the interpretation of events by each side. Remarkably, actions categorized as terrorism by Israel bore an altogether disparate connotation in

the eyes of Palestinians who regarded them as expressions of martyrdom or manifestations of the sacred struggle of jihad.

The Israeli-Palestinian discourse during the second Palestinian intifada was analyzed by Atawneh (2009) to underscore how language serves as a potent medium through which the prevailing power differentials between the parties are manifested and negotiated. The study revealed a distinctive pattern wherein Israelis exhibit a propensity for employing a higher frequency of both threats and appeals in their communication. Conversely, Palestinians primarily lean towards utilizing appeals to elicit support and understanding.

This article addresses the current dearth of scholarly literature pertaining to military naming practices among Palestinian factions in response to Israeli incursions and aggressions. With a focused and comprehensive approach, the study seeks to offer valuable insights into the communication strategies employed by these factions and their intricate role within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While previous research has examined military naming practices of various actors, this article distinctively centers on the naming approach adopted by Palestinian factions in reaction to specific actions taken by Israeli forces. As a result, it aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of their naming tactics and their consequential impact on the broader conflict.

4 Methodology

Subsequent to the ascension of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) to power in the Gaza Strip in June 2007, Israel officially designated Gaza as a “hostile entity” in September of that year, and in October of the same year, initiated an all-encompassing blockade on the region. Numerous consequential confrontations have transpired following Hamas’s consolidation of authority over the Gaza Strip involving Hamas and Islamic Jihad. This article undertakes an in-depth exploration of the appellations bestowed upon the main military engagements between these factions and the State of Israel. Our research elucidates the historical and theological underpinnings of the most prominent wars ($n = 5$) that Israel has waged since its blockade, scrutinizing them through the prism of WND theory. Ultimately, we strive to unveil the intricate interplay between the nomenclature of Palestinian factions’ battles and the nomenclature characterizing Israel’s military operations. In pursuit of this goal, and mindful of the complexities entailed by the interpretive methodology, we have employed a discursive analysis, substantiating assertions through a rigorous foundation of Islamic tradition, official documentation from Hamas, the group’s disseminated public domain publications, and scholarly elucidations provided by Arab intellectuals.

5 Analysis and Discussion

5.1 *Operation Al-Aqsa Flood*

At the break of dawn on Saturday, October 7, 2023, the Palestinian resistance within the confines of the Gaza Strip initiated a meticulously coordinated endeavor termed “Al-Aqsa Flood” against Israel. This multi-pronged operation encompassed a land, sea, and aerial offensive, alongside the infiltration of resistance fighters into several Israeli settlements close to the Gaza Strip. The rationale behind this nomenclature was grounded in the continuous transgressions by Israel upon Al-Aqsa Mosque and other revered Islamic sites in Jerusalem (Al Jazeera 2023). Remarkably, this operation marked the most extensive assault on Israel in several decades, exacting substantial casualties and severe losses upon the occupying forces. In retaliation, Israel promptly declared a “state of war” and embarked upon its own military initiative known as “Iron Swords,” initiating an intense aerial bombardment of the Gaza Strip.

The term “طوفان” (Tufan) is a noun derived from the verb “طوف” (Tawafa), which signifies the act of circulating around a place. It entails a continuous and thorough movement around a location, involving a diligent traversal of its periphery, accompanied by a meticulous examination. In this specific context, the place under discussion is none other than Al-Aqsa, the third among the Two Holy Mosques, and the sacred site that cradles the final resting place of the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him. Within the Muslim perspective, this is a symbol of paramount significance, signifying a central point within the ongoing conflict.

It is crucial to delve into the multifaceted Islamic implications connected with the term “Flood” to gain insight into why Hamas opted to designate it as the name for the present phase of their military campaign against Israel. Hamas employed the term “Flood” to characterize its battle, a term denoting profusion or magnitude in the realm of objects or occurrences, effectively establishing its preeminence; this expression conventionally conveys the idea of a formidable flood, an overpowering torrent, or water that submerges all (Ezzeddin Al-Qassam Brigades 2008).

According to Hamas, this attack was carried out in response to a combination of factors. These included what they saw as Israeli settler violence, the ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip, the desecration of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, and Israeli actions and policies they deemed as atrocities against Palestinians spanning several decades. These grievances, in the view of Hamas, provided the impetus for their actions and the support they received from external sources. This complex web of factors contributed to the eruption of hostilities in the region (Said 2023). Hamas aimed to maximize the deployment of its combatants, armaments, and missiles in its recent military campaign

against the Israeli occupation. Notably, some of these munitions and missiles managed to penetrate the northern defenses of the Israeli armed forces. Furthermore, Hamas sought to broaden the scope of its operations to encompass all Israeli municipalities and settlements, especially those located within the confines of the Gaza Strip. Lastly, Hamas aspired for their military offensive to strike the Israeli nation with a commensurate impact to the legendary flood in the story of Noah, directed at a people who persisted in their rejection of the divine message brought by Noah. The ultimate objective of Hamas was to compel Israeli which has maintained a presence on Palestinian soil for over 75 years.

