

# Do Terrorists have Human Rights too?

A Critical Analysis of the Representation of (Suspected)  
Terrorists in the "War against Terror" Discourse in the UK  
and the US



# Abstract

Terrorism has for centuries been used as a leverage to attain political, social and economic goals. It is no new phenomena, but since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks of 2001 the American And British governments have instigated a new global “war” against terrorism. The “war against terror” discourse that the British and American governments seek to uphold provides a smokescreen from behind which the UK and the US have been able to pursue foreign policies that violate human rights, especially those of (suspected) terrorists. By creating a climate of fear of terrorism and portraying terrorists as inhuman, these governments are able to continue an illegitimate “war” largely unquestioned. The following research paper is an exposé of the detrimental representation of (suspected) terrorists in the “war against terror” discourse and the lack of regard for their human rights.

*Key words:* ”war against terror”, human rights, CDA, discourse analysis, terrorists, representations.

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# 1 Introduction

Before September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 it was unfathomable that the west would become the target of an extensive terrorist campaign. Modern western identity was built around the belief that the west was invincible to outside forces. In the period following the world wars western ‘defeats’, such as the Vietnam War, were perceived as being the result of western imperialistic ambitions but actual conflict had never occurred on western soil. This naive belief abruptly ceased to exist when the terrorist organization Al-quaida started its offensive against the US and the west proving that no state, western or otherwise, was invincible.

Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the UK and US governments have instigated hard-liner foreign policy measures in what President George Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair have declared to be a “war against terror”. Many of these new measures such as anti-terrorism laws and institutions like Guantanamo Bay directly violate human rights and civil liberties. Little has been done by the international community to put a stop to these breeches. As beacons of neo liberal ideology, the US and the UK have used democracy and human rights as something of a moral trump card against oppressive regimes, but according to research, Britain alone is responsible for more than 10 million deaths due to abuses of human rights (Mark Curtis, 2004: 2). As little action has been taken by the western international community against these states with regards breeches of international law and UN declarations, it suggests that we are not facing an issue of a few deviant clauses in the US and UK’s current foreign policies, but something more deep-rooted and socially accepted.

The following research paper is an analysis grounded in an epistemological thirst after knowledge of why and how the world is formed through social constructions. In this context, why and how negative elements in the “war against terror” are being upheld. Iver Neumann explains this perspective of perceiving the world as essential because “det är meningslöst att påstå att världen består av det ena eller det andra utan att man anger varför och på vilket sätt denna värld upprätthålls” (Neumann, 2003: 14).

## 1.1 Research Question / Problem

I formulated my research question based on my critical theoretical standpoint, a perspective that has its underpinnings on the above quote. Neumann states above that we should research why and how the world is formed (Neumann: 14), which is a post positivistic approach to understanding the world. If we are to further define the critical theory strand of this collective hermeneutic school of thought

we can add the dimension that critical theory goes one step further and locates the “delusions” in our reality (Wodak in Wodak and Meyer, 2001: 10).

To begin a research process from my theoretical standpoint is not unacceptable practice as research need not necessarily begin with a problem formulation (Lundquist, 1993: 45). It was beneficial in my case as I could later adapt some critical theory research criteria that Ruth Wodak claims are central areas in Critical Discourse Analysis. Research areas include how people maintain power and how ideology functions in social institutions etc. (For a full listing, see Wodak in Wodak and Meyer: 11-12). Based on the premise that discourse analysis seeks to answer questions of the nature how certain norms and values are upheld and what representations exist, I could establish the following question from my two fields of interest - human rights and the “war against terror”:

How are the breeches of (suspected) terrorists’ human rights’ in the “war against terror” discourse being upheld?

## 1.2 Aims

I have three main ambitions that I will attempt to fulfil in this research paper. When I first embarked on analysing a discourse I quickly realized that in order to understand the many concepts and broad theoretical discussions about discourse analysis I had to read a lot of background material before I could begin to write. This was problematic because readers’ with little in depth knowledge of what a discourse is and how it can be analysed would find them selves swimming in too deep water. There is a stigma attached to discourse analysis, which marks it as being an abstract and confusing concept. By giving an account of discourse analysis from a basic level through to how I have implemented it in my research I hope to enlighten the reader that discourse analysis is a practical concept that has an undeserved reputation. Furthermore, by describing discourse analysis in depth readers’ will feel more “at home” reading my research and will be able to question it more freely based on knowledge.

Another ambition of this paper is to identify and analyse the representation of (suspected) terrorists. By doing so I hope to be able to give an insight into how we can understand that terrorists’ human rights are being violated without action being taken to stop the breeches. I use the word “suspected” in brackets as the representation includes both terrorists and suspected terrorists.

Finally as a critical theorist I aim to not only reveal how these human rights breeches are being upheld, but also what alternatives there are for change.

To summarize, this papers’ three aims: I will carry out a theoretical and methodological in-depth analysis of the meaning of discourse and how we analyse a discourse using CDA, I will investigate the disregard for (suspected) terrorists’ human rights and also highlight an alternative to the current dominant discourse.

## 1.3 Outline

As previously mentioned in the aims section, I will be using discourse analysis as both my method and theory not only to gain better insight into the “war on terror discourse” but also due to the fact that it is difficult to define where the boundary is between theory and method where discourse analysis is concerned (Neumann: 14). As a result, I have fused both theory and method into one section. This paper is divided into three sections, the first being for the most part an exposition of discourse analysis from a CDA standpoint. By writing an exposé of CDA I hope to enlighten the reader as to what it is and how it can be applied. This is crucial in the understanding of my research, as without background knowledge true intersubjectivity cannot be achieved. The second section of this paper deals with a representation within the “war against terror” and it is here I will account for my analysis. In the third and final section I will detail the result including conclusions. An important element of my conclusion is a reflection over the research process, as it is not only the result that is of importance, but how the result was obtained.



