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A Shifting Enemy: Analysing the BBC's representations of "al-Qaeda" in the aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks

Jared Ahmad

University of Liverpool

This article seeks to explore how the BBC made sense of the al-Qaeda phenomenon in its flagship "News at Ten" bulletin during the aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks. Using Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis, it shows how the BBC's representations function as a dynamic and continually shifting site upon which a range of fears, identities, discourses and forms of knowledge and power struggle and contend, and through which a number of different "al-Qaedas" manifest themselves. In particular, three shifting modes of visual and verbal representation are identified within the BBC's coverage which each correspond to a separate understanding of al-Qaeda: the "Islamic" mode, the "Personalised" mode and the "Elusive" mode. These representations both draw upon and challenge the dominant discourses surrounding Islam, non-state terrorism, and the identities of terrorist suspects, providing audiences with a variety of, often conflicting, ways of seeing and speaking about this entity. As such, the article provides insight into the complex nature of the BBC's representations of al-Qaeda during its coverage of the September 11th 2001 attacks, and shows how such complexity serves, albeit inadvertently, to legitimise the far-reaching counterterrorism policies that were enacted in the aftermath of these attacks.

Key words: *al-Qaeda, BBC "News at Ten", discourse, representation, September 11th 2001, "war on terror"*

Introduction

11 September could be said to be the opening of a blank page on which the narrative about al-Qaeda had yet to be written (Hellmich & Behnke, 2012: 1)

Its strength is that it is all things to all people, who can project their favourite fantasies onto the movement (Sageman, 2008: 144)

This article seeks to explore how the BBC made sense of al-Qaeda in its flagship "News at Ten" bulletin during the aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks. Rather than conceive of "it" as a material, real-world entity, however, drawing on Michel Foucault's understanding of discourse as a practice that gives rise to that which it speaks (1974: 49), the article suggests that "al-Qaeda" can be better understood as a discursive phenomenon that derives much of its form, strength and structural coherence from the representations that emerge within the BBC's coverage. This is not to say that al-Qaeda is not "real", or that its terrorism does not cause physical harm, but rather to

acknowledge the fact that, for most citizens, access to al-Qaeda is always-already mediated. These representations function as a dynamic and continually shifting site upon which a range of fears, identities, discourses and forms of knowledge and power struggle and contend, and through which a number of different “al-Qaedas” manifest themselves. In particular, three modes of visual and verbal representation are identified within the BBC’s coverage which each correspond to a different understanding of al-Qaeda: the “Islamic” mode, the “Personalised” mode and the “Elusive” mode. These representations both draw upon and challenge the dominant discourses surrounding Islam, non-state terrorism, and the identities of terrorist suspects, providing audiences with a variety of, often conflicting, ways of seeing and speaking about this entity. In doing so, the article sheds light on the way media representations help to formulate the discursive and ideational foundations for foreign and domestic counterterrorism policies throughout the “war on terror”. And, in particular, provides insight into the way certain modes of representation serve, albeit inadvertently, to legitimise the far-reaching policies of elites within the Bush and Blair administrations in the aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks.

Before continuing, however, it should be pointed out that this is an area of scholarship that has received an extensive level of academic scrutiny over the past fifteen years. Here, for example, significant attention has been given to the media coverage of September 11th 2001 (e.g., Silverstone, 2002; Chermak et al, 2003; Bouvier, 2007), the representations of terrorism that emerged in the aftermath of these events (e.g., Norris, 2003; Altheide, 2006), the way mainstream news coverage reinforced the dominant frames and narratives promoted by government officials (e.g., Jackson, 2005; Reese & Lewis, 2009), and the conflicting ways in which the religion and peoples of Islam were constructed within the U.K. and U.S. media during this time (e.g., Poole, 2002; Poole & Richardson, 2006; Ibrahim, 2010). In returning to the media coverage of September 11th 2001, however, this article aims to contribute to two distinct, yet closely related, literatures.

The first of these is the growing body of scholarship that has sought to interrogate media representations of the al-Qaeda phenomenon in the years after these events. Interestingly, despite

the development of a massive volume of literature on al-Qaeda (see Ranstorp, 2009: 22-25), remarkably few studies have sought to analyse the way this complex, multifaceted entity has been represented within the news media. Here, much of the research has focused on Osama bin Laden, and in particular the way in which this figure has been visually portrayed in the aftermath of these events (e.g., Macdonald, 2003; Hill, 2005; Jeffords & al-Sumait, 2015). In terms of the actual al-Qaeda phenomenon, attention has, by contrast, centred on the linguistic metaphors used within the German and British press media, and how these have changed over the course of the “war on terror” period (e.g., Hülse & Spencer, 2008; Spencer, 2010; Spencer, 2015). The article provides a strong empirical contribution to this literature by providing clearer insight into the way representations of al-Qaeda emerged and developed in the aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks. In particular, the article shows how, rather than remain static or shift gradually over the course of the “war on terror”, news media representations of al-Qaeda were in a state of near-constant flux right from the very start of the conflict. This is significant because it implies that the initial discourses and representations surrounding al-Qaeda, and the “war on terror” more generally, were less stable than existing scholarship proposes (e.g. Norris et al, 2003; Jackson, 2005; Altheide, 2006; Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008; Reese & Lewis, 2009).

Second, the article also seeks to contribute to research within the field of Critical Terrorism Studies, and International Relations more widely, that centres on the way “terrorism” has been discursively constructed in the years after the September 11th 2001 attacks. While much of this research has focused on the language deployed by members of the security and policy-making elite (e.g., Merskin, 2004; Jackson, 2005; Hodges & Nilep, 2007; Jarvis, 2009; Hodges, 2011; Holland, 2013), a growing number of critics have also sought to consider the ways in which the “war on terror” has been communicated and made meaningful through images and visual representations (e.g., Williams, 2003; Croft, 2006; Amooore, 2007; Shepherd, 2008; Hoskins & O’Loughlin, 2010; Mitchell, 2011; Nashef, 2011; Roger, 2013; Hansen, 2015). This article provides a methodological contribution to this literature by considering the way visual *and* verbal texts work together in order

to secure, and challenge, dominant meanings of phenomena such as al-Qaeda while also reinforcing the sweeping counterterrorism policies developed by the Bush and Blair administrations after September 11th 2001. In particular, it points towards Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Machin, 2013) as a useful analytical strategy for focusing attention not only to both the visual and verbal features of these representations, but also the way meaning is produced through an *interaction* between the two communicative modes (after Mitchell, 1996).

