



A Critical Discourse Analysis of Narratives in the 12-Day Iran–Israel Conflict

Dr.Mokhalad Naji Kamil,

Department of English,

University of Thi-Qar, Iraq & Al-Ayen Iraqi University, College of Education,

Mokhalad.Naji@utq.edu.iq.

Mokhaladn@alayen.edu.iq

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0757-4499>.

Abstract

The article scrutinizes the narrative dimension of the Iranian-Israeli military conflict, which lasted for twelve days, took place from June 13 to June 24, 2025 and determined that both sides made use of moral and ideological arguments in order to defend their actions and in addition to that, to sway the world's perception of the event. It employs Critical Discourse Analysis along with the aforementioned theorists to dissect the political and media discourses of the two countries, pinpointing the use of linguistic and metaphorical tactics. To achieve the study's aims, this study adopts an integrated Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model that combines insights from Fairclough (1989, 1995), van Dijk (1998). The paper demonstrates that the different stories told about the conflict are, though in contradiction, alike at the same time: Israel uses the terminologies of self-defense, high-tech precision and godly right, whereas Iran practices resistance, martyrdom, and spiritual victory to turn its weakness into moral strength. Both narratives depend on the “us versus them” dichotomy to invalidate the opponent and strengthen their own ideological position. This paper, in general, indicates that in today's wars, language is the main tool for drawing the battle lines, and the regions' and even the world's power, identity, and political legitimacy are being shaped through language.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Iran-Israeli Conflict, political debates.

تحليل الخطاب النقدي للسرديات في الصراع الإيراني-الإسرائيلي الذي استمر 12 يومًا

د. مخلد ناجي كامل

قسم اللغة الإنكليزية،

جامعة ذي قار، العراق، وجامعة العين العراقية، كلية التربية

Mokhalad.Naji@utq.edu.iq

Mokhaladn@alayen.edu.iq

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0757-4499>

المخلص

تتناول هذه المقالة بالتحليل البعد السردى للصراع العسكرى الإيراني-الإسرائيلي الذي استمر اثني عشر



يومًا، ووقع في الفترة من 13 حزيران إلى 24 حزيران 2025، وتبين أن كلا الطرفين لجأ إلى توظيف حجج أخلاقية وأيديولوجية للدفاع عن أفعالهما، فضلًا عن محاولة التأثير في نظرة العالم إلى مجريات الحدث. وتعتمد الدراسة على منهج تحليل الخطاب النقدي، بالاستفادة من منظريه المشار إليهم، لتفكيك الخطابات السياسية والإعلامية في كلا البلدين، مع تحديد الاستراتيجيات اللغوية والاستعارية المستخدمة فيها. ولتحقيق أهداف البحث، تعتمد الدراسة نموذجًا تكامليًا في تحليل الخطاب النقدي (CDA) يجمع بين إسهامات فيركلاف (1989، 1995) وفان دايك (1998). وتُظهر الدراسة أن السرديات المختلفة التي قُدمت حول الصراع، على الرغم من تعارضها، تتشابه في الوقت نفسه؛ إذ تستخدم إسرائيل مفردات الدفاع عن النفس، والدقة التكنولوجية العالية، والحق الإلهي، في حين توظف إيران مفاهيم المقاومة، والاستشهاد، والانتصار الروحي لتحويل الضعف إلى قوة أخلاقية. وتعتمد كلتا السرديتين على ثنائية «نحن مقابل هم» لإقصاء الطرف الآخر وتعزيز الموقف الأيديولوجي الذاتي. وتخلص الدراسة، بوجه عام، إلى أن اللغة في حروب اليوم تُعد الأداة الأساسية لرسم خطوط المعركة، وأن السلطة والهوية والشرعية السياسية، على مستوى المنطقة بل وعلى مستوى العالم، باتت تتشكل من خلال الخطاب اللغوي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الخطاب النقدي، الصراع الإيراني-الإسرائيلي، الخطاب السياسي.

1. Introduction

The present-day wars are not limited to physical combats only but also involve the disputes for the meaning of the events, the interpretations, and the acceptability to the media and political communication experts' view, the present-day war is more and more controlled through the narratives, which not only determine the public's perception but also support the political decisions and affect the international opinion (Entman, 2004; Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010). The 12-Day Iran-Israel conflict is a prime example of this interaction: alongside the physical attacks, political leaders and media linked to the states on both sides took part in a discourse battle, creating different narratives of blame, rightness, and strategic intention simultaneously.

As Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) points out, language is not a neutral medium at all. According to Fairlough (1992) and Wodak and Meyer (2016), it is a social practice saturated with power, ideology, and identity. In the case of the Iran-Israel conflict, the choice of linguistic features like metaphors, evaluative vocabulary, pronouns, and modality were used as strategically tools for the purpose of justifying one's own actions and making the opponent's actions appear unjust. The Israeli side of the argument stressed the notions of existential self-defense, technological precision, and religious-national destination, which were basically the same as the themes discerned in the studies of security rhetoric and national identity (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 2020; Kress & Leeuwen, 2001). In contrast, the Iranian's style pinpointed the three concepts of rightful defense, opposition, and spiritual triumph, which were the same as the themes characterized in studies of



revolutionary discourse and the communication of politics in the Middle East (Beeman, 2001; KhosraviNik, 2015).

2. Literature Review

Conflict narratives have attracted the attention of the researchers, especially in the areas of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and media studies. CDA investigates the relationship among language, society, power relations, and political action legitimization. (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998). Language in a conflict is not only a means of representation but also a powerful instrument that can sway the public through propaganda and thus, by doing so, taking sides and legitimating both the military and the political actions. This aspect corresponds with the theory of Lakoff (1980) concerning metaphorical framing which shows that metaphor has a very strong impact on people's mentality by changing their event interpretations, moral judgments, and emotional reactions.

The study focused on specific conflicts has pointed out the fact that the states and the media actors make use of linguistic strategies to gain moral and ideological authority. The face-offs in the Middle East, for instance, have utilized “us” and “them” through dualism, metaphorical framing, and selective vocabulary as a means to legitimize their military activities and depict the enemy as a non-credible being (Boltanski, 2009; Khalil, 2022). Moreover, the studies carried out have unearthed the fact that the metaphors of defense, heroism, and divine sanction are instrumental in constructing one's national identity and asserting moral superiority over others.

In the case of political communication between Israel and Iran, the scholars find different narrative strategies based on cultural, religious, and ideological divergence. The Israeli argument frequently presents the themes of danger to existence, technical advantage, and the divinely ordained nation. They are very often using metaphors of illumination, precision, and lions to portray not only the moral but also the military legitimacy of Israel. While the Iranian stories highlight the values of resistance, martyrdom, divine justice, and the transformative power of sacrifice so much that they frequently characterize the weak as morally strong and the strong as spiritually victorious. Both narratives are employing the dual constructions that are typical of the in-group and out-group identities, which is a strategy that is fundamental for supporting both internal unity and external justification.

3. Methodology



A Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) based on a corpus is employed by this study to uncover the linguistic, metaphorical, and ideological aspects of the media and political narratives regarding the 12-Day Iran-Israel conflict. The methodology incorporates the works of Fairclough (1995), van Dijk (1998), and Lakoff (1991) and provides a systematic analysis of how language constructs moral authority, legitimizes military action, and impacts global perception. The study deals with a corpus-based analysis that reveals the way Israel and Iran build up within the limit of time. Their moral worlds, legitimize their positions to the other, and wage narrative warfare against each other.

4. Data Collection

The dataset consists of official statements, press releases, and media coverage from both Iran and Israel throughout the entire duration of the 12-Day War. The sources were a mixture of different kinds of political and media discourses, such as:

- Israeli and Iranian governmental press agencies.
- Government announcements and speeches.
- Publicly available interviews with political figures.

The qualitative research method is used in this study to analyze the selected materials. Qualitative research implies a deep understanding of the context and the individuals' meanings related to the events (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2).

5. Discussion and Analysis

• Metaphorical Framing

The Israeli and Iranian discourses of the 12-Day Conflict both are based on the extensive use of metaphor to establish the ideological and moral legitimacy. In the Israeli narrative, metaphors transform the war into a sacred mission of survival and endurance. The operation's title, "*Operation Rising Lion*" evokes the image of noble strength and divine courage. In June 13 statement, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Announced Cessation of 12-Day Military Campaign in Iran:

"we rose up and stood like lions, and our roar shook Tehran and echoed around the world."

Israel is portrayed in this imagery as a collective hero who stands erect in the face of chaos. The metaphor depicts the campaign as a journey from threat to victory, adhering to Lakoff's Source–Path–Goal schema. Likewise, statements such as



"Our roar echoed around the world as a warning to those who threaten Israel's peace" were used in military campaign.