## 2 Theory and Method

A discourse is an abstract concept with many different forms and definitions that can be hard to grasp and place in the right context. In the following chapter I will start by broadly defining a discourse within the field of Social Sciences. There are other differentiating definitions, for example within linguistics studies, but these are in my opinion irrelevant here and serve only to confuse matters, so these have been excluded.

After defining what commonly constitutes a discourse, I will briefly introduce the school of thought that is the basis for my research, namely critical discourse analysis (CDA) in section 2.1. In section 2.2 I will discuss why I have chosen CDA as my analytical framework from which I conduct my research. In the face of three different schools of thought, I feel it is important to illustrate why I have chosen CDA and not the other perspectives. In section 2.3 I will frame the “war against terror” discourse that I will research. As I have chosen to focus on a few segments rather than the entire discourse, a motivation of why I have chosen a few select parts of the discourse is detailed in this section. Finally in section 2.4 I will present the analytical tools that I will be using to conduct my research and also discuss possible problems that CDA researchers face

### 2.1 Defining a Discourse

#### 2.1.1 Common Ground

Firstly, to fully comprehend what a discourse is we must appreciate that the concept discourse was borne out of the theoretical tradition that reality cannot be directly experienced (Neumann: 30). According to this tradition, how we experience the world is not objective because our perception of it is not objective but is rather socially constructed. To take a fictitious example, a group of young Arab men boarding a plane in a country in the Middle East would not gain attention, whereas the same group of young Arab men boarding a plane in the US would be deemed suspicious and arouse disquiet. This example illustrates that we do not experience reality directly, instead what we experience is a socially given reality that we have been informed and schooled to experience through a representation, or description, of what reality is. As Neumann states “mellan verklighet och våra intryck står representationen av verkligheten” (Neumann: 33). Here Neumann means that between reality and our perception of it are these socially given representations, which form our experiences of reality.

Representations of reality are one of the central pillars in a discourse but where do these representations come from? The answer is that they are primarily formed in

statements, such as articulated speeches, articles in newspapers etc. and also in social practices, such as legislation, governmental actions etc. Language is therefore the building block of a discourse, as language does not give us a reality, but serves as an aid in forming one (Bergström & Boreus, 2000: 221). Language is therefore not objective or without value, as it is language that exists in the space between us and the world (Neumann: 22-23) and therefore much of a discourse is built around language.

A discourse can be said to be the end product of a process where a/many representation(s) is/are absorbed into society and thus becoming normal. This is not to say that discourses or representations are culturally and socially universal, however. If we return for a moment to the group of young Arab men we will notice that their presence has different meaning in the two different continents, in other words there exists two different representations. From this example we can see then that representations cannot be universally defined, but differ depending on the social context to which they are related. As discourses are built around representations, different representations mean therefore that there are different discourses. Neumann (17) generally describes a discourse as:

“Ett system för skapande av en uppsättning utsagor och praktiker som, genom att få fotfäste inom olika institutioner, kan framstå som mer eller mindre normala. Systemet är verklighetskonstituerande för sina bärare och uppvisar en viss ordning i sitt mönster av sociala relationer”

To summarize from this quotation, a discourse is therefore a system whereby statements and actions derived from certain ideas and views are accepted by institutions, physical or social. Institutions by doing so legitimize these statements and actions as being perceived as normal. These normal statements and actions are then transformed into a representation of reality that is maintained by carriers of these ideas and views and result in what we perceive reality to be.

Within the social science field of discourse analysis there are three main schools of thought, the Foucault inspired continental strand, the Laclau and Mouffe anglo-saxist perspective and the predominantly Frankfurt-based CDA. These three schools of thought apply the above definition of what a discourse is, i.e. that it is a social construction between our perception and reality, but there are essential differences marked in the CDA definition that need explaining.

#### 2.1.4 Critical Discourse Theory (CDA)

What is common for the other two traditions is that discourse analysis is based predominantly around researching one certain discourse and what happens within the context of that specific discourse. CDA, however, extends its scope to include the historical background of a discourse and also so-called resistant discourses that are seen as alternatives to the dominant discourse one wishes to research, something that is called inter-discursivity (Meyer in Wodak & Meyer: 29). CDA researchers argue that one cannot understand why and how the world is

constructed as it is without analysing historical events that may have bearing on a current discourse (Meyer in Wodak & Meyer: 15). There is an historical element to why we think, act and react as we do (Wodak in Wodak & Meyer: 10). Equally, as many discourses either overlap with others or are dichotomous, it is necessary to place a discourse one is researching in a context by comparing it with other discourses, especially those which oppose the norms and values highlighted by the research object.

Secondly, CDA researchers analyse the concepts discursive practices, non-discursive practices and social practices, which are absent in the other two schools of thought. Practices are historic and therefore set a precedent for how a given social actor should act and react ([www.aptaalaska.net](http://www.aptaalaska.net)). Discursive practices means speaking and thinking on the basis of discursive knowledge. We do not take the texts we are analysing on face value, but analyse how texts are formed and consumed within a discourse. Non-discursive practices means acting on the basis of that knowledge (Siegfried Jäger in Wodak & Meyer: 33).

Social practices are related to phenomena that have to do with actual action. Here there is the strong link between the discursive and that which lies outside of this framework, what is socially acceptable and not. As previously stated, critical theory doesn't just seek to describe and understand how things are, but also reveal what lies beneath our perception. This is the basis for CDA.

