

POLITICAL FLAMING IN THE 21st-CENTURY WAR DISCOURSE: A PRAGMA-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *This article explores the phenomenon of political flaming within 21st-century war discourse from a linguistic perspective. Drawing on Entman's Framing Theory and Martin and White's Appraisal Theory, the study investigates how political figures and media commentators construct antagonistic and emotionally charged language in response to conflict events. Using qualitative coding, pragmatic and lexical analyses, it investigates flaming in political speeches and media commentaries surrounding recent wars and identifies key linguistic markers and evaluative strategies used to frame opponents and legitimize positions. The research highlights how language is employed to inflame political tensions, polarize public opinion, and frames narratives of blame and justification. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the rhetorical mechanics of contemporary war discourse and the role of flaming language in fueling political divisions.*

Keywords: *political flaming, war discourse, media commentary, linguistic markers, evaluative strategies*

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Introduction

In our digital world where wars are no longer confined to battlefields but are simultaneously waged in political arenas, media outlets and digital spaces, the language of conflict has become incendiary rhetorical. A most striking feature of this evolving antagonism is political flaming – the use of emotionally charged, hostile, or derogatory language by political actors and commentators to attack opponents, delegitimize dissent, and mobilize supporters. Once associated primarily with anonymous online exchanges, flaming has now become a prominent discursive strategy in formal political speech, media commentary, and institutional communication at large (Coe, Kenski & Rains, 2014; Papacharissi, 2004).

Today, we should also recognize that war discourse – the language surrounding narration, justification and reaction to armed conflict – is the reflection and driver of political agendas. Political speeches and opposite the editorial pages (op-eds) often employ vivid and polarizing rhetoric to frame events, allocate blame, and define moral boundaries (Chilton, 2004). These discourses shape how wars are perceived by domestic and international audiences and can profoundly influence public opinion, policy, and even diplomatic relations.

In the 21st century, such rhetoric has intensified due to several interrelated trends. In the hybrid warfare, conventional military operations are intertwined with psychological, informational, and cyber tactics and elevate the strategic value of discourse (Hoffman, 2007). At the same time, digital media accelerate the circulation of supporting narratives, heightening ideological polarization (Tucker et al., 2018). In this context, political flaming serves not just as provocation but as a calculated communicative act aimed at steering public sentiment, framing adversaries, and legitimizing controversial actions.

Hence, this article will examine political flaming in contemporary war discourse from a pragma-linguistic perspective, shedding light on how language is used to provoke, divide, and persuade during times of geopolitical crisis. Drawing on R. M. Entman's Framing Theory (1993), which explains how media and political actors emphasize certain elements of reality to shape public opinion, and J. R. Martin and P. R. R. White's Appraisal Theory (2005), which explores how addressers express attitudes and values, this study will analyze the rhetorical and linguistic features of flaming.

Using (1) qualitative coding, (2) pragmatic analysis, and (3) lexical analysis, it will investigate the strategies and markers of political flaming in speeches and media commentaries surrounding recent conflicts, including those of Israel-Iran, Israel-Palestine and Russia-Ukraine. By identifying recurring linguistic markers of flaming and evaluative strategies, this research will shed light on how flaming functions to construct antagonistic narratives, attribute blame,

and justify political stances. It will argue that these discursive patterns are not incidental, but integral to current political identity and the consolidation of ideological camps. Ultimately, we will seek to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how language functions in the contested spaces of war and politics, where words, as much as weapons, are deployed to assert power, provoke reaction, and control the narrative. Hence, this study seeks to answer research questions referring to how specific lexical markers of flaming function to construct moral judgements within the framing of 21st-century conflicts and in what ways linguo-pragmatic scales of intensity function to consolidate ideological boundaries between *us* and *them*.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of political flaming in contemporary war discourse is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that brings together insights from linguistics, media studies, and political communication. Central to this framework are the Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) and the Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), both of which provide critical tools for understanding how language shapes perception, constructs conflict, and fuels ideological polarization. These are complemented by studies on flaming and online aggression (Kayany, 1998; Lea & Spears, 1992), which trace the evolution of hostile communication from informal digital spaces to formal political discourse.