In light of these issues, therefore, the article seeks to question “how is ‘al-Qaeda’ visually and verbally represented in the BBC’s coverage of the September 11th 2001 attacks?” Asking this question enables us not only to better understand the way meaning was attributed to the seemingly strange and unfamiliar “al-Qaeda”, but, more crucially, to gain insight into the way these mediated representations helped to formulate the discursive and ideational foundations for a variety of foreign and domestic counterterrorism policies that emerged in the aftermath of these events. In order to do this, the article begins by focusing on the way both “al-Qaeda” and the “war on terror” have been shaped through a limited range of words, images and sounds; in short through what Michel Foucault refers to as “discourse”. Following this, the discussion moves on to outline the methodology used in the analysis, and in particular points towards CMDA as a useful approach for studying the way meaning is constructed within media texts. The analysis itself centres upon two weeks’ worth of BBC “News at Ten” bulletins following the incidents in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania (September 11th – 24th 2001); a focus justified by the fact that the Corporation was Britain’s most watched, trusted and influential news provider during this period (e.g., Hargreaves & Thomas, 2002: 22-29; Barnett, 2008: 8). Indeed, while some studies of media representations of terrorism tend to focus on a greater range of news programmes, over a broader timeframe (e.g., Gerhards & Schäfer, 2014), such broad quantitative methods are less suitable for uncovering the kinds of sub-textual, meaning-making processes that emerge from close, qualitative readings of smaller corpuses of texts (after Hutchings & Miazhevich, 2009: 222). Finally, the article concludes by considering the reasons why there is a shift between the “Islamic”, “Personalised”

and “Elusive” modes of representation, and the consequences that emerge from such a transformation, and ends by reflecting on the way in which these patterns of signification shed light on recent media coverage of terrorist events.

Michel Foucault, the discourse of the “war on terror” and the discursive construction of “al-Qaeda”

Given that the focus of this article is on viewing al-Qaeda as a *discursive* phenomenon, it is perhaps useful to begin by first turning to the work of French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault (1974 & 1978; See also Mills, 1997 & 2003). Though but one of a range of scholars interested in the relationship between discourse, knowledge and power (e.g. Campbell, 1992; Jackson, 2005; Hansen, 2006), Foucault’s conceptualisation of discourse as a practice that gives rise to that which it speaks can help us to better explain the way “al-Qaeda” is produced within a specific historical and institutional context. Further to this, however, his understanding of discourse as “a space of *mutual dissensions*” also enables us to acknowledge the way the meaning of social and cultural phenomena undergo continual process of renewal and change during periods of political crisis (1974: 155, my emphasis).

For Foucault, discourse functions as a continually shifting system of meaning-production that engenders highly regulated ways of seeing, speaking and thinking about the world; something that enables us to make sense of “reality” and our place within it (1974: 32-33). But rather than simply supply meaning, Foucault suggests that discourse works in a more subtle and pervasive manner, systematically forming the various subjects, objects, and identities of which it seeks to describe. As he asserts (Ibid: 49), discourses are not simply “groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representation) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak”.

In this regard, one of the most salient examples of a discourse is the complex assemblage of conflicts, politico-ideological encounters, and semiotic resources that has become known as the

“war on terror” (e.g., Jackson, 2005; Croft, 2006; Hodges & Nilep, 2007; Hoskins & O’Loughlin, 2007; Jarvis, 2009). Although we should be clear that it is not self-contained or isolated from other explanatory discourses, the discourse of the “war on terror” provides meaning to a range of disparate events so that their various contexts and complexities can be understood through a seemingly singular, unifying framework of knowledge. As Adam Hodges and Chad Nilep explain (2007: 3),

[t]he ‘war on terror’ discourse constrains and shapes public discussion and debate within the US and around the world as societal actors in Europe, Asia, the Middle East and elsewhere evoke its language to explain, react to, justify or understand a broad range of political, economic and social phenomena.

In addition to providing the means for understanding and explaining the “reality” of this conflict, however, the discourse of the “war on terror” also serves to constitute its own subjects and objects, creating a series of simplified categories of identity, such as “friend” and “enemy”, “Self” and “Other”, that can be respectively occupied by those fighting within this war (e.g. Merskin, 2004; Jackson, 2005). It is in this sense that al-Qaeda can be regarded as a phenomenon that emerges from within the discourse of the “war on terror”; as opposed to an entity that exists historically prior to, or separate from, it. Here, the meaning of al-Qaeda can be seen to be shaped by the cultural discourses and frameworks of knowledge and power that were first available in the aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks, and which have developed and expanded over subsequent years. Thus, in the same way Edward W. Said describes how “a scarecrow is assembled from bric-a-brac and then made to stand for man” (2003: 312), al-Qaeda can itself be understood to be formed from a range of discursive fragments and then made to stand as the single greatest threat to humanity. As such, “al-Qaeda” can be seen as a site upon which a range of “war on terror”-related fears, discourses and forms of knowledge and power converge and contend; with politically-informed ideas surrounding the East, Islam and the structure and organisation of terrorist movements, appearing alongside broader, more pervasive cultural understandings of normality, deviance and the notion of an “enemy within”.

It is important to note, however, that despite being highly regulated in nature, Foucault emphasised the fact that discourses are not simply produced by a small minority of “elite” figures and imposed coercively from above, but are relatively unstable and pluralistic in character; being formulated within a broad range of disparate sites and institutions (1978: 93). As he explains,

discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it (Ibid: 100-101).

Instead of being fixed or static, therefore, the discourse of the “war on terror” should not be regarded as a singular, isolated way of understanding global events, but rather as a dynamic site of continual struggle and contest, in which the meaning of “al-Qaeda” is not something that is fixed or static but is constantly undergoing a continual process of formation and change. Thus, as the conflict has developed, so to have the various discourses and categories of identity associated with it (e.g., Featherstone et al, 2010; Hodges, 2011).