Here, "roar" transforms the lion metaphor into a representation of global power projection and deterrence. Furthermore, Netanyahu also employed a metaphorical portrayal of victory in his statement on June 24, 2025:

" we achieved a historic victory, which will stand for generations. "

The expression utilizes metaphorical speech that presents the win as an everlasting and huge accomplishment. By using the word "stand" the orator likens the win to a firm building, like a monument that survives through ages. This presents the success as rock-solid, noticeable, and morally high. The allusion to "generations" makes time a dimension through which this monument continues, implying that the win is not just a happening but a legacy to be passed down and acknowledged by the coming generations. To sum up, the metaphor changes a victory in politics or war into an eternal, universally owned emblem of the country's character and pride.

The Iranian discursive, on the other hand, makes use of metaphors related to fighting, resistance, and divine vengeance. Khamenei said on June 25:

"With all that commotion and all those claims, the Zionist regime was practically knocked out and crushed under the blows of the Islamic Republic"

Amid the storm of chaos and the clamor of unrelenting accusations, the Zionist regime found itself reeling, like a boxer stunned by a relentless flurry of strikes. Every dispute, every claim turned out to be a further strike that has hit the opponent with a very strong force making him stagger and lose strength. The Islamic Republic's strategy was steadily putting pressure on what had appeared to be unbeatable so that it started to collapse under the force of an invisible yet unquestionable weight. The metaphorical battlefield comprised not only guns and tanks but also strategy, resilience, and the unyielding momentum where the opponent, despite all its noise and posturing, could not stand the force that was pressing down on it. This was presented as a comprehensive victory, extending beyond the physical domain into the psychological realm, where dominance was constructed discursively through representations of the opponent's reaction. Additionally, Khamenei stated:

"The Islamic Republic delivered a heavy slap to the US's face".

The term "slap" conveys the idea of a moral punishment, presenting Iran not as an attacker but as a divinely empowered avenger. Besides, Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf (then-Speaker / head of Iran's parliament) declared:



“It would not be an exaggeration to say that these twelve days propelled us fifty years forward.”

This metaphor conceptualizes time as a measurable distance and as an index of technological or political progress. It serves two principal functions:

- **Event Magnification:** It elevates a short-lived event by portraying it as extraordinarily consequential.
- **Narrative of Accelerated Evolution:** It frames the achieved outcomes as a form of rapid development, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of leadership and the nation’s defensive capability.

By using a temporal metaphor, the narrative compresses decades of development into the short duration of the conflict. The first part of the discourse mentions learning, adaptation, and strategic growth, and so does the Iranian power image of being always strong and capable even under the Israeli pressure. Through this discourse analysis, the text moves Iran from a passive victim position to an actor who gains experience and strength, thus marking the conflict as a source of national and military growth. This is the opposite of Israel’s victorious framing which stresses immediate success and threat neutralization, while the Iranian narrative deals with long-term benefits and strategic maturity, thus reinforcing ideological legitimacy, national pride, and endurance.

Israel's rhetoric makes use of metaphors of nobility, divine purpose, and the struggle for existence, while Iran, in contrast, talks about fight, revenge, and moral victory. Regardless of the situation, the deployment of religious and moral symbols portrays the conflict as a major war for the identity, justice, and the historical destiny that has been shared.

Aspect	Israel	Iran
Core Metaphors	Lion, roar, beacon, darkness	Boxing (“knocked out”), slap, ashes, path to glory
Narrative Focus	Survival, divine mission, moral pilgrimage	Resistance, vengeance, righteous triumph
Temporal Framing	Immediate success, neutralization of threats	Long-term strategic progress, decades condensed into 12 days
Moral / Religious Tone	Biblical resonance, historical destiny	Divine empowerment, moral justice
Journey / Progress	Lakoff’s Source–Path–Goal (threat → triumph)	Rebirth & journey metaphors (suffering → transcendence)
Ideological Purpose	Justify military action as	Portray Iran as resilient,



righteous defense

gaining strength, morally
justified

Table 1. Metaphor Analysis Process on Iran and Israel Speech

- **Lexical and Semantic Choices**

The lexical and semantic choices made by Iranian and Israeli politicians respectively revealed their intention behind language use to construct ideological identities by portraying themselves positively and, at the same time, negatively portraying their opponents which is in line with van Dijk's (1998) ideological square.