Language in war discourse does not merely describe conflict – it constructs it. Language in this case “is not simply a tool for describing a pre-existing reality, but is itself part of the social and cognitive processes that create reality” (Chilton, 2004, p. 6). As argued, political language during wartime plays an active role in the production and reproduction of power relations where linguistic choices form social identities, legitimize authority (Fairclough, 1995), and shape a key site for the enactment of ideology and reproduction of social dominance (Van Dijk, 1998).

Through metaphor, presupposition, and framing, war discourse shapes how conflicts are understood and justified. For instance, it is noted that political rhetoric often employs spatial and moral metaphors to delineate *us* versus *them*, *defense* versus *attack*, *victim* versus *aggressor* and other binaries, asserting that “a key function of political discourse is the construction of political space” (Chilton, 2004, p. 50). Discourse in such contexts is “not neutral or objective, but loaded with evaluations and ideological standpoints” (ibid, p. 45), reinforcing existing power structures and facilitating conflict through communicative means.

This is particularly evident in hostile language which functions not merely as personal attack but as a form of ideological performance (Herring, 2002; Hoskins & Shchelin, 2023), enabling to align with or against particular political

or cultural positions. As Wodak (2001) and Foucault (1980) suggest, such discourse contributes to the construction of social reality and the maintenance of hegemonic narratives, making flaming not just a linguistic outburst but a political act embedded within broader struggles for meaning and power.

In the construction of conflict narratives, authors often employ specific evaluative strategies (polarization, dehumanization, moral superiority, inevitability, threat) to frame reality and mobilize sentiment. At the heart of this process is polarization, a binary framing that partitions the social world into a rigid *us* vs. *them* dichotomy, stripping away the nuance of shared humanity. This divide is often deepened through dehumanization, where the other is stripped of moral standing via evocative metaphors characterizing opponents as barbaric or monstrous to lower the psychological barriers to violence. To validate this exclusion, the discourse frequently invokes moral superiority, positioning one's own side as the sole guardian of universal virtues like peace and freedom. This moral positioning is then used to justify the inevitability of conflict; by framing war as a tragic but unavoidable necessity to remove the possibility of diplomatic alternatives. Finally, these narratives are cemented by the articulation of threat, where the assertion of dominance and the potential for violence are presented as the only logical response to an existential danger. In addition to established evaluative strategies, this article introduces historical analogy as a distinct category to account for the specific rhetorical weight of World War II and genocidal comparisons (DIIS, 2024). While often overlapping with dehumanization, this strategy functions independently by invoking collective cultural trauma to validate current military actions through the lens of historical moral absolutes. Together, these strategies do more than describe a situation: they actively manufacture a climate where conflict is seen as both righteous and inescapable.

The Framing Theory offers a critical lens to examine how political actors and media frame war-related events to influence public opinion. Framing involves selection and salience: "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality certain and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). In the context of political flaming, this framework helps identify how antagonistic language is used not randomly but strategically – to assign blame, mobilize support, and marginalize dissenting voices. Political figures and media commentators use flaming language to define aggressors and victims, justify military actions, and solidify ideological alignments.

The Appraisal Theory provides a linguistic system for analyzing how speakers express attitude, judgment, and emotion (Combei & Reggi, 2024). "Appraisal is concerned with evaluation: the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 1). The theory categorizes

evaluative language into three domains: attitude (feelings, judgments, appreciation), engagement (source of viewpoints), and graduation (intensity and force). This framework is particularly suited for identifying evaluative strategies in political flaming, such as affect-laden adjectives, loaded naming, and moral judgments aimed at opponents. By applying Appraisal Theory, this study shows how flaming language constructs adversaries as immoral, illegitimate, or dangerous, thereby justifying oppositional stances and actions in wartime flaming narratives.