Crucially, it is in the news media where this discursive conflict can be seen to play out. As Andrew Hoskins and Ben O’Loughlin have noted (2007: 10), news is both regulated and productive in all the ways described by Foucault: It is made up of a set of generic features that audiences can readily identify as belonging to the category of “news”; it engenders a range of subjects – “Western”, “non-Western”, “Self”, “Other” – and objects – “the police”, “the military”, “the government” and “the terrorists” – that help audiences make sense of, and position themselves, in relation to events occurring around the world; and, perhaps most importantly, in order to providing meaning to its on-screen “reality”, its representational practices draw intertextually upon the discursive resources and cultural raw materials that circulate within society. As Ilija Tomanic-Trivundza puts it (2004: 481), “[n]ews comes as a pre-existing, institutional discourse that constitutes its own objects through the use of professional concepts and

techniques”. Indeed, it is this process of meaning-production is especially apparent within the BBC’s news coverage.

Celebrated around the world for its seemingly objective and impartial reporting (Born, 2004: 5), it is an institution that is characterised by its regulated and formulaic broadcasting style, offering its broad, yet singularly defined, audience with a highly specific framework for understanding world events (e.g., Schlesinger, 1978; Creebler, 2004). More specifically, however, in much the same way Foucault described discourse as “a space of *multiple dissensions*” (1974: 155, my emphasis), the BBC’s coverage of terrorism-related news can be regarded an arena in which political and cultural contests are played out (after Wolfsfeld, 1997 & 2011). The Corporation’s reporting, therefore, can be viewed as a space in which a circumscribed range of political actors – elected officials, members of the security services, terrorist spokespersons, and other interest groups, for instance – can be witnessed alongside one another (Callaghan & Schnell, 2001). Though we should acknowledge the structural barriers that prevent certain groups from gaining access to this institution, the BBC’s broad public services remit requires it to provide its audiences with a range of perspectives, with dominant, state-centric representations of terror understood to appear alongside more critical understandings and interpretations (BBC Online, 2015).

Such conflict can be understood to be congenital to the Corporation’s pluralistic broadcasting remit (e.g., Schlesinger, 1978; Schlessinger et al, 1983; Viera, 1988; Flood et al, 2011; Flood et al, 2012). As the nation’s foremost public service institution, the BBC is required to report on terrorism-related incidents in an independent and objective manner; providing its audiences with sufficient information for them to make democratic, critically-informed decisions about the nature of the threat and how best to deal with it (BBC Online, 2015). In this sense, the BBC’s role is understood as an objective cultural arbiter, delicately balancing a range of contending viewpoints (e.g., Gaber et al, 2006; Ashley, 2015). At the same time, however, the Corporation also has a statutory obligation to safeguard the fundamental democratic principles and ideological values that are required to sustain British society; providing citizens with the well-rehearsed voice of the

established social and political order (Flood et al, 2011: 224). Here, the broadcaster is understood to defer to “official” perspectives, reinforcing nationalistic sentiments and culturally-shaped understandings of identity (e.g., Eldridge et al, 1995; Philo & Berry, 2004 & 2011). Indeed, broader structural and cultural factors, such as political and temporal constraints or the emergence of new explanatory discourses, can equally impact upon its coverage, engendering a series of, often unintended, representations and stereotypes that can come to be seen as “real”.

Critically Analysing Multimodal Representations of al-Qaeda

In order to answer the research question outlined in the introduction, namely, “how is ‘al-Qaeda’ visually and verbally represented in the BBC’s coverage of the September 11th 2001 attacks”, this article draws upon Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis (CMDA). Doing so enables us to better understand the way al-Qaeda is visually and verbally shaped within the BBC’s reporting, and how these representations draw upon or challenge the dominant discourses that were present in the immediate aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks. Rooted within the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g., Van Dijk, 1987; Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2001), the fundamental aim of CMDA is to “further advance our growing understanding of the role that different semiotic resources and their multimodal interaction play in supporting existing power relations and promoting social change” (Djonov & Zhao, 2013: 11). In particular, this approach acknowledges the fact that discourses are complex, shifting systems of meaning-production that simultaneously call into play and challenge existing ways of seeing and speaking about the world. Its main advantage over other discourse-analytical techniques is the way in which it helps us to identify subtle interactions between visual and verbal components, and, crucially, enables us to gain insight into the way broader cultural and political discourses surrounding al-Qaeda, Islam and terrorism are projected onto the al-Qaeda phenomenon. CMDA, therefore, allows us to direct attention to the way “al-Qaeda” is constructed within the BBC’s reporting from a broad range of

discursive and cultural raw materials, and, importantly, how these representations are further shaped by the influence of political elites, who seek to fix meaning for their own strategic purposes.

For the analysis, two weeks' worth of BBC1 'News at Ten' bulletins were sourced through the British Film Institute's extensive archives following the attacks in America (September 11th – 24th 2001). This resulted in over 9 hours of continual news coverage, of which 29 reports dealt either with Osama bin Laden, the al-Qaeda phenomenon, or the search for the hijackers. Although it is important to acknowledge that the BBC was not the only source of news and information for citizens during these events, the "News at Ten" bulletin was considered to be the most watched and trusted news programme in the United Kingdom at the time (Hargreaves & Thomas, 2002: 5; Barnett, 2008: 8), providing crucial, up-to-the-minute information about the attacks, the victims and search for those responsible to 33.3% of the British public; with the "News at Ten" drawing 6.7 million viewers on the date in question and roughly 6.41 million on subsequent days (Deans, 2001). Due to the fact that these attacks took place in a foreign context, it should also be noted that the BBC's geographical and political distance from America are expected to influence the nature of its representations of al-Qaeda. As research by Hillel Nosssek has shown (2004; See also Nosssek & Berkowitz, 2006), news media cover events differently depending on whether a conflict is internal or external to the nation state, with distant events typically being reported on in a more professional and detached manner than local or national events, where ideological and nationalistic imperatives prevail.

The analysis proceeded in two stages: First, detailed verbal and visual transcripts were generated for each "News at Ten" broadcast over the course of the two week period. The visual transcripts involved taking screengrabs each time a new camera shot or angle was used and then laying these down in chronological sequence (Rose, 2002: 250). These two sets of transcripts were then placed alongside each other to facilitate close textual analysis, something that enabled the identification of specific patterns of verbal representation – the appearance of value-laden terms, labels, predicates and metaphors, for instance – and visual depiction – repeated still images and

photographs or sequences of moving imagery, for example –, thus helping to identify those moments when specific clusters of words and images coincided. As Howard Davies and Paul Walton point out (1983: 43), “[w]hen the stills are mounted alongside a transcript of the news script... it becomes possible to analyse the relationships between the constituent elements”. While this strategy is certainly time consuming, with each report often taking several hours to fully transcribe and annotate, the process helps to manage the ephemeral nature of televisual discourse and, thus, make it easier to understand how “al-Qaeda” is made meaningful within the BBC’s coverage. It should be pointed out that the analysis of these transcripts was also supplemented by periods of *re*-viewing the news reports as structured wholes; a methodological strategy that prevented the inquiry from losing sight of the broader form and flow of each broadcast.