Utilizing the tenets of the WND theory elucidates that Hamas branded its campaign as “Al-Aqsa Flood,” effectively refocusing the collective attention of Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims on Al-Quds, also known as Jerusalem, and all its sacred sites (Baroud 2023). The Al-Aqsa Mosque bears immense religious and cultural significance for Muslims worldwide, evoking profound emotions within the Muslim community. The Al-Aqsa Mosque has been a consistent focal point of Israeli-Palestinian tensions, frequently igniting conflict between the two sides. Consequently, the current wave of conflict is seen as an act of self-defense and preservation of the mosque’s sovereignty. For Hamas, this has the potential to garner widespread support and solidarity and present the conflict as a justifiable defense against perceived threats to this sacred site. Such framing aligns with the overarching story that this struggle transcends mere territorial or political disputes; it is, in essence, a moral duty to shield a revered religious landmark from harm (Jaafar 2023).

In contrast, “Iron Swords” stand out as a manifestation of arrogance and vanity amid this evocation of symbols and the core of battle because they reflect a physical force evocative of a bygone past that is disassociated from current norms of international humanitarian law that govern warfare (Pinkas 2023). Both sides are affected by these descriptions in various ways: Hamas fighters are compared to an overwhelming downpour, whereas Israel represents an unrestrained force that lacks moral or legal authority.

The disparity is further manifested in the divergent goals of the operation. Hamas asserted that the offensive was a reaction to a complex interplay of factors. These encompassed their perception of Israeli settler violence, the ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip, the desecration of Jerusalem’s Al-Aqsa Mosque, and Israeli actions and policies that they regarded as protracted and severe transgressions against the Palestinian population, namely the prisoners (Said 2023). The objectives pursued by the other resistance factions encompassed a multifaceted spectrum, including humanitarian aims such as the release of prisoners, symbolic intentions to safeguard holy sites and Muslim

and Christian worshipers, political motivations geared towards addressing violations against Palestinians in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and objectives focused on thwarting economic-driven solutions that might undermine the core issue. In contrast, Israel's objectives were starkly militaristic and bereft of humanity, primarily aimed at reinstating a "deterrence" strategy that had proven ineffective.

5.2 *"Saif" Al-Quds Battle: Operation Guardians of the Wall (2021)*

A significant escalation of violence in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict began on May 10, 2021. This period was characterized by a series of protests and police efforts to control civil unrest, rocket attacks on Israel launched by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip. The crisis was initially triggered on May 6 when Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem initiated protests in response to an impending decision by the Supreme Court of Israel concerning the eviction of six Palestinian families residing in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood (Halbfinger and Rasgon 2021).

The situation took a grave turn as a considerable number of Israeli police officers launched a highly contentious operation, forcibly entering the courtyards of the Al-Aqsa Mosque; this incursion resulted in the deployment of clubs, tear gas, and rubber bullets against worshippers, inflicting injuries upon approximately 250 Palestinian civilians within the yards of the Al-Aqsa Mosque (Inlakesh 2022). On May 10, Israeli police resumed assault on Al-Aqsa Mosque, injuring 231 Palestinian civilians, seven in critical condition.

The term "Saif Al-Quds" carries profound Islamic significance, and comprehending this is vital to understand why Hamas chose it as the name for the initial phase of their military campaign. It comprises two components: "Saif" and "Al-Quds." The name "Saif" is a masculine Arabic appellation that symbolizes strength and valor, often linked with resoluteness and fortitude. An individual named Saif is captivating and alluring, frequently inciting curiosity and inspiring others to unravel the enigma that surrounds him. His remarkable intelligence distinguishes him from others, enabling him to concentrate on the task at hand and pursue rational solutions. Khalid Bin Al-Waleed received a distinguished appellation from the prophet of Islam. Following the demise of the three appointed Muslim armies in the Battle of Muthah, Khalid Bin Al-Waleed assumed command of the army and, despite formidable challenges, effectively oversaw the safe withdrawal of the Muslim forces. In recognition of his exceptional leadership, the Prophet Muhammad bestowed upon Khalid the prestigious title of "Saif Allah," signifying the Sword of God (Ziadeh 2012).

Al-Quds, or Jerusalem, ranks as the third most sacred city in Islam, following Mecca and Medina. While the Quran does not explicitly name Jerusalem,

later Islamic writings acknowledge it as the location of Muhammad's Night Journey. The significance of Jerusalem in Islamic spirituality is underscored by its role as the initial Qibla, the direction of prayer. According to Islamic tradition, Muhammad initially led prayers facing Jerusalem for approximately the first 16 to 17 months following his migration from Mecca to Medina, until Allah instructed him to reorient towards the Kaaba in Mecca (Bosworth 2007).