In conclusion, it can be said that all three traditions deal with issues of power and distribution and that the analysis of language as a central pillar in upholding a discourse. However, where the continental school focuses on common elements within a discourse, both the anglo-saxist and the CDA schools focus on the conflicting elements albeit in different ways. Furthermore it can be said that the CDA school incorporates more elements that the other schools dismiss as being outside the scope of discourse (Bergström & Boréus: 224).

## 2.2 Why CDA?

As the above demonstrates, CDA has dimensions that the other two schools of thought lack. In this section I will motivate why I see CDA as a superior discourse analysis form and therefore my chosen analytical tool for this research paper.

### 2.2.1 The Three-dimensional Approach

CDA offers a three dimensional discursive framework of not only language being analysed as with the other schools of thought, but also discursive practices and

social practices (Bergström & Boréus: 224). It is three-dimensional in the sense that there are three analytical parts that form discourse analysis within CDA.

One dimension common with all discourse analysis is the analysis of language by analysing individual texts. CDA, in common with other discourse analysis schools of thought, seeks to uncover hidden power struggles and discourse upholding statements within language. The other two dimensions are lacking in the other schools of thought and therefore specific only to CDA.

The second dimension is the analysis of discursive practices, or inter-textual analysis. Here texts are analysed with regards to other texts both in and outside the chosen discourse. This serves to reveal ideological and socially constructed norms that permeate not only the texts but also the conditions under which the texts are produced.

The third dimension is an analysis of social actions, or social practices, as language according to CDA researchers is very much connected to action and should therefore not be seen as a separate entity ([www.ched.uct.ac.za](http://www.ched.uct.ac.za)). CDA, by covering not only the language aspect of a discourse but also how it interacts with other discourses and as social actions, covers more social structures within a discourse and therefore offers more insight into a given discourse.

### 2.2.2 Inter-discursivity

Inter-discursivity (analysing both the dominant and resilient discourses) is specific to CDA. By analysing not only the dominant discourse and focussing on the oppressive nature of that discourse, CDA also reveals alternatives present in resilient discourses. We can therefore gain, through CDA's exposition of alternatives, vital information that can help change dominant oppressive discourses (Norman Fairclough in Wodak & Meyer: 124). This is CDA's strength, not only to reveal existing power struggles, but also to offer change and alternatives. CDA in effect uses the aims and theoretical ambitions of the continental school and anglo-saxist schools and expands on their definitions and practices to include other concepts and issues that create a better understanding of the constructed reality.

### 2.2.3 CDA Concepts

As I stated before, CDA has a whole array of concepts in its' analytical weaponry which the continental and anglo-saxist lack. There are three main concepts that are central to conducting a discourse analysis in accordance with CDA, which are power, history and ideology (Wodak in Wodak and Meyer: 3). The concept power is central to all discourse analysis, but what defines CDA is its' use of three-dimensional power as oppose to two-dimensional power. Steven Lukes' defined three concepts of power, whereby the three-dimensional approach was favoured (Lukes, 1974: 21). Many discourse analyses' are based on the two-dimensional, that power is control over decision-making and control over agenda

setting (i.e. what issues arise on the decision-making agenda) (Lukes: 16-20). CDA adopts the three-dimensional concept, where both these dimensions are accounted for, but also a third. This is that power can socially shape needs and wants, in other words manipulate, without people realizing they are being manipulated (Lukes: 23-25). This is important because it means we can analyse power as a means of social control.

As I have previously detailed the importance of historical events in shaping the present and will return to this subject later, ideology, then, is the final concept of this trio that is central to CDA.

Norman Fairclough states “discourse is ideological in so far as it contributes to sustaining particular relations of power and domination” ( Fairclough in Wodak & Meyer: 126). It is the ideological underpinnings of the powerful groups that sustain certain discourses. Through revealing hidden ideological power structures, CDA has the ambition of further contributing to the emancipation of those most affected by them (Wodak in Wodak & Meyer: 3). The ideological slant that CDA employs is of special interest to my research question. The neo liberal ideology that the USA and the UK advocate has far reaching negative consequences that have not been fully exposed, instead western liberalism is incorrectly perceived as being something wholly ‘good’.

In conclusion, of all the discursive schools of thought, CDA is in my opinion the most advanced although possibly the hardest to apply effectively to a research object. At first glance it is a web of abstract concepts and many dimensions. However, for all the difficulties that CDA imposes on the researcher, it has more to offer than the other two schools of thought. CDA boasts a three-dimensional analytical framework, acknowledges the importance of historical and ideological concepts and seeks not only to describe and explain the world but also change it.

## 2.3 Framing the “War Against Terror” Discourse

The “war against terror” discourse became a global phenomena when President Bush famously declared in a statement “You’re either with us or against us”. “Us” was the identity that President Bush constructed to include all those within the discourse. To analyse the “war against terror” discourse in its entirety would therefore include an analysis of all those nations that became allies of President Bush against terror. Given the time and resources available, this wouldn’t have been possible, so instead I have chosen to concentrate on a few certain aspects of the “war against terror” discourse.

My primary task was to identify what was central in the discourse so that I could then sift through different features of the discourse and thereby focus on the most essential representations. Those features that were frequently recurring in most aspects of the discourse (newspapers, speeches, legislation etc) were the representation of terrorists, the threat of terrorist attacks, the Bush administration, the British government as strongest ally to President Bush in the “war against

terror” and September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. I chose to focus on the representation of (suspected) terrorists within the discourse and also the Bush administration and “New” Labour government who have powerful institutional positions which therefore have an ideological grip on the discourse. The American and British governments are arguably the most powerful institutions in their societies. They are central to upholding the discourse and its representations, and therefore an analysis of these institutions is vital. As defined, discourse is not only about the language, but also about investigating the social institutions (Neumann: 75). I chose both the UK and the US partly because these are frequently referred to in the “war against terror” discourse and therefore have a central role, but also because I have a good deal of what Neumann coins “cultural competence” (Neumann: 47).