The verbalization of the Israel's discourse, among others, the linguistic items "*historic victory*" "*stood like lions*" and "*echoed around the world*" are a proof of how the selection of words creates a nationally heroic and morally elevated image. One instance is that of Prime Minister Netanyahu's June 13th proclamation, in which he stated: "*We stood like lions against the darkness that wanted to engulf us.*" By using the lion imagery the nation is depicted as a single unit of valor and moral superiority. Likewise, when he referred to the event as a "historic victory that echoed around the world," it was not only the speech but also the whole Israeli image that was projected as both winning and just. Even the phrases "defending our very existence against annihilation" not only imply an existential struggle but also draw attention to the moral aspect of the conflict, thereby, indirectly characterizing Iran as the malevolent aggressor. These lexical trends cast the conflict as a struggle between light and darkness, survival and destruction—thus, making the Israeli actions appear as defensive and divinely sanctioned. The identical ideological mechanism is at work in the Iranian discourse, but in reverse. Using terms like "*the resistance of the oppressed*," "*defense of sovereignty*," and "*struggle against arrogance*," Iranian leaders are able to portray a moral and spiritual self-image. In one of the official pronouncements, the Supreme Leader said that the struggle was "*a defense of dignity and faith against the Zionist regime's aggression*" thus, identifying Iran to be both the victim and the defender. The term "*Zionist regime*" is used instead of "*Israel*" and it serves as a derogatory term which achieves both the non-recognition of Israel's statehood and its moral standing. Similarly, the notions of "martyrdom," "sacrifice," and "divine victory" rendered the conflict to be a theological one. The Iranian president in another speech said: "*Our martyrs' blood clears the way for divine victory; resistance is our sacred obligation.*" Such phrases are used to push the conflict to a higher level, almost transforming it into a redemptive mission, and thus converting military defense into a spiritual duty.



In general, the two parties' languages do much more than just present facts; they build moral dimensions. The vocabulary of Israel revolves around heroism, survival, and moral purity while Iran's centers on resistance, sacrifice, and spiritual duty. Both of them make use of selective lexical and semantic framing to not only assert their own legitimacy but also depict the opposite side as unjust, aggressive, and morally corrupt. Therefore, through the meticulous selection of terms and the use of powerful images, both talks are in a way reflecting each other through the process of getting the ideological superiority in the conflict narrative of their choice.

Aspect	Israel	Iran	Ideological Function / Effect
Lexical Focus	Heroism, survival, moral clarity	Resistance, sacrifice, spiritual duty	Reinforces each side's positive self-image and moral legitimacy
Framing of Self	Morally righteous, courageous, enduring	Committed, sacrificial, spiritually driven	Projects moral authority and just cause
Framing of Other	Aggressive, threatening, unjust	Oppressive, immoral, corrupt	Portrays opponent as illegitimate, dangerous, or morally deficient
Semantic Strategy	Selective lexical choice, evocative imagery	Selective lexical choice, evocative imagery	Constructs a moral universe favoring own side, justifies actions
Overall Purpose	Construct moral world where Israel is heroic and justified	Construct moral world where Iran is righteous in resistance	Both pursue ideological dominance in the conflict narrative

Table2: Moral and Ideological Framing in Iran and Israel's Discourse

• Power and Ideology in the Israel Discourse

In the official Israeli discourse during the 12-Day War, power and ideology are articulated through a triad of pre-emption, technological superiority, Targeting Military Infrastructure and sacred national legitimacy.

▪ **Existential self-defense.** In the aftermath of a 12-day war between Israel and Iran in June 2025 Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared:



“We removed two existential threats to our nation’s survival. Had we not acted now, we would face annihilation”.

The language builds a moral justification layer over the offensive action and turns the aggression into a defensive necessity. The expression “we would face annihilation” cites the existence threat and thus, allows pre-emption to be considered moral and unavoidable.

▪ **Targeting Military Infrastructure:** In a public briefing, IDF spokesperson Jonathan Conricus stated, *“According to the laws of armed conflict, we are not targeting civilians ... Casualties ... are regrettable. They are not the aim of our operations.”*

During the public briefing, the IDF spokesperson Jonathan Conricus described the military actions of Israel in such a way that they were strictly in accordance with international law by stressing the fact that civilians were not the targets and thus their deaths were unfortunate but not intended. The statement emphasizes technique and moderation in a tactical way and presents the attacks as if they were very accurately aimed at military and nuclear infrastructure that was mainly uninhabited. The IDF mentions the laws of armed conflict in order to assert its moral and legal authority and to create an image of a disciplined and ethical war. Through the choice of words, a storyline is built where military activities are regarded as legitimate and narrowly defined, thus reinforcing both the domestic and international attitudes towards Israel's operations as justified, targeted, and caring while concealing the extent and importance of collateral damage.