While this first stage of the analysis revealed the main patterns and modes of representation appearing within the BBC’s coverage, the second stage of the analysis involved identifying the dominant discourses that underpin these figurative categories, and also how they shifted and developed over the course of the two weeks of coverage. This meant reflecting on the broader representational strategies and frameworks of knowledge employed by the BBC’s journalists, presenters and interviewed participants, and analysing the way particular modes of representation were privileged at the expense of others. Here, a variety of discourse analytical strategies were deployed, ranging from subject position (Doty, 1993) to social actor analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2013), in order to understand how the BBC positioned the various subjects and objects that formulated its on-screen reality (Schlesinger, 1978). More conventional forms of visual and semiotic analysis (e.g., Barthes, 1973; Rose, 2001) were also used to identify the kinds of deep, subtextual and symbolic meanings that inform and underpin these media representations (after Hutchings & Miazhevich, 2009: 222). Despite its limitations, namely the fact that the analysis is always going to be subject to the interpretive bias of the researcher, in adhering to the guidelines set down in related studies this bias should not detract from the validity of the research outlined below (after Brown, 2011: 708).

Dominant modes of visual and verbal representation

The following sections outline the three dominant modes of visual and verbal representation that can be seen in the BBC's coverage during the aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks. As noted above, these representations are a continually shifting site upon which a range of fears, identities, discourses and forms of knowledge and power struggle and contend, and through which a number of different "al-Qaedas" manifest themselves. These changing ways of seeing and speaking about al-Qaeda are labelled the "Islamic" mode, the "Personalised" mode, and the "Elusive" mode of representation. Though discussed separately here, it should be noted, however, that the boundaries separating these representational modes are not fixed or permanent, but rather are in a state of continual conflict during this period, with one figurative mode feeding into, contradicting, or reinforcing the next.

The "Islamic" mode of representation

The first mode of representation to emerge within the BBC's coverage can be seen to draw upon a long tradition of reductive stereotypes and media representations that depict the religion and peoples of Islam as irrational, culturally inferior and inherently violent (e.g., Said, 1997; Merskin, 2004; Poole & Richardson, 2006; Shaheen, 2012). As such, al-Qaeda is constructed as a fanatical, anti-Western entity, driven by its religious, as opposed to political, aims and grievances (Said, 1987: 89). Here, characterisations of Osama bin Laden as a "wealthy Arab fundamentalist" (BBC1, September 11th 2001), an "Islamic fundamentalist", or an "Islamic militant" (BBC1, September 13th 2001), can be seen to appear alongside descriptions of al-Qaeda as group of "Arab fundamentalists", a collection of "Islamic and extremist groups", a "network of Islamic militants" (BBC1, September 11th 2001), "Islamic terrorists", "a network of anti-American groups", or as "fanatics", "fanatical terrorists" (BBC1, September 12th 2001) and "enemies of the civilized world", more generally (BBC1, September 14th 2001). These representations are further supported by the repeated use of images of Osama bin Laden, pictured dressed in a mixture of "military"-style

combat fatigues and more “traditional”, Islamic clothing (e.g. BBC1, September 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th 2001), or brief training sequences taken from al-Qaeda’s *State of the Ummah* video (2001), in which scores of masked fighters can be seen engaged in aggressive training activities in the Afghan hinterland (e.g. BBC1, September 11th, 12th, 13th 2001). The lack of references to al-Qaeda’s political aims and grievances during this initial coverage, save for a number of generalised statements such as bin Laden is “known to fund and train a network of anti-American groups” (BBC1, September 12th 2001), further stands to reinforce this mode of representation; thus containing al-Qaeda within a simplified and seemingly familiar framework of understanding.

By way of example, the “Islamic” mode of representation can be seen in its most concentrated form during George Eykyn’s September 11th 2001 report, when the al-Qaeda phenomenon is first “covered” by the broadcaster (after Said, 1997). Appearing third in the “News at Ten” running order, and lasting a lengthy 4 minutes and 25 seconds, the report opens, in a somewhat predictable fashion, with footage of a number of Palestinians firing guns into the air and loudly celebrating the “horror and carnage” in the United States. Though these scenes are briefly moderated by reference to Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat’s swift condemnation of the attacks, Edward Said’s belief that Arab people and cultures are most often represented through frameworks centring upon violence, irrationality and anti-Westernism finds significant support here (e.g., Said, 1987, 1997 & 2003). As if to further emphasise this point the report moves onto a brief interview segment with “Security Analyst” Paul Beaver, who suggests that “American pilots would not do this, but *Arab fundamentalists* may well be prepared to” (my emphasis). This reductive statement is immediately followed by the first appearance of Osama bin Laden during the BBC’s “News at Ten” bulletin. Indeed, the contrast between these two figures is particularly stark; with Beaver pictured in a modern, urban setting and wearing a grey suit, and an ascetically-dressed bin Laden emerging out of a mud-bricked building into a chaotic scene of masked, heavily-armed fighters. While it is interesting to point out that the BBC did have access to a wider range of images and visual representations of the Saudi, as seen in Jane Corbin’s *Panorama* documentary “Death to

America” (Sutcliffe, 1998), when contrasted in this manner bin Laden’s “non-Western” dress and appearance function discursively as a visual marker of his backwardness and fanaticism, with the AK-47, the quintessential weapon of the “Islamic” terrorist, serving to further emphasise this notion. Bin Laden’s “traditional” clothing is also supplemented in other reports, particularly those taken from al-Qaeda’s own propaganda videos, where he is pictured wearing the ceremonial bisht, a long brown woollen cloak typically worn by Islamic scholars or the Saudi ruling classes (BBC1, September 13th & 20th 2001), or a faded, military-style camouflage jacket (BBC1, September 13th, 15th, 18th & 23rd 2001).