### 2.3.1 Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is the accumulated background knowledge a researcher has regarding their research object. It is also the ability to understand the subtle differing meanings there can be present underneath the ostensible surface (Neumann: 47). In Neumann’s opinion, cultural competence is a necessary prerequisite for being able to competently conduct a discourse analysis (Neumann: 47). Being British and having English as my mother of tongue I have the ability to decipher the language used in the British discourse and can detect subtle nuances that someone without fluency in English may overlook. However, I cannot claim to have the same competency when dealing with the American discourse. As Neumann points out “Churchill hävdade en gång att britter och amerikaner var två folk som skildes åt av ett gemensamt språk” (Neumann: 10). Neumann means that Britons and Americans may use the same words and phrases, but that they can have very different connotations and meanings (Neumann: 11). This is something that I am aware of, and therefore when dealing with American texts, I have scrutinized them more so than the British texts to assure that my findings are accurate.

As I prioritized my cultural competence and decided to analyse both the US and the UK, I had to limit the time scale of my analysis. Originally, I had planned on comparing the discourse post September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 with the current time, but this would be too time consuming. So as time and writing space are limited, I chose to analyse the discourse as it is in the present day using sources of information predominately from the past few months and previous research from the past couple of years that is applicable.

In conclusion, I have framed one specific representation within the “war against terror” discourse, the representation of (suspected) terrorists, which is central to the discourse. I am further using my cultural competence to analyse the British government and the Bush administration that are also central to the discourse. Finally, I have placed it in the present day context due to limitations on my research possibilities. As I am researching using CDA methodology, it is imperative that I also frame the resilient discourse that I will be using.

### 2.3.1 The Resilient, Humanitarian Discourse

When I first considered what categorizes a resilient discourse, I thought of conflict and clashes of interests. What or who is opposed to the US and UK's treatment of (suspected) terrorists with regards their human rights? Which organisation or person is also central to that resilient discourse so that it can be seen to be a real threat to the current, dominant discourse? I concluded that organized human rights' activists are the loudest and most dominant resistance to the "war against terror" discourse and therefore chose to analyse Amnesty International as well as the media. As the resilient element in CDA need not necessarily be another discourse but can also take the form of strands within a discourse, I also sought out conflicting information about the representation of terrorists within the "war against terror" discourse.

## 2.4 Analysing a Discourse

To refresh our memory, a discourse analyst analyses discourses that which inhabits the space in-between reality and our perception of what we experience reality to be. Language is not an objective form of communication because it is itself a tool that is used by those upholding representations to legitimize a discourse (Wodak in Wodak & Meyer: 10). Statements, such as newspaper articles, speeches, official documents etc, that eventually form representations are therefore the fundamental unit of analysis in discourse analysis (Neumann: 9). In the case of CDA even social actions are a part of discourse and are therefore analysed, but within the CDA tradition the stress is on analysing language. As Wodak states "Language is the new capitalism" (Fairclough in Wodak & Meyer: 127), meaning that language has the ability to manipulate its target audience.

### 2.4.1 An Analytical Toolbox for Discursive Language

Discourse analysis is both a hermeneutic and critical theoretical concept, but lends itself predominantly to hermeneutic research methods (Wodak in Wodak & Meyer: 25). Discursive analysis therefore uses qualitative methods where close scrutiny of texts and language are favoured over large amounts of documents being sifted through. One favoured method of analysing texts and language is the use of codes, which are what I intent to utilize in my analysis. Language has to be broken down and deciphered if we are to understand a discourse and it is through codes that we can achieve this (Heradstveit & Björge 1996 in Bergström & Boréus: 248).

In Bergström and Boréus' book they present Dennis Westlinds' discourse analysis research on the topic *Politics of Popular Identity* and how he uses codes

to analyse political propaganda in party leaflets and campaign posters<sup>2</sup>. In order to analyse a text, there are different codes that help us to decipher the underlying implications and meanings of the text. There are categories of codes, such as the symbolic code where a word or meaning has different connotations to what is actually written, there is the proairic code, where parties declare promises and so on (Bergström & Boréus: 246-251). Here, Westlind has adapted Roland Barthes codes to suit his own research, but with too many different codes and aims an analysis can easily appear too complex. It is a question of finding which codes are relevant for the research object so that the analysis is thorough without being too heavy-handed on the reader.

At the forefront of CDA is Michael Meyer, who details criteria for carrying out an analysis of a discourse. He states that there are 7 focus areas to consider when analysing language. They are 1) what kind and form of argumentation is presented 2) what are the argument strategies 3) what is the composition of the text, i.e. what is the *röd tråd* 4) what implicit implications are there 5) are there symbolic metaphors and what are their meanings 6) are there idioms, sayings, clichés present in the text and 7) which actors are present either in the text or as a carrier of the text (Meyer in Wodak & Meyer: 25). It is these criteria coupled with the codes used by Westlind that I base my own “home-made” codes on. Just as Westlind saw fit, I have chosen to devise, in part, my own codes so as to make my research more accessible and less complex and also follow more closely in the footsteps of other CDA analysts. Indeed, a pluralism of methods improves inter-subjectivity

## 2.4.2 Codes

The codes I will systematically be using in my research are as follows: an argumentation code, a symbolic code, a reference code, a grammatical code and a colloquial code. Argumentation code is based on the first two Meyer criteria - what kind of argument is in the text and what are the argument strategies. In the second code, symbolic code, the language is deciphered according to symbolism and metaphors that occur within the discourse, an element present in both Fairclough’s and Westlind’s methods (Meyer in Wodak & Meyer: 25; Bergström & Boréus: 248-249). The reference code refers to other information or people. This can be a historical event, current issues on the agenda within the discourse etc. The grammatical code decipheres the use of grammar in the language, which is important. The use of “we”, “us” and “them” creates divides between groups of people, and the use of “ought” for example is normative. Lastly the colloquialism code deals with specifics of a certain language, in this case British English and American English. Are there any idioms or sayings, platitudes and so forth that are present and why?