▪ **International Threat:** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has warned about Iran's plans to build powerful missiles that can reach the U.S. East Coast with only small improvements. He is shaping a story that paints Iran as not just a local enemy but a global danger. By saying Iran's missiles could hit Europe and the United States, Netanyahu is making the conflict seem like a worldwide issue, not just a problem in one region. This approach has two main goals: it makes Israel's military actions look necessary for both national and global safety, and it tries to get more international support by drawing in people who see Iran's power as a serious threat.

▪ **Israel's legitimacy:** Israel's case is built on premises of fear and moral reasoning as the main arguments. It portrays Iran as the main danger and gets Israel as the responsible guardian not only of its people but of the entire earth. Israel links the local dispute with global stability and thus, bolsters its claim to be the



legitimate ruler, makes its actions look in accordance with what the world wants, and also, justifies its military actions as both inevitable and righteous.

▪ **Sacral-national imagery:** Sacral-national imagery: Israel's discourse also utilizes sacral-national imagery to elevate military action to a moral and historical plane. Netanyahu's victory speech (24 June) proclaimed:

"We stood like lions, and our roar echoed through history. This victory will stand for generations."

This metaphor compares military strength to moral goodness and even to God, turning the use of power and control into a holy duty for survival. From an ideological viewpoint, the idea that something is sent from heaven, along with human effort and the nation's survival, makes military attacks done in advance socially acceptable. In this discourse, the power of Israel is not only viewed as moral right but also as a factor associated with its history, thus making military might the major part of a nation's personality that is formed by valor and God's will.

▪ **Power and Ideology in the Iranian Discourse**

The Iranian narrative during the 12-Day War, juxtaposed to Israel's triad of preemption, technological superiority, and sacral-national legitimacy, builds up the ideological power through a mixture of legitimate defense, moral inversion, sacred resistance, and revolutionary endurance. Reframing material vulnerability as spiritual strength, the discourse converts military confrontation into a moral struggle that is based on divine justice and historical destiny.

▪ **Legitimate Defense and Retaliation**

The actions of Iran were officially framed as being Legitimate Defense and Retaliation discourse. "*legitimate defense and retaliation*" against Israeli aggression, particularly in response to the initial Israeli strikes that were Right from the start, Iran's communication made it clear that its reaction would be "legitimate defense" against the Israeli assault, basing its actions on the principles of sovereignty and international law. The first Israeli attack is described as an illegal entry, thus enabling Iran to present its counter-strike not as an escalation but as an angry *self-defense*. This legalistic argument is similar to Israel's usage of the laws of armed conflict, but it turns the case round: Israel insists on its accuracy to limit the impact, while Iran supports its use of force with the argument of sovereignty. The two narratives have contended to receive the moral high ground, with both sides claiming moral necessity; nevertheless, the Iranian story gives prominence to the issues of the border being crossed and the forced reaction, thus portraying the Islamic Republic as the victim fighting against an external oppressor.



▪ Evil Other and Illegitimate Entity

Ideological power becomes more explicit in Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's post-ceasefire address (26 June 2025), where he asserts:

"With all that commotion and all those claims, the Zionist regime was practically knocked out and crushed under the blows of the Islamic Republic." The deployment of the verbs "knocked out" and "crushed under the blows" serves to powerfully and graphically describe the process of physical domination, thus presenting Iran not merely as a country that resists but as the one that defeats a supposedly stronger opponent. Just like the Israeli rhetoric, metaphor in this case signifies an ideology: Israel draws a parallel between military action and destiny and historical events, whereas Iran sees it in terms of moral retribution and divine justice.

The repetitive application of the term "*Zionist regime*" denies Israel's political legitimacy and portrays it as a colonial presence aided by the support of the West. This linguistic delegitimization parallels Israel's portrayal of Iran as a "global threat" and sets up a world divided between the righteous self and the corrupt other, thereby reinforcing Iran's revolutionary identity which is already long established. To this ideological alignment, Khamenei goes one step further by stating:

"We will take great strides in strengthening our religious faith and in expanding and deepening our diverse and wide-ranging fields of knowledge. And much to the enemy's dismay, we will, by God's grace, succeed in elevating Iran to the peak of progress and the pinnacle of honor."