The quality of the image also confers an additional level of legitimacy onto the Security Analyst, in which a steady, brightly-lit profile shot of Beaver is swiftly followed by grainy, hand-held footage of bin Laden. While we should note that it is not clear whether such a severe contrasting of images is intended by the BBC, the opposition between these two figures serves to visually enact a form of subject positioning, in which the rational, expert-driven mind-set of Modernity, typified by the contemporary setting and Beaver’s grey suit, is juxtaposed against bin Laden’s “traditional” clothing and the pre-Modern mise en-scène, something which functions to make these positions all the more explicit. As Jackson has argued in relation to the discursive construction of the “terrorist” in western societies (2005: 61),

[c]ritical to maintaining the nation-state and the collective identity of its citizens therefore, is the notion of *difference*; there has to be a series of identity markers to differentiate those who belong to the community and those who do not.

While it is possible that the BBC’s audiences would reject this interpretation, such a forceful contrasting of these images, coupled with the shocking scenes of devastation emerging from America, would make it difficult to think outside of such positions.

Evoking another Orientalist-inspired stereotype, Eykyn goes on to introduce bin Laden as a “*wealthy* Arab fundamentalist”, who “controls and finances al-Qaeda; an umbrella network of Islamic militants” (my emphasis). Here, directly coinciding with the first appearance of the term “al-Qaeda”, the visuals depict bin Laden, bearded, bescarved, and wearing a military-style flak

jacket, in a 1998 interview with Al-Jazeera's Jamal Ismail. These images provide the BBC's audiences with a potent visual manifestation of the term "al-Qaeda", with bin Laden's image standing to further emphasise the notion of "Islamic" militancy, by way of his plain white turban, often worn by religious clerics, and his AK-47 and faded military jacket. Notably, while bin Laden is pictured calmly speaking to the interviewer, we do not *hear* what he is saying; leaving the report's narrator to fill in the gaps and explain how the Saudi has "vowed to destroy the United States". Such a claim, while in one sense true, serves merely to simplify bin Laden's grievances against the U.S. and portray al-Qaeda's violence as being rooted in religious causes.

As if to further confirm this view, the report moves to describe how bin Laden has been "accused of masterminding a string of attacks on American targets", which include the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings Kenya and Tanzania, and, perhaps most significantly, Ramzi Yousef's 1993 attack on the World Trade Centre and his failed plot to destroy a series of commercial airliners over the Pacific. Here, archival footage is shown following the aftermath of these attacks, images which resonate powerfully with the scenes of destruction occurring in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania that book-end the report. Although it is evident that the BBC includes this material in order to contextualise the day's events, in compressing these incidents into a simplified, teleological narrative Eykyn's report overlooks the various social, economic and political factors that were specific to each attack, and which point to the involvement of other groups, individuals and causes. Indeed, in privileging such graphic, highly emotive scenes, over a more sober analysis of the various political aims and grievances (e.g., Kepel & Milelli, 2008: 47-59), the report serves to reinforce the belief that "Islamic" terrorist organisations are more fanatical, more extreme, and less conciliatory than other terrorist groups or movements. As if to confirm this view, Eykyn's report ends with scenes from New York and a description of the September 11th 2001 attacks as the "biggest and bloodiest terrorist operation ever".

The “Personalised” mode of representation

As the coverage moves beyond the first two days of reporting, however, the overtly Orientalised nature of these representations are progressively moderated, and at times challenged by the BBC, and a much more “Personalised” conception of al-Qaeda begins to take shape. Reflecting Michael Stohl’s assertion that Western news media have a tendency to both “personalize” and “psychologize” terrorist violence (2008: 7), al-Qaeda is here portrayed as a hierarchical, centrally-administered entity that is directly controlled and financed by a single, all-powerful “mastermind” figure (BBC1, September 11th, 12th, 19th & 20th 2001). This can be seen, for example, in the increased number of possessive pronouns used by the BBC to link Osama bin Laden to the al-Qaeda phenomenon. Thus, we see references to “Osama bin Laden and his network”, “Osama bin Laden’s network” (BBC1, September 14th 2001), “Osama bin Laden’s terror network”, “Osama bin Laden’s men” (BBC1, September 16th 2001), “Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda network” (BBC1, September 18th & 24th 2001), “Osama bin Laden’s network in Europe” (BBC1, September 19th 2001), and “his terrorist network in Afghanistan” (BBC1, September 21st 2001), alongside a smaller number of descriptions of al-Qaeda as an “organisation” (BBC1, September 18th, 21st and 23rd 2001). Such descriptions function to discursively link the Saudi figure to al-Qaeda, ensuring that the two become synonymous within the BBC’s coverage.

As if to further confirm this view, the “Personalised” mode of representation is also evident in the descriptions of bin Laden as an individual who has a significant level of influence over al-Qaeda’s foot-soldiers. Here, references to the fact that he “controls and finances al-Qaeda” (BBC1, September 11th 2001), that he is “known to fund and train a network of anti-American terror groups from his base in Afghanistan” (BBC1, September 12th 2001), that he has access to “a huge amount of communications equipment and can contact his supporters everywhere” (BBC1, September 13th 2001), and, moreover, that he has the loyalty of several “trusted lieutenants” (BBC1, September 18th, 19th & 24th 2001), serve to bolster the belief that al-Qaeda is a seemingly traditional organisation, with a clear chain-of-command that leads directly to the Saudi.

As we shall see, although the BBC's representations move on to challenge this understanding, such descriptions call into play a series of, often highly simplified, assumptions about the structure, organisation and behaviour of clandestine political groupings, where it is presumed that terrorist attacks can always be linked to a clear "mastermind" figure, and that the actions of terrorist actors are directly influenced by those higher up the chain of command. As Stohl asserts, this kind of reporting functions to distort media coverage of terrorism and reduce "structural and political problems to those of individual pathologies and personal problems" (2008: 8).