Traditional research on flaming has focused on hostile exchanges in anonymous, online environments (Kiesler et al., 1984). However, later scholarship acknowledges that flaming has permeated public, formal, and institutional discourse (Jane, 2014; Lea & Spears, 1992). Political flaming in this context is no longer a breach of decorum, but a strategic rhetorical device used in political debates, speeches, and published op-eds characterizing not an isolated behavior but a broader discursive trend in adversarial politics, especially during conflict.

Methodology

To operationalize the above-mentioned theoretical framework, this study uses a triangulated methodology: qualitative coding (to identify recurring themes and categories of flaming such as vilification, demonization, delegitimization, etc.), pragmatic analysis (to examine how speech acts – insults, accusations, threats – function within context to achieve communicative goals) and lexical analysis (to detect evaluative, mostly negative lexis, flaming markers, strategies associated with targets of flaming). Together, the three tools enable a nuanced mapping of how political flaming operates linguistically to frame conflicts, persuade publics, and consolidate ideological boundaries.

To bridge theory and analysis, to ensure the analysis is grounded in the promised theoretical framework, the study operationalizes the mentioned Framing and Appraisal Theories through a specific diagnostic process. Framing Theory is applied by identifying the problem definition and moral evaluation within each text – specifically how the speaker selects certain aspects of the conflict (e.g., *terrorism* or *genocide*) to make them more salient. Simultaneously, Appraisal Theory is used to decode the graduation (intensity) and attitude (judgment) of the language. This allows the study to move beyond simple observation and into a structured evaluation of how specific lexical choices function as both a framing device for conflict and a linguistic marker of flaming. By combining these two lenses, the analysis demonstrates how personal hostility (appraisal) is systematically scaled to create broader political narratives (framing).

To systematically investigate the mechanics of political flaming, this study employs a qualitative, multi-layered linguistic approach. By isolating specific rhetorical patterns within a controlled corpus, the research aims to uncover

how incendiary language is used to shape public perception during geopolitical crises. The analysis is based on a purposive corpus of 45 primary texts curated to represent a broad spectrum of political and media discourse. This includes 15 official political speeches or press statements from heads of state and high-ranking officials, and 30 media commentaries (op-eds) and highly-engaged social media posts from influential political commentators. Data collection was conducted over a specific timeframe – from October 2023 to July 2025 – capturing the immediate rhetorical responses to critical escalations in three primary theaters of conflict:

- The Israel-Iran Escalation: Sourced from *The Times of Israel*, *PressTV*, *ir*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.
- The Israel-Palestine Conflict: Sourced from official press briefings, *Al Jazeera*, and *Kan News*.
- The Russia-Ukraine War: Sourced from official Kremlin transcripts, *The Kyiv Independent*, and state-aligned media outlets.

The three specific conflicts were selected because they represent the most significant discursive flashpoints of the mid-2020s, where traditional military warfare is heavily supplemented by digital and rhetorical warfare.

Examples were curated based on three primary criteria:

1. Prominence: The text was delivered by a high-ranking official or published in a media outlet with a global or significant regional reach (such as international wire services, widely circulated broadsheets, or major state/independent broadcasters with millions of daily readers and viewers).
2. Affective Intensity: The presence of flaming markers (lexis that is explicitly hostile, derogatory, or emotionally charged).
3. Thematic Relevance: The content specifically addresses the justification of military action, the framing of an adversary, or the mobilization of national/international sentiment.

The data was analyzed using a three-tiered method: Qualitative Coding was used to categorize recurring themes of hostility and group the clusters into six primary evaluative strategies (polarization, dehumanization, etc.) that structure the analysis; Pragmatic Analysis was applied to identify how flaming markers function within discursive political contexts and contribute to the delegitimization of the target, and finally, Lexical Analysis based on Appraisal Theory was used to evaluate how specific words function to scale emotion and intensity, i.e. how flame markers amplify the emotional impact of a political frame. This combined methodology ensures that the findings reflect consistent linguistic strategies used in contemporary war discourse.