In this case, the material results are evaluated spiritually: victory is determined by faith, not by winning headcounts on the battlefields. This is akin to the sacral-national image of Israel, yet in Iran's situation, it intertwines God's approval with the revolutionary's fight. The war turns to be a sacred fight where the persistence of Iran is seen as an indication of the support from the Lord.

State media amplifies this sacralization of suffering, proclaiming: Sayyid Ali Khamenei September 23, 2025.

"Sacred Defense Week is decorated with the names and memories of great martyrs. Their sincere sacrifice and that of other self-sacrificing warriors gave victory to the Iranian nation, and their pure blood marked the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic on the forefront of history".

The pain and suffering are turned into ideological capital and thus the dead are transformed into symbols of spiritual victory. In the Israeli narrative, accuracy



restricts collateral damage; in the Iranian narrative, martyrdom justifies the righteousness of the nation. Therefore, the two stories reflect each other but at the same time they are opposite in moral reasoning: Israel puts the focus on restraint whereas Iran puts the focus on sacrifice.

▪ Victory and Resistance

Beyond religious framing, Iranian discourse underlines collective resistance and national cohesion. Khamenei's Advisor Larijani declared June 30, 2025:

"The enemies' plan to overthrow Iran's system in less than six days was defeated by the nation's resistance and wise leadership."

This blending combines the widely accepted unity of "the nation's resistance" along with the institutional legitimacy of "wise leadership", thus portraying the persistence of Iran as both the will of the people and the plan of God. The language of resilience—dominating Iranian revolutionary rhetoric—has the very existence as a proof of superiority that corresponds with the Israeli assertion of existential defense but is rooted in ideological commitment, not in military accuracy. A top adviser went on to say:

"What these twelve days did to us is the same as giving us fifty years, so we are speaking right".

This metaphor makes the war hardships look like a very fast national development. While Israel's tale converts military triumphs into historical fate, Iran transforms pain into revolution. The victory is not only in land but also in symbols, ideologies, and time.

Israel Discourse	Iran Discourse	Difference
Identify themes of pre-emption, technological superiority, sacral-national legitimacy.	Identify themes of legitimate defense, moral inversion, sacred resistance, revolutionary endurance.	Israel = preventive & rational; Iran = reactive & moral/spiritual.
Extract quotes showing precision, self-defence, legal justification.	Extract quotes showing victimhood, oppression narrative, martyrdom.	Israel → control & legality. Iran → suffering & righteousness.
Analyze metaphors: "surgical operations," "existential threat," "lions."	Analyze metaphors: "crushed under the blows," "test of faith," "martyrs' blood."	Israel → precision & destiny. Iran → punishment & divine justice.



Study how Israel uses international law and pre-emptive necessity to justify action.	Study how Iran uses sovereignty, retaliation, and faith-based legitimacy.	Israel → legality + survival. Iran → sovereignty + spiritual victory.
Examine how Israel uses technology + national destiny for moral authority.	Examine how Iran uses martyrdom + revolutionary endurance for moral authority.	Israel → professionalism ideology. Iran → sacrifice ideology.
Map how Israel portrays Iran as a global threat.	Map how Iran portrays Israel as an illegitimate “Zionist regime.”	Both delegitimize the other, but with different moral logics.
Summarize: pre-emptive, precise, lawful, destined.	Summarize: defensive, righteous, sacrificial, revolutionary.	Israel = power through control; Iran = power through endurance.

Table3: Contrasting Rhetorical Frameworks in Israeli and Iranian Narratives

- **Pronoun**

Wahyuningsih (2018) maintains that, depending on the context, the deployment of personal pronouns by the speaker can greatly influence, or even fully direct, the audience's perception. On a practical level, the research of Kaewrungruang and Yaoharee (2018) points out that a tiny language element like a personal pronoun has enormous impact on the speaker's and listener's decision-making process. “We” (Israel) vs. “Iran” and “Tehran.” Iran is described as the threat. The oration makes Israel the defender and Iran the aggressor. In the Day-2 speech, Netanyahu declares:

“Today, Israel is defending freedom in the Middle East and beyond. We’re doing so against a tyrannical and radical Iranian regime that wants to build atomic bombs to destroy us.”