In terms of visuals, this conception of al-Qaeda is further supported through the near-continual visual referencing of bin Laden throughout the BBC's reporting. In particular, despite representations of other individuals and operatives, an image of the Saudi appears in every broadcast between September 11th – 24th 2001, with the exception of the September 17th 2001 newscast where he is still referred to fourteen times by journalists and commentators. As noted above, though it is evident that bin Laden's "foreign" or "traditional" appearance functions as a powerful marker of his difference, on a more practical level, the focus this individual works to further centre the viewers' attention and provide audiences with a clear "enemy" figure upon which to locate the source of the violence. This can be seen, for instance, in the repeated airing of supplemental footage from John Miller's 1998 ABC interview with bin Laden. Appearing in a total of seven reports during this period (BBC1, September 11th, 12th, 15th, 16th, 18th, 20th & 23rd 2001), the shaky images depict an ascetically-dressed bin Laden walking at night amongst an unknown number of masked, anonymous fighters. Against this faceless backdrop, bin Laden's presence is further amplified as the light from a single hand-held camera illuminates his long, white thobe and turban, whilst casting darkened shadows onto the masked mujahedeen that surround him. Those writing about the conventions of visual representation refer to this as the "personal code" (e.g., Shapiro, 1988: 129; Hutchinson et al, 2014: 6), a representational strategy that can also be seen to reflect a broader cultural tendency to view large-scale dangers as being orchestrated by sinister, all-powerful individuals (e.g. Robin, 2001: 3; Croft & Moore, 2010: 825). Such a notion stands to

further contain al-Qaeda within a highly identifiable and culturally familiar mode of representation, thus allaying fears surrounding who, what, and, crucially, where such a threat might be located.

Interestingly, and as if to challenge the reductive, Orientalist-inspired nature of the “Islamic” mode, the “Personalised” mode of representation also appears, at least tacitly, to downplay the association between Islam and terrorism seen earlier in the coverage. This is evident, for example, in the subtly shifting characterisations of bin Laden, which change from that of an “Islamic militant” to a more neutral-sounding “Saudi dissident” (BBC1, September 12th 2001), a “Saudi-born business man” (BBC1, September 15th 2001), or, more commonly, as the “prime suspect” behind the attacks in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania (e.g., BBC1, September 13th, 14th, 15th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th, 23rd 2001). Although references to bin Laden’s fundamentalism and militancy continue, these labels appear to attribute a level of legitimacy to this figure when compared to the more reductive predicates that appear during this period.

Further to this, the “Personalised” mode of representation also sees the emergence of a series of generalised references to the role of “American foreign policy”, or the “policies” of “Western governments” more generally (BBC1, September 12th 2001), in motivating the September 11th 2001 attacks; something that highlights the fact that al-Qaeda is driven by more than mere religious or other-worldly concerns (See also reports by John Simpson and Matt Frei, BBC1, September 14th 2001). Nevertheless, these political and historical grievances are themselves frequently presented in a highly individualised manner. So, for instance, BBC journalists make references to the fact that *bin Laden* has “vowed to destroy the United States” (BBC1, September 11th 2001, my emphasis), that “*he* is known to fund and train a network of anti-American terror groups” (BBC1, September 12th 2001, my emphasis), and that “*he* calls upon followers to strike at America and Israel” (BBC1, September 13th 2001, my emphasis). In attributing these acts of violence to bin Laden himself, therefore, rather than provide audiences with insight into the material factors motivating the attacks the BBC merely serve to reduce al-Qaeda’s broader social, economic and political motivations to the personal protestations of one man.

The “Elusive” mode of representation

Despite the BBC’s attempts to construct al-Qaeda ways that can be easily understood by its audiences, however, appearing alongside the “Islamic” and “Personalised” modes of representation is a far more complex and, what can be termed, “Elusive” conception of this phenomenon. Here, concerns about the size and shape of al-Qaeda, uncertainty regarding identity of its operatives, and, perhaps most importantly, doubts over the operational role of Osama bin Laden appear within the BBC’s coverage, giving rise to a more complex, multifaceted understanding of it as a movement made up of an unknown number of unassuming, ordinary-looking, assailants.

This is first evident in the sense that this entity cannot fit within the conventional categories representation described above, where al-Qaeda is characterised in increasingly uncertain terms as an “unseen enemy” (BBC1, September 14th & 24th 2001), and entity without a definite “shape” (BBC1, September 13th 2001), an enemy that wages war by “stealth” (BBC1, September 14th 2001), or as a disparate grouping of “shadowy terrorists” who are spread out across the globe (BBC1, September 14th, 15th & 18th 2001). Drawing heavily on the deliberately vague terminology employed by figures within the Bush administration (See Jackson, 2005: 142-150), al-Qaeda is also described on a number of occasions as “a new kind of enemy” (BBC1, September 14th 2001), a type of enemy America “has never faced before” (BBC1, September 12th 2001), and one that, perhaps more importantly, is “faceless” (BBC1, September 14th 2001) or “elusive” in nature (BBC1, September 15th 2001). Such descriptions, while challenging the belief that al-Qaeda is a hierarchically-organised, centrally-administered threat, serve to highlight the difficulties in identifying exactly who its operatives are and what they might look like, enabling a more complex understanding of this phenomenon to take shape within the Corporation’s coverage.

Indeed, the uncertainty over what al-Qaeda is, and in particular what its adherents look like, is further exhibited through the appearance of a broader range of images and visual representations of the September 11th 2001 hijackers. In particular, the emergence of a series of

seemingly normal, everyday images of Mohamed Atta (BBC1, September 13th & 14th 2001) and Ziad Jarrah (BBC1, September 20th 2001), alongside CCTV, mugshot and silhouette-style images of other suspected hijackers and accomplices (BBC1, September 16th, 19th, 20th, & 24th 2001), can be said to draw upon a much deeper discursive repository, challenging the “Islamic” and “Personalised” modes of representation highlighted earlier in the analysis, and thus transforming al-Qaeda from a distant, foreign threat, to a more “familiar”, albeit less distinctive, enemy within. Although there are attempts to emphasise the foreign identity of the hijackers, for example through descriptions of the men as “Middle Eastern” in appearance (BBC1, September 13th 2001), here the terrorist subject is recognised less by the appearance of embodied or sartorial signifiers that indicate difference and Otherness, such as beards, faded combat fatigues and keffiyeh scarves, and more by their sheer normality.