Political Flaming: Linguistic Markers and Evaluative Strategies in Contemporary War Discourse

In today's globalized and interconnected media-saturated world, war is fought not only on the battlefields but also in the realm of language. Political leaders, media agents, and public figures increasingly engage in rhetorical warfare, using language as a strategic tool to shape perception, justify action, and rally support. In this volatile environment, political flaming has become a prominent communicative strategy: deliberate, emotionally charged, and often deeply polarizing.

Thus, this section focuses on how language functions in times of war not just to express anger or outrage, but to frame narratives, assign blame, and solidify group identities. Political flaming, far from being random or impulsive, is shown here as a purposeful act: a rhetorical maneuver embedded in the broader structure of war discourse.

To explore this, we turn to the linguistic fabric of key conflict zones: Israel-Iran, Israel-Palestine, Russia-Ukraine. Through qualitative coding, pragmatic analysis, and lexical scrutiny, we examine the linguistic markers and evaluative strategies that drive political flaming in these contexts.

To see how geopolitical hostility plays out in high-stakes rhetoric, we look at how political leaders, state media, and commentators frame existential threats and moral duties during escalations between Israel and Iran. The excerpts below highlight the key features of political flaming from outright demonization and apocalyptic warnings to calls for revenge across official speeches, news editorials, and social media posts.

Israel-Iran Conflict Examples

(1) *We are at a decisive moment in Israel's history. We are defending the free world from **terrorism** and **barbarism** that Iran fosters and exports across the globe. Our fight is against the **murderous** Islamic regime that oppresses and impoverishes you. They are targeting civilians because they're a **criminal** regime. They're the **archterrorists** of the world.* (Benjamin Netanyahu, *The Times of Israel*, 13 June 2025)

(2) *If **Khamenei** continues to fire missiles at the Israeli home front, **Tehran will burn**.* (Israel Katz, *The Times of Israel*, 14 June 2025)

(3) *We have begun this operation because the time has come, we are at the **point of no return**. We cannot afford to wait for another time to operate – we have no other choice. [...] I warn that anyone who will try to challenge us **will pay a heavy price**.* (Eyal Zamir, *The Times of Israel*, 13 June 2025)

(4) *The battle begins. The **terrorist Zionist regime** has opened its **wicked** and **bloodstained hand** to a crime in our beloved country. **By God's will**,*

the powerful arm of the Islamic Republic's armed forces will not let it go unpunished. (Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, *The Times of London*, 13 June 2025)

(5) Iran's War of Proxy Terror Must Be Crushed Israel stands at the forefront of the global resistance to militant theocracy. The Iranian regime – brutal, expansionist, and obsessed with annihilating the Jewish state – has left Israel no choice but to act decisively. (*The Wall Street Journal* Editorial, 16 June 2025)

(6) Iran is the world's arsonist, lighting fires from Lebanon to Yemen. Time to extinguish the flame before it burns down civilization. (X/Twitter user @DefendIsrael, 17 June 2025)

(7) Zionist Aggression Will Ignite the Fury of the Muslim Ummah. The illegitimate Zionist entity, drenched in the blood of innocents, has triggered the wrath of a people who will not tolerate occupation, lies, and genocide any longer. (Iranian PressTV.ir, 15 June 2025)

(8) The Zionist regime is a cancerous tumour that must be cut out once and for all. Our missiles are not weapons of destruction – they are instruments of justice. (Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami, Iranian Clerical Sermon, 21 June 2025)

In Netanyahu's speech (1), Israel is framed as a guardian of civilization, while Iran is framed as the source of global terrorism and barbarism. This moral polarization associates Iran with universal evil and positions Israel as the defender of shared values. Linguistic markers include evaluative adjectives (*murderous, criminal*) and nouns (*terrorism, barbarism, archterrorists*). The deictic use of *we* versus *they* evaluates sharp in-group/out-group boundaries.