The excerpt is a clear indication of division between “us” and “them” with the use of the pronoun “we,” which includes Israel and the people living there, and the term “Iran” and “Iranian regime” depicting the enemy as one sinister force. Speaking in linguistic terms, the use of the first-person plural pronoun “we” assigns to Israel the role of the moral and active protector while Iran is depicted as the illegitimate aggressor who causes extinction risk. The adjectives used for evaluation in the speech—tyrannical and radical—together with the choice of “regime” as the noun result in the objectification of Iran and the consequent oversimplification of the intricacies of the political situations into merely a good



versus evil scenario. From the critical discourse analysis perspective, this binary is more than just a role assignment; it is a major factor influencing audience perception, rallying domestic support, legitimizing military action, and receiving international sympathy. The Day-2 presentation manifests its support through the establishment of a strong in-group/out-group dichotomy, thereby raising the perceived threat and branding Israel's military actions as necessary, protective, and morally right. On the other hand, the Iranian narrative is built on the same “we versus them” structure to mark the boundary between the in-group and out-group. By constantly referring to the “enemies' plan”, “our nation”, and “Israel and the United States as the initiators”, the rhetoric clearly identifies Iran as the collective in-group that is both morally and politically justified, while Israel and the U.S. are portrayed as the out-group who are responsible for the conflict. The use of the first-person plural pronoun “our” linguistically emphasizes the Iranian power and unity. In contrast, the use of the term “enemies”, as well as the reference to Israel and the U.S. delegitimize and demonize the opponents. The division not only reveals the structure of Netanyahu's Day 2 speech but also switches the roles, presenting Iran as the protector and Israel as the aggressor. A critical discourse analysis shows that pronouns and vocabulary not only create internal unity but also justify the defensive tactics and exaggerate the narrative of moral and strategic legitimacy in confronting foreign threats.

• Modality

Fairclough (1989, p. 126) posits that modality pertains to the authority of the speaker or writer, and it encompasses two dimensions contingent upon the orientation of authority. First and foremost, while considering the issue of one participant's authority over another, we encounter a relational modality. Furthermore, let us consider the speaker or writer's credibility concerning the integrity or likelihood of a depiction of actuality. In this scenario, we encounter expressive modality, which refers to the modality through which the speaker or writer assesses truth. This speech has utilized both sorts of modality. In the Israeli speeches, modality plays a central role in projecting power and legitimizing military action. For instance, Netanyahu, on 13 June 2025, declared, “*This operation will continue for as many days as it takes to remove this threat,.....*”. “*Our forces can strike any target that threatens Israeli civilians.*” Firstly, concerning deontic modality, the statement “This operation will continue ...” indicates duty along with the future time, putting the strike among those actions that are necessary to protect citizens. In addition, it goes beyond the simple conveying of intent and covers a moral and strategic imperative which, in turn, implies taking decisive action. The second aspect regarded from the perspective of



epistemic modality is that the expression “can strike any target” indicates a very high degree of alienation concerning military power of Israel. Therefore, by revealing both the capacity and the unavoidable result, the orations not only give off an aura of power but also at the same time of deterrence. In conclusion, modality not only supports the image of Israel as an active and skillful nation but also, through its presentation of the campaign as necessary, justified, and achievable, legitimizes preemptive strikes.

On the opposite side, Iranian speeches resort to modality to stress the resilience and the inevitability of failure for the enemy. For instance, on June 13, 2025, the leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei claimed that the “*Zionist regime ... has prepared for itself a bitter and painful fate ... and will light up the path to repentance.*” Through the epistemic lens, such a construction, especially “undoubtedly,” indicates a high degree of certainty related to the outcome of the Iranian retaliation, thus portraying the Israeli attack as one that leads to punishment only. Furthermore, from a deontic modality perspective, implicit references to the obligation of defence — for instance the statement that the armed forces “*will not let it go unpunished*” — emphasize moral and national duty to resist aggression. Consequently, modality in Iranian rhetoric plays a dual role by not only rallying internal support and portraying military action as but also declaring the Iranian victory and supremacy in the war as a fait accompli.