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<sup>2</sup> See Bergström & Boréus pages 246-251 for an in depth analysis



After analysing the texts individually with the help of these codes, I will be analysing them inter-textually, or analysing the discursive practice. To refresh our memories, this is the stage where texts are compared to reveal the structures behind their existence. Focussing on institutions, such as Wodak does in her analysis of discursive practices, is one analytical method that I too adhere to in this section (Bergström & Boréus: 252). For my research the onus is on the governmental institutions of the British and American governments and also the Amnesty International organisation whereby the ideological underpinnings can be exposed.

In conclusion, I have defined some pre-existing and some new codes to analyse the language aspect of the representation of terrorists in the “war against terror” discourse. I have based them on Westlinds’ research who himself ‘invented’ some of his codes, and also on the criteria CDA researcher Michael Meyer deems central in analysing a discourse. To then take it to the next step, I will then compare and contrast the different uses of language in texts, speeches and documents to reveal ideological and historical conditioned realities.

### 2.4.3 Social Practices and Actions

As stated previously, language is not and should not be treated as separate to action. They are two intertwined strands of the same discourse and one invariably gives rise to the other and vice versa. Social practices or actions are the physical manifestations that occur within a discourse and can, but not solely, be related to the communication of language (i.e. the speakers gestures and movements to convey a point etc.). It can be the condemnation of certain behaviour within a given discourse or the actual physical effects of the discursive language. The analysis of language out of its social context that is to say without due attention to the social actions surrounding it, can be misleading, as we do not see the whole picture (Ron Scollon in Wodak & Mejer: 144). As analysing social practices and actions is generally based on first-hand and primary sources of information (especially experiencing or seeing actions). Due to resource restrictions, I have not been able to fully analyse social actions but chosen to include a reflection over social actions.

### 2.4.4 Analysis Problems

Analysing language is, of course, problematic and many critics of discourse analysis have argued that it is both relativistic and lends poorly to the possibility of inter-subjectivity. If everything as discourse analysts claim is imbued by language, what external criteria is there to relate the analysis to? (Bergström & Boréus: 258). Firstly the claim to relativism is unfounded as there exists external criteria by which discourse analysis can be compared. True and false statements can be made even within discourse analysis, as “i grund och botten handlar sanning om konsensus inom vetenskapsvärlden” (Bergström & Boréus: 257-258).

As a contribution to that “scientific world” discourse analysis cannot be used to make wild claims or untrue statements about the way the world is. We must remember that the researcher is not conducting a discourse analysis for their own satisfaction, but research is carried out in such a manner that it can be understood through inter-subjectivity (Bergström & Boréus: 260). Inter-subjectivity is not something reserved just for the more scientific experimental approaches that positivism touts, but can and should be applied to discourse analysis. Through the use of carefully detailed codes to decipher metaphors and meanings and also through the transparency of including texts that I have analysed in my research, a high level inter-subjectivity can be reached.

In conclusion, in order to produce credible results that are accepted by the research community it is important to be transparent with both method and those materials analysed in a discourse analysis so that inter-subjectivity can be reached.

## 3 Material

Choosing material and analysing their worth is an important part of any research process, for both the researcher and the reader (Lundquist, 1993: 107). The wrong or biased choice of material can affect the result and diminish its' validity. Peter Esaiasson et al. Have detailed four rules of practice for analysing the worth of information and their sources (Esaiasson et al., 2003: 307-311) of which I have applied two. In this section I will motivate my choices of material and analyse their reliability based on Esaiasson et al.'s authenticity and currency rules (Esaiasson et al.: 307-311). I have chosen to disregard both independence and tendency as these relate to the notion that the producer of material should be divorced from the subject matter. Within discourse theory, this is not deemed possible as the producers of texts are a part of the social construction within which a text is written.

### 3.1 Primary Material

My primary material comprises of governmental officials' speeches and press releases from the American and British governments. These institutions are central in the "war against terror" and humanitarian discourses I am investigating and therefore it is essential to have material from these sources. The articles and speeches I chose specifically deal with my study object, the representation of terrorists and their human rights and was therefore relevant. As all of my primary material was accessed from the Internet, one problem I had to deal with was authenticity. Were these texts written by whom they claimed to be written by, in other words were they authentic (Esaiasson et.al: 307). In order to minimize the risks, I down loaded information from official governmental websites and the UN official website.

### 3.2 Secondary Material

The secondary sources of material that I used are newspaper articles, research papers and books by academics and researchers and the Internet. The media is an essential link between the carriers and consumers within a discourse and in fact are a part of a discourse. If we are to describe the media's role in a discourse, it is as follows:

"Media institutions often purport to be neutral in that they provide space for public discourse, that they reflect states of affairs disinterestedly, and that they give the perceptions and arguments of the newsmakers. Fairclough shows the fallacy of such

assumptions, and illustrates the mediating and constructing role of the media” (Wodak: 6-7).