In Israel Katz's statement (2), political flaming relies on escalation and existential threat. Using a conditional structure (*If Khamenei continues*), Katz frames retaliation not as an act of aggression, but as an inevitable consequence triggered by the enemy. The metaphor *Tehran will burn* shifts the focus from defensive measures to total destruction. By using the capital city metonymically to represent the entire nation, the rhetoric expands the threat beyond political leaders to an entire population, using hyperbole to signal absolute resolve. Eyal Zamir's declaration (3) uses temporal and modal language to construct a narrative of forced action. Idioms of finality (*point of no return*) combined with absolute negation (*no other choice*) effectively erase diplomacy as a realistic option. This framing presents military escalation as an existential necessity rather than a calculated political choice. Finally, pairing a direct warning with high-commitment future modals (*will pay a heavy price*) morally sanitizes state violence, casting it as a simple, necessary reaction to external provocation. In Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's address (4), political flaming centers

on religious polarization and delegitimizing labels. Khamenei relies on heavy evaluative modifiers (*wicked and bloodstained hand*) alongside the formulaic label *terrorist Zionist regime* to strip the adversary of state legitimacy. He then contrasts this villainy with divine authority, using phrases like *By God's will* and personified imagery (*the powerful arm*). By framing military retaliation as a sacred duty (*will not let it go unpunished*), the rhetoric elevates a political conflict into a moral battle. Common strategies include **polarization** (*us vs them*), **dehumanization** (*murderous, barbarism, cancerous tumour*), **moral superiority** (defending peace/justice), **inevitability** (war as unavoidable), and **threat** (violent potential).

Turning to the ongoing conflict in Israel and Palestine, the language shifts from high-level state rivalries to raw battles over basic survival, land, and human rights. The following examples show how political leaders and external advocates draw on both emotions and strict legal jargon to undermine each other's legitimacy.

Israel-Palestine Conflict Examples

(9) “We are fighting **human animals**, and we will act accordingly. Every place Hamas operates will become rubble. This is a battle between **civilization** and **barbarism**.” (Benjamin Netanyahu, Press Briefing, 20 October 2023)

(10) “We will not stop until Hamas **is annihilated**. Gaza will feel the full weight of our resolve. The **terrorists** hide behind children, behind mosques, behind hospitals – but make no mistakes, they **will be eliminated**.” (Yoav Gallant, Kan News, 25 June 2025)

(11) “The **genocidal campaign** by the **Zionist regime** continues unabated. Every child buried in the rubble is **a nail in the coffin** of their legitimacy. This is not a war – it's a **massacre**.” (Mustafa Barghouti, Al Jazeera Interview, 27 June 2025)

(12) “Gaza is not a battlefield. It is a **slaughterhouse**. The so-called ‘self-defense’ of Israel is nothing more than a **licence to exterminate**.” (Francesca Albanese, X/Twitter post, 1 July 2025)

In example (9), political flaming relies on blunt dehumanization and moral binary framing. Labeling the adversary as *human animals* strips away their basic humanity, while setting *civilization* against *barbarism* creates a rigid moral divide that casts the conflict as an existential struggle between total good and absolute evil. Yoav Gallant (10) builds on this binary by pushing the rhetoric toward total military necessity. Using forceful terms like *annihilated* and *eliminated*, Gallant frames the military campaign not as a political conflict open to negotiation, but as an absolute imperative. In contrast, counter-discourse strategies draw on

legally loaded vocabulary to strip the opponent of state legitimacy. In example (11), Mustafa Barghouti uses heavy evaluative terms, most notably *genocidal campaign* and *massacre*, alongside the metaphor *nail in the coffin* to dismantle Israel's moral authority in the international arena. Similarly, Francesca Albanese (12) sharpens this delegitimization through imagery. By reframing Gaza as a *slaughterhouse* rather than a battlefield and dismissing *self-defense* as a *licence to exterminate*, her rhetoric explicitly links state military action to historical atrocities, completing the cycle of mutual delegitimization.