Such a notion finds itself powerfully articulated with the appearance of a family portrait-style photograph of Ziad Jarrah during a news item by Asia Correspondent Matt Frei (September 20th 2001). Although the term “al-Qaeda” is conspicuous in its absence, the report provides considerable insight into the shifting categories of identity attributed to this phenomenon. First seen as a physical artefact in the hands of his grieving father, Jarrah’s photo forms the visual centrepiece to the 2 minute 20 second report and draws powerfully upon discourses of domesticity and familiarity typically seen in family portrait photography (e.g., Rose, 2010). Indeed, his image is immediately recognisable due to its almost banal iconicity: we all have similar images scattered around our homes and domestic spaces. Its unmodulated, sky-blue backdrop, further lends the image a relaxed, calm quality, with the colour blue calling on culturally signifying notions of honesty, decency and loyalty (Caivano, 1998: 394) and Jarrah’s round, wire-rimmed spectacles, further eliciting stereotypical notions of mildness and intelligence (after Hellström & Telke, 1994: 694). His uncle goes on to describe how he

went to the best schools, he was raised gently, he was the only boy in the family, he is the kind of lovely boy to his parents, to his family, he always likes to have fun.

As if to support this view, footage is shown of the 26 year-old dancing, whilst surrounded by smiling women, at a cousin's wedding in Beirut. The grainy, hand-held images run counter to al-Qaeda's own propagandistic home-video footage, described earlier, in which rows of masked, anonymous fighters are seen taking part in synchronised training exercises in Afghanistan's dusty landscape. The report's narrator quietly underscores the ambiguous nature of these images, suggesting that "this is not the behaviour of an Islamic fundamentalist". In particular, the presence of these seemingly "everyday", "normal" forms of imagery can be said to function as a direct challenge to the "Islamic" mode of representation described earlier, giving rise to a much more complex understanding of the al-Qaeda phenomenon, and the identities of those who formulate its ranks. Here, rather than be located in the dangerous and darkened spaces of the Orient, the terrorist becomes a figure that permeates liberal, multicultural societies. Such a view is understandably underplayed within televisual accounts, since it places the "deviant" in the realm of the ordinary" (Jermyn, 2003: 181), and thus destabilises the delicate boundaries between the (non-terrorist) "Self" and the (terrorist) "Other" (after Jackson, 2005: 76). Significantly, and as if to further bring the threat closer to home for the BBC's audiences, Frei's report is immediately followed by an item on extremism within the United Kingdom, in which outspoken members of the seemingly singular Muslim community chillingly note that British military bases are also deemed legitimate targets by al-Qaeda's shadowy sympathisers.

Perhaps most importantly, however, the uncertainty over exactly who and what al-Qaeda is further conveyed in the belief that bin Laden has little operational authority over such an entity. Here the BBC's representations can be seen to draw upon the discursive terms and constructions employed by senior figures within the Bush and Blair administrations, who seek to take advantage of the ambiguity surrounding "al-Qaeda" in order to disseminate their own far-reaching interpretation of who and what the threat is. This notion is first seen, for instance, in Colin Powell's claim that it is "not enough to get one individual; although we will start with that one individual" (BBC1, September 17th 2001), an ominous statement that shows that U.S. officials were already

looking beyond bin Laden in its fight against terror. This notion is further articulated in the BBC's own analysis, with the Washington correspondent, Stephen Sackur, noting that “[y]ou cannot go out and round bin Laden up, he’s not the real problem, it’s a network all over the world” (BBC1, September 17th 2001). Further statements by the U.S. Secretary of Defence, who characterises al-Qaeda as “a broad network of individuals and organisations” (BBC1, September 18th 2001), the President, who describes it as a “global terror network” (BBC, September 24th 2001), and the Attorney General, who refers to al-Qaeda as a “network” that is “supported and sustained by a variety of foreign governments” (BBC1, September 19th 2001), also serve to underscore the broad nature of the threat. As if to further echo these claims, British Prime Minister Tony Blair also reinforces the idea that al-Qaeda is much larger than bin Laden, stating that the conflict “it’s not about one man, it’s about a very large organisation” (BBC1, September 20th 2001). Although this is not to suggest that the BBC simply functions as a mouthpiece for state discourse, such uncertainty serves to lend powerful support to the belief that al-Qaeda is a disparate, conspiratorially-spreading threat that has no clear definitional boundaries.

Conclusion and Discussion

With the exception of Jane Corbin’s 1998 *Panorama* documentary, “Death to America”, for many British citizens the events of September 11th 2001 were most likely the first instance in which they had heard the term “al-Qaeda”, and, as a result, news media outlets such as the BBC had to make sense of this entity by drawing on the various discourses and frameworks of knowledge that were available in the aftermath of these attacks. In returning to the BBC’s coverage of these events, therefore, this article enables us to critically assess the very *production* of “al-Qaeda” as an object of discourse, knowledge and power. But before considering how these modes of visual and verbal representation help us to understand contemporary portrayals of the terrorist threat, it is important to first consider *why* we see this shift from an “Islamic” and “Personalised” category of

representation to a more fragmented and “Elusive” conception of al-Qaeda, and what consequences emerge from such a transformation?

Despite drawing on a tradition of deeply hostile representations of the East and Islam, for the BBC, and conservative commentators such as Paul Beaver, the advancement of the “Islamic” mode of representation would seem to be the most logical way of viewing al-Qaeda in the immediate aftermath of such a massive terrorist attack, as it helps to reduce the complexity of the events occurring in America and maintain the discursive boundaries between the Western “Self” and its non-Western, terrorist “Other”. As Kirsten Mogensen points out (2008), one of the key roles of the news media during terrorist attacks is to maintain the social order and minimise harm to the basic structure of society. Thus, in containing the terrorist threat within a seemingly familiar, and culturally recognisable, mode of representation the BBC constructs an image of the enemy that can be readily identified and quickly understood by its audiences. Here, al-Qaeda is externalised as an entity that is recognisable by its bearded, keffiyeh-wearing operatives, and one that is principally located in the dark, dusty and chaotic landscape of the Orient, as opposed to the clean, bright and ordered cities of the Occident.