When Hamas names its military operations, such as the 2021 Operation Guardian of the Walls, they employ the term "Saif Al-Quds," which means "the Sword of Jerusalem," reflecting a symbolic and militarized approach to the struggle. The name highlights Jerusalem's importance in the Palestinian narrative and arouses feelings of religious and nationalistic duty. It adds to the militarization of the war by highlighting the armed fight and the significance of Jerusalem and aligns with War Normalizing Discourse (WND) by favoring military measures over diplomatic or peaceful solutions. This speech may make the enemies seem less human and incite dread, which will make the battle seem essential and justifiable. Hamas sees itself as a defender of Al-Aqsa and the rights of Palestinians (Schweitzer and Siman-Tov 2022). The nomenclature and symbolism used in "Saif al-Quds" are a sort of rhetorical manipulation intended to inspire support from the general population and portray fighters as brave heroes (Hamida 2014).

Furthermore, Hamas utilizes theological language to justify their military actions, fostering a strong religious obligation among not only the Palestinians but also Arabs and Muslims; they connect the Palestinian struggle to the Prophet's followers' historical protection, aiming to build a collective identity and gain support for their cause (Hadad 2021).

The term "Saif Al-Quds" signifies a sense of ownership and responsibility, as the resistance movement exclusively uses its armaments, resources, and cadre for Jerusalem. As Jerusalem faced encroachments, the resistance swiftly deployed its ordinance, demonstrating its commitment to the sacred city; this armament serves as a symbolic weapon in defense and an unyielding sentinel to protect the city from harm (Ziadeh 2012). The armament used by the resistance represents Jerusalem's ownership and a singular instrument for preserving its sanctity and security.

Finally, Hamas uses the name Saif Al-Quds to challenge the Israeli Operation Guardians of the Wall, which refers to Israel's destructive munitions and military actions in Gaza. The Israeli army unwaveringly upheld its fundamental objectives: defeating acts of Palestinian terrorism, securing Israel, and, importantly, mitigating harm to Israeli settlers and soldiers. Operation Guardian of the Walls was strategically designed to reinstate and fortify the security of Israel and the welfare of its populace (IDF 2021).

5.3 *Al-Asef Al-Makul: the Eaten Stalk Battle (2014 Gaza War)*

The 2014 Gaza War was an armed conflict between Israel and Palestinian resistance movements in the Gaza Strip, originating on July 8, 2014. The conflict was triggered by the abduction, torture, and burning of a child, Mohammed Abu Khdeir, and the re-arrest of Palestinian prisoners (Thrall 2014). Protests ensued in Jerusalem, the 1948 Arab territories, and the West Bank. The situation escalated when an Israeli settler ran over two Arab laborers near Haifa.

The declared objective of Hamas was to secure international pressure to lift the Israeli blockade on Gaza, terminate the Israeli offensive, establish a third-party monitoring and compliance mechanism for a ceasefire, release Palestinian prisoners, and overcome the political isolation imposed upon the movement. In contrast, the Israeli operation was to halt the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel, a situation that had escalated following the Israeli campaign against Hamas in the West Bank, triggered by the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli settlers on June 12, 2014 by Hamas (Khoury 2014).

Hamas deliberately chose its name in accordance with the principles of the WND theory, aiming to frame its military actions as intrinsic, virtuous, and justifiable endeavors. Firstly, adopting a term from the same Quranic narrative creates an inherent sense of continuity with prior rounds of conflict. This continuity serves to reinforce the narrative that Israel is perpetuating a historical pattern of Western imperialist occupation forces striving to assert dominance over the Islamic and Arab Ummah for their own political and economic interests. Additionally, it establishes a connection between the Israeli occupation and past endeavors by non-Muslim entities to conquer the Palestinian territory (Hamida 2014). This nomenclature contributes to a broader narrative within the WND framework, presenting the conflict as part of a historical struggle against occupation and asserting the legitimacy of armed resistance as a response to perceived oppression (Hroub 2010).

The “Eaten Stalk” battle, an asymmetrical combat based on the Quranic tale, symbolizes Palestinians’ ability to defend their homeland against Israeli military forces. The weapons used in this battle are named after the mythical stones and Ababil birds from the Quranic tale (610–632 CE:105). This nomenclature is linked to Hamas’s successful efforts during the conflict, such as the development of the “Baked Clay 55” rocket, which traveled fifty-five kilometers, and the first flight of the “Ababil 1” drone, which flies above the Israeli Stronghold of force, i.e., the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv (Hadad 2021).

Like in previous cases, Hamas’ use of the battle name revealed an obvious match with the terminology of the Israeli operation. In this instance, the Israeli operation was referred to as “Strong Cliff”, a name that was purposefully intended to portray Israel as a powerful and resilient country (Mohsen 2014).