Finally, looking at the war in Eastern Europe, the rhetoric centers heavily on competing historical claims, national sovereignty, and cultural survival. The excerpts below show how state leaders and major media figures in both Russia and Ukraine frame the conflict focusing on existential self-defense, foreign proxy manipulation, and the moral corruption of their opponent.

Russia-Ukraine Conflict Examples

(13) “The **so-called Ukrainian government** is not independent. It is a **colonial administration** controlled by Washington and used as a **battering ram** against Russia. For years, they have waged war on their own people... What we are doing is **not aggression** – it is **liberation**. Russia will not allow **Nazis** and **foreign agents** to threaten our borders.” (Vladimir Putin, 18 March 2024)

(14) “We are not just fighting **Nazis** in Ukraine. We are fighting the entire **Western apparatus of lies**, imperialism, and **moral decay**. NATO has turned Kyiv into a **Frankenstein state** ruled by **drug addicts** and **puppets**.” (Vladimir Solovyov, 15 April 2024)

(15) “Every Ukrainian soldier... is a **war criminal**. They **shell children**, they **bomb kindergartens**. This is **genocide**.” (Maria Zakharova, 10 March 2024)

(16) “Russia is a **terrorist state**. It **bombs civilians**, **kidnaps children**, and uses **rape as a weapon** of war. The world must treat Russia like it treated **Nazi Germany**.” (Dmytro Kuleba, 20 November 2024)

(17) “Putin is a **war criminal** leading a **mafia regime**. He doesn't care about peace – he **thrives on blood**. Every missile... is a signature of **Russian fascism**.” (Mykhailo Podolyak, 6 May 2024)

(18) “This is not a war – it's a **campaign of extermination**. Russia seeks to **erase our identity**... We will resist **until the last breath**.” (Volodymyr Zelenskyy, 2 January 2025)

In Example (13), Vladimir Putin relies on dismissive language and colonial metaphors to strip Ukraine of its political agency. By branding the leadership a

so-called Ukrainian government and a *colonial administration*, Putin reframes military aggression as a righteous act of *liberation* from foreign control. Building on this idea, Vladimir Solovyov (14) pushes the rhetoric into vivid, almost grotesque territory. His description of Ukraine as a *Frankenstein state* run by *drug addicts and puppets*, elevates the conflict from a geopolitical struggle into a grand moral crusade against Western imperialism and cultural decay. Maria Zakharova (15) anchors her argument in intense moral outrage and heavy legalistic terms. By sweeping all Ukrainian soldiers into the category of *war criminals* and labelling their actions as *genocide*, she uses accusations of grave human rights abuses to justify Russia's military response. On the other side, Ukrainian officials counter these claims by tying Russian actions to historical tyranny to rally international support. Dmytro Kuleba (16) draws direct historical parallels, calling Russia a *terrorist state* and comparing it to *Nazi Germany* to tap into shared global memory and demand moral accountability. In a similar spirit, Mykhailo Podolyak (17) focuses directly on the Russian leadership, using criminalizing labels like *mafia regime* and *Russian fascism* to completely strip the Kremlin of political legitimacy. Finally, Volodymyr Zelenskyy (18) frames the war in stark existential terms. By describing it as a *campaign of extermination* meant to wipe out national identity, his rhetoric turns Ukrainian resistance into an absolute struggle for survival: one that must go on *until the last breath*.

Across all three conflict zones, political flaming is never a random outburst of anger; it is a calculated tool of war rhetoric. Whether through existential threats between Israel and Iran, severe dehumanization and legalistic attacks in the Israel-Palestine conflict, or competing historical narratives in the Russia-Ukraine war, these tactics serve the same core purpose. By using specific linguistic tools, from zoomorphic labels and grotesque metaphors to rigid temporal framing, political figures enforce strict *us* versus *them* divides, strip their enemies of legitimacy, and frame military violence as an unavoidable act of self-defense. A complete breakdown of these shared strategies and their functions is presented in the conclusion.