Country	Type of Modality	Example	Function / Meaning
Israel	Deontic Modality (obligation, necessity)	“This operation will continue... ” —	Expresses duty and necessity to act; frames military action as moral and strategic obligation.
Israel	Epistemic Modality (certainty, ability)	“Our forces can strike any target that threatens Israeli civilians.”	Conveys certainty and confidence in capability; emphasizes power and deterrence.
Iran	Deontic Modality (moral, religious, national obligation)	“We must defend the nation.” (<i>implied</i>)	Expresses obligation to resist aggression; legitimizes defense as righteous duty.
Iran	Epistemic Modality (certainty, inevitability)	“The Zionist regime has prepared a bitter and painful fate for itself ... and will undoubtedly face ”	Expresses absolute certainty of success and enemy failure; emphasizes inevitability and divine justice.

Table4: Types of Modality in Israeli and Iranian Discourses

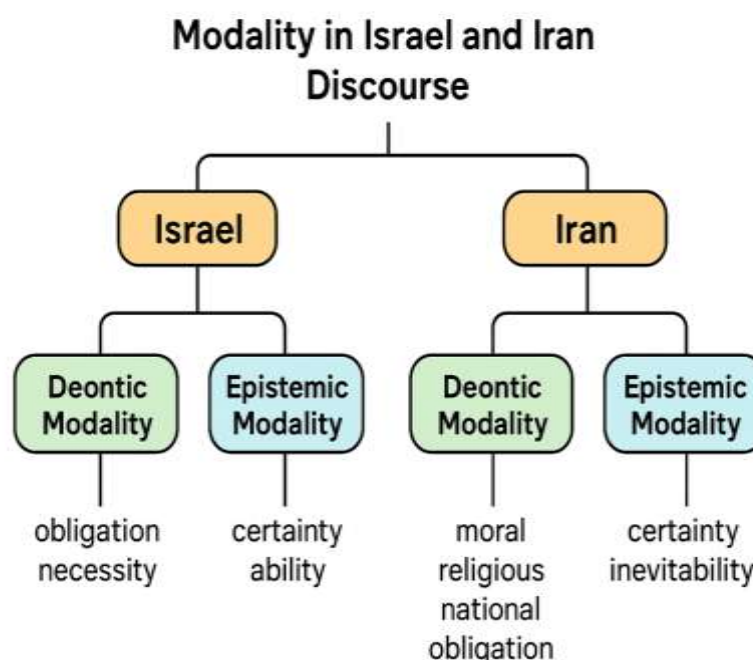


Figure1: Modality in Israel and Iran

6-Conclusion

The 12-Day Iran–Israel conflict as a case of an extended military dispute, rather than just a military conflict, has been proven through this study over meaning, and legitimacy, and through moral power discourse. Through a corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis, the study applied Fairclough, van Dijk, and Lakoff to the debates and revealed that the narratives of the Israeli and Iranian governments and their media outlets systematically created competing moral worlds where the use of force was declared unavoidable, legitimized, and even virtuous.

The findings indicate that even though the two sides were ideologically opposed to each other, they used very similar discursive mechanisms to support their positions. The clear "us versus them" dichotomy was created, the in-group cohesion was strengthened, and the opponent was denied legitimacy through the use of metaphor, selective vocabulary, pronouns, and modality. Israeli argument highlighted self-defense, technological precision, legality, and sacral-national destiny, thus portraying military action as pre-emptive, rational, and morally unavoidable. On the other hand, the Iranian justification stressed legitimate defense, resistance, martyrdom, and divine justice, thus converting physical weakness and pain into



symbols of spiritual power and revolutionary persistency. The moral reasoning varied—control and precision against sacrifice and faith—but the structural role of the discourse was still the same: both aspired to the ideological supremacy and international acknowledgment.

Moreover, The investigation makes it clear that language has transformed into a battleground in present-day wars. Through the use of metaphor and modality, military actions were represented as historical necessity, divine mission, or moral obligation, which consequently narrowed the space for different interpretations and dissenting voices. Such narrative warfare produces tangible results by shaping public opinion, influencing international perceptions, and assisting the conflict's normalization and prolongation.

This research does not only uncover the discursive forms but also facilitates the society's comprehension of the contemporary wars' mediation and justification through language rather than guns. It highlights the function of Critical Discourse Analysis in unveiling the ideological mechanisms that underpin the conflicts and in-countering the narratives that depict violence either as unavoidable or as divine. Future studies along this line could involve examining different wars for comparison purposes, or conducting audience reception studies to gain a deeper understanding of how such narratives are accepted, resisted, or altered in various political and social contexts.

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