Hamas used the name “Eaten Stalk” in contrast to Israel’s operation name “Strong Cliff” to portray the Israeli military as unstable and weak. This choice of name aimed to boost the morale of Hamas fighters and present their battle as a historic victory against those attempting to conquer Gaza, with the victory being symbolized by the transformation of the “Strong Cliff” (Israeli forces) into an “Eaten Stalk” (Hamas’s battle) (Ibid).

5.4 *Hijarat As-Sijil: Pillar of Cloud Operation 2012*

Israel launched Operation Pillar of Cloud, targeting Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza. The operation resulted in the death of Ahmed Jabari, commander of Hamas’ Izzadin Kassam Brigades (Lappin 2012). The Palestinian perspective attributed the surge in violence to the Israeli government and accused the IDF of carrying out strikes on civilians in the Gaza Strip during the days preceding the operation. They underscored the Gaza Strip blockade and the occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as the primary motivations behind the missile attacks (Hroub 2010).

The Quran contains passages mentioning “Stones of Baked Clay” as a divine act of retribution against disbelievers. These stones are used to subdue leaders of elephants who are associated with Abraha, a Christian Abyssinian military commander who invaded Mecca in 570 CE (Quran 610–632 CE:105). The Quranic narrative suggests that Allah intervened by sending magical Ababil birds to drop stones of baked clay upon the advancing Yemeni elephants, reducing them to mere eaten stalks. Hamas rockets resemble these stones, which will burn the Israelis.

The “Pillar of Cloud” is a biblical symbol that symbolizes divine protection for the Israelites during their journey to the Promised Land (Gilgoff 2012). It serves as a guiding beacon, symbolizing the Almighty’s watchful care. In the biblical account, the “Pillar of Cloud” acts as a barrier against Egyptian threats, ensuring the safety and well-being of the Israelites; Israel adopted this analogy for its military operation to align with the biblical symbol’s protective aspect, conveying the message that their forces safeguard Israeli citizens against missile attacks (Rosenberg 2012). This metaphorical reference highlights the Israeli military’s role in shielding its people from external threats.

Based on the tenants of the WND, the name “The Stones of Baked Clay” was carefully chosen by Hamas to portray their confrontation with Israel as the inevitable result of Israeli aggression and threat. This gave them the opportunity to underline both their right to self-defense and the repercussions of those who would harm them. Additionally, the name was chosen to exaggerate Hamas’s military power while concealing the devastation the battle had on the local populace (Rimawi 2014). Hamas attempted to highlight the significance

of its fierce missile attacks by alluding to the legendary victory of the people of Mecca who resisted capture by using mystical stones (Hroub 2010).

5.5 *“Al-Furqan” Battle: Operation Cast Lead (2008–2009)*

On the 27th of December 2008, Israel embarked on a military campaign in the Gaza Strip, designating it as “Operation Cast Lead.” In response, Palestinian resistance factions namely Hamas in the Gaza Strip initiated an operation they termed “The Battle of Al-Furqan” (Norton, 2021). The stated objective of this Israeli military endeavor was to bring an end to the governance of Hamas within the Gaza Strip, eradicate Palestinian national resistance, and prevent their capacity to launch rocket attacks into Israeli territory (Norton 2021:23).

Comprehending the multifaceted Islamic connotations embedded within the term “Al-Furqan” is pivotal in elucidating the rationale behind its selection as the nomenclature for the inaugural phase of Hamas’s military engagement against Israel. It serves as a catalyst in shaping the perception of Hamas’s combatants and their supporters within the broader populace. This choice derives from the underlying belief that Israel’s conflict with them was initiated after their ascension to power in the Gaza Strip, a consequence of the initial Israeli-Palestinian hostilities (Al Khater 2015). In this context, “Al-Furqan” assumes a distinct significance, symbolizing the military pursuits of Hamas as an inherently natural, morally righteous, and efficacious enterprise.

The term “Al-Furqan” in Islamic tradition refers to the concept of redemption and the distinction between truth and falsehood. It originates from the Quran (610–632 CE:2:53), which symbolizes the divine parting of the Red Sea, a salvation act for the children of Israel. The term is also used to refer to the Quran itself, which serves as an arbiter of moral rectitude and ethical standards, transforming the lives of its followers and defining the divide between believers and non-believers. Another significant historical event is the Battle of Badr, also known as Yawm Al-Furqan, which marked the first military confrontation between Prophet Muhammad and his followers (AlQabas 2017).