Conclusion

In modern warfare, words are deployed as deliberately as military hardware. As this study shows, political flaming is not just an emotional outburst or a loss of self-control. Grounded in Framing Theory and Appraisal Theory, our analysis demonstrates that flaming is a strategic communicative choice. Across high-stakes conflicts from the Israel-Iran escalations to the Israel-Palestine conflict and the Russia-Ukraine war, political figures and media commentators intentionally use hostile, polarized language to control the narrative, delegitimize enemies, and unite their own bases.

By examining these speeches and commentaries, we can see a clear pattern: speakers use specific language choices to build broader, ideologically loaded narratives about war. To understand how these rhetorical tactics operate in practice, it is helpful to categorize them by their core function and the specific flaming markers that bring them to life. The table below breaks down the primary evaluative strategies identified across our corpus, showing how individual word choices scale up into overarching frames of conflict.

Summary Table. *Flaming Markers and Evaluative Strategies*

Evaluative Strategy	Function	Flaming Markers	Examples
Polarization	Frames conflict as binary moral struggle	Zionist regime, Islamic regime, defending free world, civilization vs arsonist, so-called government, Frankenstein state, imperialist West, Western apparatus of lies, foreign agents, terrorist state, moral decay	(1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 16)
Dehumanization	Strips opponents of human qualities	terrorist, barbarism, murderous, criminal, arch-terrorist, cancerous tumour, arsonist, human animals, drug addict, puppets, war criminal, thrives on blood, shell children, bomb kindergartens, genocide, bombs civilians, kidnaps children, rape as weapon	(1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 17)
Moral Superiority	Frames speaker's side as righteous	guardians of civilization, defenders of justice, instruments of justice, defending peace/freedom, Muslim Ummah, resisting extermination, liberation, fight against fascism	(1, 5, 7, 8, 13, 14, 18)
Inevitability	Justifies violence as unavoidable	have no other choice, point of no return, must be crushed, must be cut out, no choice but to act, will not stop, will be eliminated, we will resist until the last breath, never forgive	(3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 15, 18)
Threat	Asserts power through potential violence	Tehran will burn, will pay a heavy price, wrath of the people, extinguish the flame, not let it go unpunished, Gaza will feel the full weight, we will act accordingly	(2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 15)

Evaluative Strategy	Function	Flaming Markers	Examples
Historical Analogy	Evokes weight via past atrocities	Nazis, campaign of extermination, genocidal campaign, slaughterhouse, licence to exterminate, like Nazi Germany, erase our identity	(13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18)
Delegitimization	Denies enemy's standing	Zionist entity, illegitimate regime, colonial administration, puppet state, terrorist regime, so-called self-defence	(4, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16)

As the breakdown above illustrates, political flaming works through a calculated combination of tone and vocabulary. Tactics like polarization and delegitimization draw strict lines between *us* and *them*, leaving almost no room for compromise or diplomatic dialogue. At the same time, dehumanizing terms (such as comparing opponents to animals or disease) work alongside historical analogies (comparing current leaders to Nazis or imperialists) to erase moral empathy, making military force seem necessary and right.

Furthermore, statements emphasizing inevitability and threat allow leaders to reframe aggression as basic self-defense. By claiming they have *no other choice* and asserting their own moral superiority, political actors soften the political cost of military escalation, turning controversial policy choices into moral imperatives.

Ultimately, political flaming in 21st-century war discourse is far more than a debate over bad manners or inflammatory public relations. It is an active tool of political power, identity construction, and narrative strategy. In an age where global conflicts are fought online as much as on the ground, understanding how incendiary language operates is vital to grasping how modern wars are waged, justified, and understood around the world.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this paper, I used Gemini to refine some language phrasing and assist in double-checking citation accuracy. After using this tool, I

thoroughly reviewed, verified, and edited the content as needed and thus I take full responsibility for the ultimate content and accuracy of the publication.

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