The media is very much a part of a discourse and therefore needs to be analysed as such. My focus here is on newspaper articles as the resources I had available limited which parts of the media I could analyse (for example television and radio etc.). The reliability of newspapers is however questionable. Recently, *Newsweek* printed an article claiming that prison wardens were burning the Koran at Guantanamo Bay in front of inmates. It later transpired that this was false and *Newsweek* retracted its’ article. To avoid analysing false articles, I ensured that at least a few days elapsed between my accumulating an article and analysing its’ content.

In my use of the Internet, I used it predominantly to gather information about the American and British governments, from newspapers and academic research. I used only university-based websites, official newspaper websites and official government websites to avoid down loading false information.

My use of other academics’ research through my use of books and papers has proved beneficial as many hard to access documents are referred to in the books that I have used. In limiting my choice of books, I used an internet based search engine and used key words such as “war against terror”, terrorism and discourse analysis to find relevant material.

Fulfilling the currency criteria is a relative given for this research. As I am not relying on historical information that can be manipulated over time, the material I used is current, dating back to the earliest 2003.

# 4 The Dominant and Resilient Discourses

As I have stated previously in my framing of the dominant “war against terror discourse” the US and the UK governments are at the forefront of upholding this dominant discourse. They are central to upholding a representation of terrorists that denies them the same human rights as other human beings, which, until recently, wasn’t loudly questioned. In this chapter my ambition is to analyse the “war against terror” discourse. Michael Meyer describes four levels of analysis used within CDA to analyse a discourse (Meyer in Wodak and Meyer: 29). The first is deciphering the language, which I will do with the help of my codes in section 4.1. The second is intertextuality and interdiscursivity, which is where I relate these texts to other texts and other discourses. Here the humanitarian, resilient discourse that is the focus for section 4.2. The third level is an analysis of the social practices within the “war against terror” discourse. With social actions we mean socially given and accepted actions within the discourse. The social actions are the focus of section 4.3. Finally in the last level of analysis, the socio-political and historical dimensions of a discourse are analysed. This can be the ideological underpinnings of a discourse and its’ historical background. These will be analysed in section 4.4. Worth noting here is that I will merely reflect over the social practices as I previously mentioned I could not analyse them fully. This is due to lack of resources and time, but as social practices are central to CDA they are still worth mentioning here.

## 4.1 The Representation of (Suspected) Terrorists in the “War against Terror”

To gain an understanding of the representation of (suspected) terrorists we must analyse a few central and reoccurring words in the discourse that relate to this representation.

In the literature on their websites, in the content of the speeches of governmental officials and in the media the word “threat” is commonplace. On the White House governmental home page we can read the “current threat level” of terrorist attack, which for the past 3 months has remained on “elevated” (Homeland Security homepage, [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov), 2005). Similarly, in a speech made in February this year by Hazel Blears a British government official, she stated that “the threat level remains high” (Hazel Blears Speech - The Tools to Counter Terrorism, [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk), 2005). This is a constant reference point for all the governmental documents and speeches I analysed and therefore central to the discourse. According to Mark Curtis, presenting a threat to

our way of life has been a long-term method used by elites to achieve their goals (Curtis, 2003: 75). He argues that “these stories of impending doom are intended to frighten the public into giving our leaders a free hand in doing whatever it takes to destroy the ruthless enemy that seeks to kill us” (Curtis: 77).

Threat is not only used as a reference point, but also as an argumentation strategy. The word threat is introduced early on in the texts and speeches together with “prevention” and “strengthening defences” (President Bush, “President Signs Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act Speech” & Hazel Blears’ speech “Tools for Counter-terrorism”, 2005). The strategy used to inform citizens that they need protecting from this threat through prevention, that the threat is directed at them and the government is acting as a guardian. In one newspaper article another argumentative strategy is adopted. Firstly the author seems to go against the governments actions by stating criticisms and then changes tack and states “but” and follows with information about how the government is acting in the publics interests (Washington post, “Surveillance Operation in Pakistan Located and Killed Al Qaeda Official, 2005).

When it comes to the representation of terrorists, both the British and American governments use the same representation. “Al Quaida and associated networks” are cited as being “significant” if not the “most significant” terrorist threats ([www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk) and [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov), 2005). When describing Al Quaida, the first reference point is the Islamic connections this organisation has. Jihad, or the holy war, is described as being something evil and unjust, and no reference is made to the Koran and what it defines a truly Islamic jihad to be. Muslim citizens of the UK and the US are often mentioned in this context, furthermore in a disparaging capacity. Muslims are placed in the “them” category as oppose to us even when referring to Muslim citizens of the USA and UK often, that they are troublesome. As President Bush states “we don’t have a beef with Muslims. We want to be friends with them” (FAQ on War on Terror, [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov), 2005). In a Washington Post newspaper article a picture of a recently arrested Al Quaida member is shown. It is a stereotypical image of an Arabic young man with a long beard and aggressive expression (Washington Post article as above).

Hazel Blears’ speech is a good sample example of how the representation of terrorists has been formed and is being upheld. By analysing it with the help of the codes, we can more fully understand the true implications of her words. In the following exert, the grammatical code and argumentative code have proved most useful in deciphering the language. First, she states that the organisations we should most be worried about “may have a religious or ideological as well as political motivation”. As Al Quaida is implicated to be an Islamic organisation, she strengthens the idea that Islam is something negative. Secondly, she discusses the Muslim community in Britain in grammatical terms “them”. It is “their concerns” she talks about, as though they are troublesome:

“We are working to develop and improve a close partnership with Muslim communities on issues that concern them including counter-terrorism issues. We are undertaking specific work to....reassure them

that the powers are not targeted at them and are being used proportionately and appropriately” (Hazel Blears, [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk), 2005)

In conclusion, the representation of terrorists is of a militant Al Quaida Muslim, but even Muslims in the US and UK are portrayed to a certain extent as being involved in this representation. Muslims form the “other” group and are not within the confines of the discourse, even if they are westerners. When dealing with terrorists, the issue of threat is prevalent and the governments stress the need to act “pre-emptively” or in advance. Terrorists’ and suspected terrorists’ human rights are nowhere mentioned explicitly in any of the texts I have analysed in this section, which shows that they do not figure highly on the agenda.