Through the lens of WND theory, Hamas tactically harnessed the phrase “Al-Furqan” to frame the post-Israeli withdrawal conflict from the Gaza Strip in 2005 as a fundamental moral dichotomy, pitting good against evil. It served as a symbolic partition between the aggressive Israeli military, initiating operations within Gaza, and the righteous Palestinian defenders compelled to safeguard their newly acquired autonomous territory (Rimawi 2014). Beyond this, the chosen name was conceived to reinforce the indomitable spirit and unwavering resolution of the Palestinian populace throughout the enduring conflict. It represented an emblem of national fortitude, even in the face of the Palestinians’ comparative military inferiority, extensive human suffering,

substantial infrastructural devastation, and the tragic toll on Palestinian lives. By drawing an analogy between the Palestinian struggle and the legendary Battle of Badr, Hamas celebrated its combatants, while fostering the expectation that, much like the historic heroic encounter of the Prophet's followers against a mightier adversary, the Palestinians would ultimately secure a resounding victory, Expelling the malignant intruders (Ezzeddin Al-Qassam Brigades 2008).

The youthful leadership of Hamas effectively framed their military endeavors as virtuous and just actions against a relentless adversary using theological discourse, drawing parallels between the Palestinian cause and the valiant followers of the Prophet who stood alongside celestial beings. By invoking the image of those who initially sought the annihilation of the Muslim Nation, Hamas managed to underscore the conflict's broader, public dimension, communicating that the Palestinian struggle transcended mere localized hostilities and was an integral part of the larger collective endeavor engaged by all Muslims (Hroub 2010). This narrative was substantiated by declarations from Muslim clergy during the conflict, further emphasizing the notion that Hamas represents a global Islamic movement firmly rooted in its beliefs (Islamic Resistance Movement 1988).

Finally, Hamas uses the name Al-Furqan to challenge the Israeli Operation Cast Lead, which refers to Israel's destructive munitions and military actions (Hadad 2021). The name also symbolizes the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, commemorating the rededication of the Second Temple during the Maccabean Revolt against the Greeks. The holiday's cultural significance emphasizes religious miracles, Jewish activism, and national victory (Gavriely-Nuri 2009).

6 Conclusion

In recent decades, the practice of assigning names to military operations has become a prevalent phenomenon in the realm of modern unconventional wars, especially when it comes to Palestinian resistance groups. This act of naming plays a pivotal role in shaping the perception of the conflict, wielding influence not only over the Palestinian people but also over those who are actively engaged in the Palestinian resistance. Notably, this communicative instrument is no longer limited to the domain of sovereign states and has been wholeheartedly adopted by non-state actors, particularly Palestinian resistance groups engaged in acts of resistance and opposition against the Israeli occupation.

In the context of unconventional conflicts involving resistance groups, achieving success is contingent not solely on military strength and tactical maneuvers, but also on how the resistance group is perceived by the Palestinian population, the Israelis, the Arab and Muslim nations as well as the entire world. Consequently, the practice of operation naming is utilized by all sides engaged, regardless of the disparities in their power, in order to gain an advantage within the intangible realm of wars, where psychological and perceptual factors exert a significant impact.

To elucidate the transformation within Hamas since its assumption of power in the Gaza Strip, this research endeavor conducted an in-depth analysis of the appellations associated with its five main combats with Israel in Gaza. This undertaking proved to be compelling and enlightening, shedding light on how Hamas strategically leveraged the practice of military nomenclature, akin to the methods employed by the Israeli occupation.

The investigation showed that Hamas skillfully employed warfare terminology to promote its military engagements as customary, beneficial, and morally acceptable behaviors, while simultaneously obscuring the negative effects on the local community as well as Arabs and Muslims. To match its perspective with the dynamics of the conflict and to affect Palestinian public opinion regarding its different interactions with the Israeli occupation, Hamas manipulated the language effectively. It became clear, using the four tenets of the War Normalizing Discourse theory, that Hamas skillfully employed this linguistic strategy to influence perceptions and win support for its activities.

The utilization of military operation names by Hamas constitutes an integral aspect of its non-physical warfare strategy against Israel. This practice serves to broaden the dimensions of the conflict, transcending the physical battlefield and encompassing other domains of contention. Moreover, it is strategically designed to present Hamas as a formidable adversary operating on equal footing with its supporters.

These names not only portray Hamas's confrontations with Israel as an extension of a historical Islamic struggle, but also narrate the story of a resolute people who are destined to ultimately overcome a formidable and oppressive adversary. This narrative is carefully crafted to evoke a sense of resilience and historical continuity, fostering unwavering support for Hamas among its constituents.

The names chosen for military operations by non-state resistance groups are not merely arbitrary; they are often carefully crafted to convey specific messages and extend the meaning of their military operational capabilities. These names serve several purposes.