Yet, in a country home to nearly 2.7 million Muslims the BBC’s producers would have been acutely aware of the consequences of associating al-Qaeda’s actions with the beliefs and practices of Britain’s wider Islamic community: the reports focusing on the impact of the terror attacks on Muslims in the United States and Britain clearly serve to confirm this unease (e.g., September 20th & 24th 2001). As such, the subsequent playing down of this category, and the shift towards a more “Personalised” mode of representation, can be understood as an attempt by the Corporation to make sense of al-Qaeda in view of its strict editorial guidelines and public purpose commitments, which caution against overly-simplistic depictions of religion, culture and terrorism (e.g., BBC Online, 2015; BBC Trust, 2007). Thus, in embodying the terrorist threat within a singular, all-powerful “mastermind” figure the BBC simultaneously provides its audiences with a clear image of the enemy while tacitly severing the link between al-Qaeda’s violence and the

broader Muslim community in Britain and further afield. At the same time, however, one of the consequences to emerge from such a view is that it encourages an incredibly one-dimensional understanding of the terror threat to take shape, whereby phenomena such as al-Qaeda are viewed as hierarchical in form and structure, and are always regarded as being led by highly identifiable, charismatic leaders. Although this is not to say that BBC audiences will interpret these two modes of representation as described here, in focusing so much visual and verbal attention onto Osama bin Laden the term “al-Qaeda” becomes synonymous with this figure, and thus silences the historical and political factors that influenced the September 11th 2001 attacks.

Nevertheless, once more information is made available about the individuals behind the attacks the stability of the “Islamic” and “Personalised” modes of representation is substantially weakened, and this opens up a space for a more diffused, fragmented and, at times, familiar-looking vision of al-Qaeda to emerge within the BBC’s coverage. Here, the sheer levels of uncertainty surrounding who and what al-Qaeda is, and, perhaps more importantly, where its shadowy fighters might be located, compels the broadcaster to draw upon a much broader range of discourses and frameworks of knowledge so as to contain this entity within a representational form that is in some way understandable for citizens. And yet in doing so, the “Elusive” mode of representation works to diffuse the threat posed by al-Qaeda and violently destabilise the delicate boundaries between the (non-terrorist) “Self” and the (terrorist) “Other”. Perhaps more concerning, however, and as noted above, this representational mode also functions to inadvertently legitimise the deliberately vague and nebulous vision of al-Qaeda promoted by political elites in America and Britain in the days and weeks following the September 11th 2001 attacks, providing audiences with the image of a shadowy, conspiratorially-spreading threat that is scattered across a broad range of strategic and economic sites. As one correspondent astutely points out, the search for those responsible “isn’t just about one man, Osama bin Laden, or indeed one country, Afghanistan: the Americans are finding all sorts of connections, to Yemen, to Egypt, to Saudi Arabia, and many other countries” (BBC1, September 15th 2001). As a consequence, the

BBC's representations become as a vehicle through which the far-reaching ambitions and counterterrorism strategies of the Bush and Blair administrations can be sanctioned. This is not to say that there is a direct, causal relationship between the BBC's representations and the policies of government officials, but rather, as Hoskins and O'Loughlin point out (2007: 161), that media representations and definitions of terrorism "are integral to the legitimacy of security measures and whether citizens grant consent to those policies". This is perhaps the greatest challenge the BBC faces when seeking to represent the al-Qaeda phenomenon, as it cannot help but become part of the propaganda apparatus of policy elites who seek to construct their own understanding of events. It is not the place to offer a solution to such a problem, here, but rather to show how this representational conflict plays out.

Despite the sheer volume of academic literature surrounding the September 11th 2001 attacks, this article has highlighted the fact that media representations of al-Qaeda were much more complex and unstable than existing scholarship suggests; simultaneously drawing upon and challenging the dominant discourses that circulated in the aftermath of these events. In addition to this, the application of CMDA further helps us to gain insight into this meaning-making process. And, in doing so, the article is an initial step towards gaining a deeper understanding the way the al-Qaeda phenomenon has been visually and verbally represented for British television audiences during the opening stages of the "war on terror". Nevertheless, given the fact that the September 11th 2001 attacks are now but a distant memory for citizens concerned with more immediate terrorism-related threats and dangers, such as the apparent "rise" of the Islamic State, it is useful to end this article by considering how the modes of representation described here can help to shed light on contemporary representations of the terrorist Other.

Though we should be cautious when seeking to compare al-Qaeda with the Islamic State (e.g. Byman, 2015), recent media coverage surrounding events linked to the conflict in Syria and Northern Iraq has seen a return to many of the patterns of visual and verbal representation highlighted in this article. Thus, recent BBC coverage of terror attacks in San Bernardino (2015)

and Paris (2015), for instance, can be understood to powerfully call upon the “Islamic” mode of representation, described here, in the way its news reports quickly highlighted the religious identity of the perpetrators and speculated about the spiritual motivations underpinning the attacks (e.g., BBC Online, December 11th 2015; BBC Online, April 27th 2016). Similarly, the Corporation’s disproportionate focus on figures such as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Mohammed Emwazi, aka “Jihadi John”, and Salah Abdeslam, further serves to highlight the continued relevance of the “Personalised” mode of representation, and the way the news media often over-report on the influence and actions of individual terrorists at the expense of the broader social, economic and political causes that motivate such acts.

Nevertheless, while institutions such as the BBC will always attempt to portray terror threats in ways that can be easily understood by citizens, the mode of representation that is perhaps most relevant in the context of recent terrorist events is the “Elusive” mode. With the advent of Web 2.0 and the emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, we have seen a steady proliferation of representations, and in particular visual portrayals, of the terrorist “Other” that more and more seem to reflect the visual language and culture of our own online, mediated selves. Thus, in recent years, citizens are increasingly presented with images appear to that show “typical” citizens in everyday social settings and engaged in the kinds of seemingly “ordinary” activities that can be identified with by a range of audience members, regardless of their own unique cultural background (e.g. Ahmad, 2016). What's more, though this article has sought to show how this particular category of representation served to function in the interests of political and security elites during the opening stages of the “war on terror”, it is important to point out that these mediated images have increasingly become a vital component of terrorist propaganda releases over the course of this conflict; as they serve to reinforce the fear that the terrorist is lying in the shadows, waiting to launch yet another, more deadly, strike. Indeed, this explains the willingness of both al-Qaeda and Islamic State to use Western fighters in their propaganda releases. Such a state of affairs, as Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass point out

(2008: 29), finds us in a strange, tangled situation in which allegedly sworn enemies, such as states and terrorist movements, begin to “feed rhetorically into one another’s interests as each side perceives political advantage in the very existence of the other”. Thus, the more these images appear within media coverage of terrorist attacks, the more they serve to unwittingly reinforce the positions of these two powerful groups. And, as we enter into a new, and perhaps more terrifying, phase of the “war on terror” the aim of future research should be to analyse the shifting ways in which media representations serve to sustain this conflicting, yet mutually reinforcing, relationship.

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