## 4.2 Intertextuality and Inter-discursivity

Comparing the above findings with the resilient, humanitarian discourse and other texts is the next step and focus of this section. It can be problematic analysing an alternative discourse and alternative texts, especially within the media. As Montague Kern et al. state:

“The power of consensual news frames, exemplified by the “war on terrorism” frame in America cannot be underestimated. A one-sided news frame can block the reception of contrary independent evidence” (Montague Kern, Marion Just & Pippa Norris, 2003: 283). SIZE 10!!!!

However, the resilient discourse is gaining ground in the international community and with organisations like Amnesty International to analyse, intertextuality can be achieved. Amnesty International is at the forefront of the human rights movement and a strong campaigner for equality. An article on their web page, together with two articles published the Guardian newspaper and the Washington Post newspapers are the basis for this part of the analysis.

Common for all articles is the humanization of terrorists. They are given faces, names, identities and not referred to as “the enemy” or “terrorist”, but “people” ([www.amnestyinternational.org](http://www.amnestyinternational.org)). In one article, (suspected) terrorists’ motives are highlighted in such a fashion that the reader will feel sympathy for them ([www.guardianonline.co.uk](http://www.guardianonline.co.uk)). It states “they are disillusioned with western values, angry about the British and American policies on Iraq...” ([www.guardianonline.co.uk](http://www.guardianonline.co.uk)). Here the strategy is a play on the British public’s contempt for the Iraq policies so that they may sympathise with those that are branded terrorist.

The “war against terror” representation of terrorists is on shaky ground, as one article illustrates ([www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)). The case of the Cuban exile Luis Posada Carriles is pertinent in this question as he is currently seeking asylum in the USA after having committed acts of terrorism against Fidel Castro. The

identity of terrorists as being a certain group is questioned here because Bush famously stated that all terrorists are to be combated. Does that include those who are terrorists for the American cause?

Symbolism is present in the resilient discourse and other texts. Symbolically, Guantanamo Bay is referred to as a “legal black hole” which serves to strengthen the image of it being an illegitimate institution.

Threat is also mentioned in these texts, but in connection with the colloquial saying “crying wolf” ([www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)). Here the implication is that the threat denoted in the “war against terror” is exaggerated to discern the general public. Key words present here that are lacking in the “war against terror” are “human rights” and “compliance with international law” ([www.amnestyinternational.org](http://www.amnestyinternational.org)). Common for all articles is their offensive attack on the governmental policies and institutions, which is often followed up by reference to current statistics and comments by high governmental officials.

In conclusion, when compared to the humanitarian discourse and other texts the flaws and delusions with the war against terror representation of terrorists is highlighted. This alternative discourse not only opposes the “war against terror” representation of terrorists, but also demonstrates that terrorists are humans too and deserve the rights of humans. “One persons’ terrorist is another’s freedom fighter” is a saying that is applicable here. Furthermore, these texts encourage action against the war against terror discourse to be taken and declare, “Close them [Guantanamo Bay etc.] down” ([www.Amnestyinternational.org](http://www.Amnestyinternational.org)).

### 4.3 Social Actions

As mentioned earlier, this section serves to reflect over the social actions of the “war against terror” discourse, without an in-depth analysis. Here the main focal point is what social actions have been accepted as social norms and how we can explain them.

The most obvious social actions within the “war against terror” discourse with regards the treatment of (suspected) terrorists are the implementation of the anti-terrorism laws and the vigilant security measures adopted by airports and railway stations etc. that discriminate against certain groups and individuals. In America certain nationalities, such as Iraqis, are not permitted to study or work there from abroad since September 11<sup>th</sup>. This illustrates how deeply ingrained in society the image of a terrorist being Arabic and from the Middle East is. Airlines were systematically body searching and questioning any passengers that were deemed as “suspected terrorists”. A couple of years ago a flight was cancelled in the west due to the passengers disquiet over a group of Arabic men boarding the plane.

The treatment of suspected terrorists is kept quiet within the “war against terror” discourse and covered up with statements such as “we are taking proportionate action” (Hazel Blears speech as previously, 2005). The focus is shifted to the general public where both the American and the British



governments advocate vigilance, that we should be aware of what your neighbours are doing and keep an eye out for suspected terrorists. It is a climate of threat that can be compared to Thomas Hobbes “natural state” where one must be aware that people are evil.

To conclude, the representation of terrorists upholds racist social action toward all people that have the appearance of a terrorist as according to the representation. Discrimination of people because of their nationality is common social action and the instigation of the Acts of Terrorism legislation are portrayed as the only alternative, when in fact there are alternatives. We are told to put our own well being first before that of the suspected terrorists, which is why the human rights violations of Guantanamo Bay etc. are largely ignored.

## 4.4 The Ideological and Historical Underpinnings

The fourth level of analysis seeks to root out the socio-political, or ideological, and historical underpinnings. The ideology and the history behind the “war against terror” discourse are central to our understanding of the current representation of (suspected) terrorists and the abuses of them. As Meyer points out “all discourses are historical and can therefore only be understood with reference to their context” (Meyer in Wodak & Meyer: 15).

### 4.4.1 Historical Context

According to previous research, both the US and the UK have poor human rights track records. In fact, these two governments are responsible for abuses of human rights across the globe<sup>1</sup>. These two governments have breached the UN declaration of Human Rights and continue to do so which demonstrates that current disregard for (suspected) terrorists’ human rights is an extension of past practices.