1. **Symbolic Significance:** The names are chosen to carry deep symbolic and cultural significance. In the case of “Al-Aqsa Flood” and “Saif Al-Quds,” both names evoke powerful imagery associated with Islam and the Palestinian cause. “Al-Aqsa Flood” signifies a force that overwhelms and submerges, drawing a parallel to the biblical flood of Noah, while “Saif Al-Quds” connects the struggle to the historical and spiritual importance of Jerusalem in Islam. These names help create a narrative that aligns the military operations with broader religious and nationalistic values.
2. **Emotional Appeal:** The names are designed to evoke strong emotions and garner support among the local population, as well as within the broader Arab and Muslim world. By connecting the operations to symbols of religion and national identity, these groups aim to make their cause more relatable and emotionally charged for their supporters. This emotional appeal can help them recruit fighters, gain public support, and maintain their resilience in the face of adversity.
3. **Propaganda and Perception:** Naming operations plays a crucial role in shaping the perception of these groups’ capabilities and intentions. “Saif Al-Quds,” for example, conveys a sense of determination and readiness to defend Jerusalem. Such names imply a high level of military preparedness and commitment, which can be used as a deterrent against adversaries. At the same time, it portrays the non-state actors as steadfast defenders, which can garner sympathy and support from a wider audience.
4. **Rhetorical Manipulation:** These names also serve as a form of rhetorical manipulation. By framing their military actions in religious or historical terms, these groups attempt to justify their activities and present them as a moral duty rather than mere acts of violence. This framing can influence both the local and international perception of their actions.
5. **Counter-Narrative to Adversaries:** These names are often chosen in contrast to the names or narratives adopted by their adversaries, such as the Israeli military’s “Operation Guardians of the Wall.” By using names like “Saif Al-Quds,” Hamas attempts to counter the Israeli narrative and assert its own perspective. This can be part of the broader information warfare in which both sides seek to shape the narrative and control the discourse surrounding the conflict.

7 Implications and Limitations

The naming conventions employed by non-state resistance groups for their military operations hold both limitations and significant implications. These

names, carefully chosen to convey messages, carry the risk of being misinterpreted, as individuals may perceive the symbolism differently, potentially leading to confusion or unintended messaging. Moreover, language and cultural barriers could hinder the full translation of the deep cultural and symbolic significance to audiences from different cultural backgrounds, limiting the intended impact of these names outside of their target demographic. Additionally, while these names have strong emotional appeal and propaganda value in the short term, their effectiveness in achieving long-term political objectives is debatable, as military operations alone may not lead to lasting solutions to complex conflicts.

On the other hand, these naming conventions have noteworthy implications. Firstly, they can heighten tensions by using religious or nationalistic connotations, exacerbating existing conflicts and potentially leading to escalations and further turmoil. Secondly, these names can significantly influence recruitment efforts, particularly among individuals who strongly identify with the invoked religious or nationalistic symbols, thus contributing to the persistence of such groups. Thirdly, they impact how international audiences perceive these groups and their actions, which in turn can influence diplomatic and political responses to the conflict. Moreover, the symbolic and emotionally charged nature of these names can make it challenging for these groups to engage in peaceful negotiations or compromise, as their actions are often framed as moral duties, hindering conflict resolution efforts. Lastly, the use of such names may prompt adversaries to respond with their own narratives and propaganda, leading to an information warfare cycle that further polarizes the conflict. It's important to consider that the specific context, the intended audience, and the group employing these naming conventions can introduce variations in these implications and limitations.

This study offers a range of promising avenues for investigation across multiple academic disciplines. Researchers can delve into the cultural and psychological dimensions of these names, exploring how various audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds interpret and respond to the symbolism. Comparative studies might unveil commonalities and differences in naming conventions across various non-state actors and conflicts, shedding light on cross-cultural dynamics. Additionally, a focus on long-term effects can help uncover how these names influence group identity, recruitment strategies, and the overall trajectory of conflicts. Analyzing the role of these names in media and communication strategies, including their dissemination through traditional and social media, is crucial for understanding their influence on public opinion and international perception.

Finally, understanding how these names fit into the broader narrative of a conflict and their evolution over time can contribute to a comprehensive view of the role of symbolic naming in contemporary conflicts and inform strategies for conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts.

Statements and Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate: NA

Availability of data and materials: NA

Author contributions: OJ, background, literature review, conceptual clarity, manuscript drafting and final drafting and approval; HD, citation management, manuscript review, data collection; and MS, conceptualization, design, final drafting, oversight, and coordination.

Acknowledgments: The researcher would like to extend their sincere gratitude to An-Najah National University for allowing them to use its state-of-the-art facilities to conduct their research.

Funding: This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Declaration of competing interest: The authors declare no competing interests.

References

- Al Jazeera. 2023. "Why the Palestinian group Hamas launched an attack on Israel? All to know." Aljazeera.com, October 7. (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/palestinian-group-hamas-launches-surprise-attack-on-israel-what-to-know>).
- Al Khater, Lama. 2015. "Pauses in Memory of the Battle of Al-Furqan." MinaNews.net, December 30. (<https://ar.minanews.net/وقفات-في-ذكرى-معركة-الفرقان>).
- AlQabas. 2017. "Yawm al-Furqan ... Ma'arikah fasilah fi tarikh al-Islam" (Yawm al-Furqan ... A decisive battle in the history of Islam). AlQabas.com, June 10. (<https://www.alqabas.com/article/405912-يوم-الفرقان-معركة-فاصلة-في-تاريخ-الإسلام>).
- Alsoos, Imad. 2021. "From jihad to resistance: the evolution of Hamas's discourse in the framework of mobilization." *Middle Eastern Studies* 57(5): 833–856.

- Atawneh, Ahmad M. 2009. "The discourse of war in the Middle East: Analysis of media reporting." *Journal of Pragmatics* 41(2): 263–278.
- Baroud, Ramzy. 2023. "The roots and hidden meanings of 'Al-Aqsa Flood'." Arab News, October 09, 2023. (<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2388206>).
- Barry, Marguerite and Gavin Doherty. 2017. "What we talk about when we talk about interactivity: Empowerment in public discourse." *New Media & Society* 19(7): 1052–1071.
- Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26(2000): 611–639.
- Bosworth, Edmund C. 2007. *Historic Cities of the Islamic World*. The Netherlands: Brill.
- Brekke, Herbert E. 1989. "War with words." Pp. 81–94 in *Language, Power and Ideology: Studies in Political Discourse*. Edited by Ruth Wodak. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Brym, Robert J. and Bader Araj. 2008. "Palestinian Suicide Bombing Revisited: A Critique of the Outbidding Thesis." *Political Science Quarterly* 123(3): 485–500.
- Ezzeddin Al-Qassam Brigades. 2008. "Bayn Al-Furqan [Ma'arakah] wa [Hijarat] Al-Tin Al-Mahrooq [Ma'arakah]: 'Buq'at Al-Zayt' wa Sayyaroh 'M75' Kata'ib Az Al-Din Al-Qassam" (Between 'Al-Furqan Battle' and the 'Battle of Molten Clay Stones': 'The Oil Spot' and the 'M75' rocket of the Al-Qassam Brigades). Alqassam.ps, December 27. (<https://alqassam.ps/arabic/news/details/5398>).
- Gallo, Giorgio and Arturo Marzano. 2009. "The Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflicts: The Israeli-Palestinian Case." *The Journal of Conflict Studies* 29(2009). (<https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/jcs/2009-v29-jcs29/jcs29arto3/>).
- Gavriely-Nuri, Dalia. 2009. "Rainbow, Snow, and the Poplar's Song: The 'Annihilative Naming' of Israeli Military Practices." *Armed Forces & Society* 36(5): 825–842.
- Gelman, Susan A. and Steven O. Roberts. 2017. "How language shapes the cultural inheritance of categories." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114(30): 7900–7907.
- Gilgoff, Dan. 2012. "Name of Israel's anti-Hamas operation has biblical meaning." Gale Academic Onefile, November 20. (<https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA309337895&sid=sitemap&v=2.1&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&userGroupName=anon%7Ed6878d15&aty=open-web-entry>).
- Hadad, Ofir. 2021. "A Battle of Names: Hamas and Israeli Operations in the Gaza Strip." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 33(5): 931–950.
- Halbfinger, David M. and Adam Rasgon. 2021. "Life Under Occupation: The Misery at the Heart of the Conflict." *The New York Times*, May 28. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/22/world/middleeast/israel-gaza-conflict.html>).
- Hamida, Tariq Mustafa. 2014. "Al-Harb al-Nafsia fi Ma'arakat al-'Asf al-Ma'kul" (Psychological warfare in the Battle of the Eaten Stalk). The Palestinian Information Center, September 7. (<https://palinfo.com/news/2014/09/07/54122/>).