Despite the UN being a powerful INGO, it is sidelined and ignored in part by the British and American governments due to their imperialistic endeavour. For centuries, Britain had had colonies abroad and still basks in commonwealth glory. America for its part has long been regarded as a unipolar super power. Both these governments have been at the forefront in numerous coup d’états around the globe in the pursuit of imperialism. The hegemonic American standing can be described as wanting to be “a condition that is to be “ permanent [so] that no state or coalition could ever challenge [the US] as global leader, protector, and enforcer” (Ikenberry in Chomsky, 2003: 11).

To summarize the British and American have a long history of dominating the world and using their international power to bully other states into conceding

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<sup>1</sup> See Noam Chomsky’s *The Umbrella of US Power*, and Mark Curtis’ *Unpeople* for detailed accounts.

their demands. Human rights violations are nothing new, which demonstrates that the current disregard for (suspected) terrorists' human rights is embedded in an historical acceptance.

#### 4.4.2 Ideology

Democratize oppressive regimes, safeguard human rights and instigate peace throughout the world. Ostensibly this is the ideological platform from which Britain (and America) have based their foreign policy (Pilger in Mark Curtis, 2003: xiii), but underneath the sugarcoated declarations of these governments lies a very different ideology.

Mark Curtis refers to the real ideological goals of the British government as “single-state ideology” (Curtis, 2003: 285), a term that can be applied to the Bush Administration. It is an elite that shares the same broad viewpoint in the major aspects of foreign policy. This united viewpoint is then upheld by powerful actors within the mainstream political parties and through the media and civil servants shapes public opinion (Curtis, 2003: 285-286). According to Curtis the ideology promoted is “support for the US foreign policy and the maintenance of a “special relationship”, promotion of free trade and economic “liberalisation”...[and] strong support for the traditional order in the Middle East” (Curtis, 2003: 286).

This domestic British elites' standing and policy-making is mirrored in American foreign policy ambitions. Noam Chomsky states that on the basis of a strong ideological elite in America “it is only natural that state policy should seek to construct a world system open to US economic penetration and political control, tolerating no rivals or threats” (Chomsky, 2003: 15).

In conclusion, the information we receive as members of the public in the US and UK strengthens a misguided belief that neo liberalism is a universal “good”. In reality both the British and American governments seek to force the world into accepting a world order that benefits their needs. Al Quaida poses a threat to their ideological plan of mass domination and thus the concentration of the term “terrorist” implicating Al Quaida and Muslims is necessary to “defend” western neo liberalist values.

## 5 Conclusions

In this final chapter, I aim at presenting both a summary of my research findings and a critical assessment of the research process as a whole.

At the start of this project I had three aims. 1) To investigate the representation of (suspected) terrorists in the “war against terror” discourse and how we can understand why their human rights are being abused. 2) To illuminate an alternative to this oppressive discourse, and 3) to define and describe my research process and discourse analysis from a CDA approach. What was the end result?

My research concluded that there exists a detrimental representation of (suspected) terrorists that closely links them to Islam and the Middle East, especially Al Quaida. Muslim communities are portrayed in both the US and the UK as troublesome and outside the discursive “we” identity. They are the “others”. This representation is being upheld by the British and American governments that together have created a unified “war against terror” representation of (suspected) terrorists.

The governments are central in the discourse as a whole and both uphold the discourse and create the statements that have become representations and social norms. They have both created similar climates of fear where the threat of terrorist attacks is portrayed as being constant and imminent. All measures need to be taken to secure the safety of the public, is declared, but this comes at the cost of the (suspected) terrorists’ human rights. Human rights are barely mentioned in the “war against terror” referring to (suspected) terrorists, and therefore remain outside of the limelight. It is a calculated move on the part of the governments not to mention this so that it remains a non-subject.

If we delve into the historical background and ideological underpinnings to understand the social practices and norms that are upheld, we find a long-standing holding. The “war against terror” is an extension of the American and British imperialistic dream of world dominance that has existed for centuries. Anything other than neo-liberalism is seen as an imminent threat to this striving after hegemony.

So, if my findings reveal the grim nature of these governments and their treatment of (suspected) terrorists, what then is the alternative? By revealing an alternative discourse we can see that this “reality” in the “war against terror” discourse is harmful and that there exists another way. By humanising (suspected) terrorists and talking openly about human rights abuses, we see that the “war against terror” should not be accepted behaviour. The first step to changing the discourse is to end it. Closing down the oppressive Guantanamo Bay prison is a start, many claim.

These results were the end product of a research process that has been filled with twists and turns. Finding the right balance between explaining discourse analysis

and actually analysing a discourse proved tricky. My attempt was to avoid “dumbing down” the content of my analysis by describing a little more in depth what discourse analysis is. My hope is that the reader has a greater insight into CDA and may apply it to their own future research. It presented me with a framework that I could manoeuvre freely within. I could develop my own tailor-made tools of analysis and could focus on the aspects of the “war against terror” discourse that I found most interesting, the abuse of (suspected) terrorists’ human rights. There is little research that I have found that deals directly with (suspected) terrorists’ human rights, and therefore I hope that this paper will open up that area for future research.

Combining method and theory proved at times difficult to manage and a lot of background research into discourse analysis was called for. However, I feel that a thorough in depth analysis of a discourse can be more easily reached by using discourse analysis in both a theoretical context and as an analytical tool.

In conclusion, through CDA and discourse analysis as a whole, we can gain substantial knowledge about underlying power struggle. A different viewpoint of the world is presented, one that we must adopt if we want to change the social constructions that are prevalent today.

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