- Hatuqa, Dalia. 2022. "The New Palestinian Resistance." *Foreign Policy*, October 23. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/03/29/palestine-israel-west-bank-armed-groups-huwara-lions-den-jenin-brigade/>).
- Hroub, Khaled. 2010. *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice*. Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies.
- Inlakesh, Robert. 2022. "Seif Al-Quds: The battle which ushered in a new era of Palestinian armed struggle." *Al Mayadeen English*, May 12. (<https://english.almayadeen.net/articles/analysis/seif-al-quds-the-battle-which-ushered-in-a-new-era-of-pales>).
- Islamic Resistance Movement. 1988. "The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Article 7." *Avalon.law.yale.edu*. (https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp).
- Israel Defense Forces, The (IDF). 2021. "Operation Guardian of the Walls." *IDF.il*, June 14. (<https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/wars-and-operations/operation-guardian-of-the-walls/operation-guardian-of-the-walls-1/>).
- Jaafar, Hisham. 2023. "Bayn 'Tufan Al-Aqsa' wa 'Al-Suyuf Al-Hadidiyya' ... Qira'ah Ma'rifiyah" (Between "Tufan Al-Aqsa" and "The Iron Swords" ... A cognitive reading). *Al Jazeera*, October 12. (<https://www.aljazeera.net/opinions/2023/10/12>).
- Jabali, Oqab. 2022. "Popular Resistance against Israeli Territorial Expropriation: Beita as a Model." *Middle East Policy* 29(4): 91–106.
- Khoury, Jack. 2014. "Hamas Claims Responsibility for Three Israeli Teens' Kidnapping and Murder." *Haaretz.com*, August 21. (<https://www.haaretz.com/2014-08-21/ty-article/hamas-admits-kidnap-murder-of-3-teens/0000017f-e6ef-df5f-a17f-ffff07e30000>).
- Kienzler, Hanna. 2019. "Mental health in all policies in contexts of war and conflict." *The Lancet Public Health* 4(11): e547–e548.
- Lappin, Yaakov. 2012. "Israeli air strike kills Hamas military chief Jabari." *The Jerusalem Post*, November 14. (<https://web.archive.org/web/20190414151104/https://www.jpost.com/Defense/IAF-strike-kills-Hamas-military-chief-Jabari>).
- Lindquist, Torkel. 2003. *A War of Words, from Lod to Twin Towers: Defining Terrorism in Arab and Israeli Newspapers 1972–1996 (2001), a Study in Propaganda, Semantics and Pragmatics*. Indiana University: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.
- Mannheim, Bruce. 2015. "The Social Imaginary, Unspoken in Verbal Art." Pp. 44–61 in *The Routledge Handbook of Linguistic Anthropology*. Edited by Nancy Bonvillain. New York: Routledge.
- Mohsen, Anis. 2014. "Gaza: A Battle the Size of a War." *Institute for Palestine Studies*, June 25. (<https://www.palestine-studies.org/ar/node/1636595>).
- Monshipouri, Mahmood and Reza Motameni. 2000. "Globalization, Sacred Beliefs, and Defiance: Is Human Rights Discourse Relevant in the Muslim World?" *Journal of Church and State* 42(4): 709–736.

- Norton, Bill. 2021. *75 Years of the Israeli Air Force: Volume 3 – Training, Combat Support, Special Operations, Naval Operations, and Air Defences, 1948–2023 (Middle East@War)*. Warwick: Helion & Company.
- Pennebaker, James W., Matthias R. Mehl and Kate G. Niederhoffer. 2003. "Psychological Aspects of Natural Language Use: Our Words, Our Selves." *Annual Review of Psychology* 54(2003): 547–577.
- Pinkas, Alon. 2023. "October 7, 2023: A Date That Will Live in Infamy in Israel." Haaretz.com, October 7. (<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-10-07/ty-article/.premium/october-7-2023-a-date-that-will-live-in-infamy-in-israel/0000018b-0bbf-dc5d-a39f-gfff47680000>).
- Quran. 610–632 CE. "105. Surat Al-Fil: The Elephant." (<https://quran.com/105>).
- Quran. 610–632 CE. "2:53. Al-Baqarah: The Cow." (<https://quran.com/2?startingVerse=53>).
- Rimawi, Alaa. 2014. "Names of the battles between Hamas and Israel ... varying religious presence." RaiAlyoum.com, July 13. (<http://www.raialyoum.com/?p=121127>).
- Rosenberg, Yair. 2012. "Here's What 'Pillar of Defense' Actually Means." *Tablet Magazine*, November 15. (<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/heres-what-pillar-of-defense-actually-means>).
- Said, Summer. 2023. "Hamas Says Attacks on Israel Were Backed by Iran." *The Wall Street Journal*, October 10. (<https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/israel-hamas-gaza-rockets-attack-palestinians/card/hamas-says-attacks-on-israel-were-backed-by-iran-kbzySPwSyBrYpQVUPyM9>).
- Salah, Amr and Azzam Shaath. 2023. "Prospects for Escalation in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 13. (<https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/89541>).
- Schweitzer, Yoram and David Siman-Tov. 2022. "The Cognitive War between Israel and Hamas: Implications and Recommendations." Institute for National Security Studies. (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep42560>).
- Stepanova, Ekaterina. 2008. *Terrorism in Asymmetrical Conflict: Ideological and Structural Aspects*. New York: Oxford University Press. (<https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/RR/SIPRIR23.pdf>).
- Steuter, Erin and Deborah Wills. 2009. *At War with Metaphor: Media, Propaganda, and Racism in the War on Terror*. United Kingdom: Lexington Books.
- Thrall, Nathan. 2014. Hamas's Chances. *London Review of Books* 36(16). (<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v36/n16/nathan-thrall/hamas-s-chances>).
- Ziadeh, Adeeb. 2012. "'Al-Mutaghayyar Al-Amriki' fi Zilal Mu'araka 'Saif Al-Quds' taghyir fi al-mawaqif am anzayaha fi al-mashhad" ("The American Variable" after the Battle of "Saif Al Quds" A change in attitude or a shift in the scene?). *Middle Eastern Studies Journal* 96: 73–95.