

# Interaction of image and language in the construction of the theme “terrorist threat” in newspaper texts: A critical study of media discourse

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**Abstract:** With the increasing global expansion of the media communications, the study of media discourse and their diverse roles have become the focus of recent academic researches. Apart from verbal texts, a growing amount of space is being given to visual images in the press, which indicates that visual metaphor as well as verbal metaphor is employed in the construction of meanings in media discourse. This study draws on the theory of social semiotics and the concepts of cognitive metaphor theory to analyze two multimodal newspaper articles on the theme “terrorist threat”, specifically the functions these visual and verbal modes of the texts perform, the specific role visual metaphor plays and its relationship to verbal metaphor in the construction of this theme.

**Key words:** media discourse; social semiotics; multimodality; visual metaphor; terrorist threat

## 1. Introduction

Due to the increasing global expansion of the media in its various forms (whether print or electronic), its diverse roles and its influence have been the focus of a number of academic studies in various disciplines. Alongside entertainment and advertising, one of the major roles of the media is the dissemination of the news. It could perhaps even be said that access to information about real events nationally and internationally is dominated or controlled by the media (mainly TV and newspapers). Thus, the study of media discourse, and the way the media deploys language and image in its construction of these events is important in attempting to gain a critical perspective into the role the media may play in its interaction with its readers or viewers. Since we (readers and viewers) necessarily participate in these constructions through our interpretations, the analysis of media discourse may facilitate a critical awareness of our own perceptions and assumptions. An important reason for discourse analysis, then, is also as a tool of self-awareness (a deconstruction and demystifying of one’s own thoughts and concepts in relation to one’s social environment—the media being a significant part of that environment). Critical self-awareness is also not an end in itself but creates the potential to see oneself as a dynamic social and political being, which in turn may motivate social action.

## 2. Literature Review

The study of media has recently become the focus of linguists as well as researchers in media communications. Fairclough (1995, p. 16) points out that discourse analysis of media should include a detailed analysis of language in relation to socio-cultural and discourse practices as text is central to meaning and

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“delimits” its possible interpretations. Discourse analysis itself has moved through significant changes from a more traditional socio-linguistics to the recent studies of social semiotics (Halliday, 1978; Hodge & Kress, 1988) and multimodality (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996).

Fundamental to recent approaches in discourse analysis is the emphasis on language as a social process, the “dialectical” (Halliday, 1985, p. 19) nature of the relationship between language and the social or cultural context. Related to the issue of ideology and power in language is what Fairclough calls the ‘naturalization’ of ideological discourse—the idea that certain types of discourse (especially those of dominant groups) may become accepted as “natural” or “common sense”, thus “disguising” their ideological nature. Integral to an exploration of how meanings are created in discourse is the analysis of intertextuality (Halliday, 1985)—the idea that texts always exist in relation to other texts, that our production and interpretation of texts is always built upon previous texts that are a part of our experience. Intertextual analysis is extensively examined in relation to media discourse (and specifically to the news) in Fairclough (1995) from a number of perspectives, making this an important contribution to the understanding of the workings of intertextuality in media discourse.

An important recent contribution to the study of images in the press and their political implications has been the analysis by Van Leeuwen and Jaworski (2002) of photography in relation to representations of the Palestinian-Israeli war in two newspapers, the *Guardian* and the Polish *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Through a detailed analysis of the photographs, they show how difference is constructed in the two newspapers, how actions are either legitimized or de-legitimized through the images, how the actors in the conflict are either “romanticized”, (shown predominantly as “heroes” and/or “victims”), or shown unsympathetically as “aggressors”. The study reveals how the readers are positioned in relation to the images, not only through the “manipulation of photojournalistic imagery” (p. 270) but also through the links made to the readers’ shared political background or intertexts that form their political culture.

However, what seems to have been largely neglected or not explicitly explored in depth in studies that apply Kress and Van Leeuwen’s visual grammar is the study specifically of the construction of visual metaphor, the concepts that underlie it, and its relationship to verbal metaphor. The significance of metaphors, their exploitation in the creation of “ideologies” in relation to the specific themes of war and conflict have nevertheless been explored to a much greater extent in terms of verbal text.

Yet, significant as such analyses may be to media studies and critical linguistics, they do not address the increasingly important aspect of the visual image in the press. An attempt to redress this imbalance is made by El Refaie’s (2003) study of visual metaphor in Austrian newspaper cartoons in which she draws on both the visual grammar of Kress and Van Leeuwen and principles of cognitive metaphor theory. She argues for a comprehensive examination of visual metaphors that takes into account both their “underlying concepts” and their specific socio-political contexts while paying particular attention to the influence of their grammar and form. She also points out the necessity of a close analysis of the differences between the visual and verbal modes of communication and suggests that the visual image may be more effective in the construction of “affective” meanings (p. 89). El Refaie focuses on the “implicit” meanings the visual metaphor can evoke and how the visual form “seems to lend itself to the personification of abstract concepts” (p. 87). By focusing on an aspect of media representations that has been given little consideration until now, El Refaie’s study stimulates an interest in further exploring the relationship of visual and verbal metaphor and the role they play in media texts.

It is in this specific area of the role of “metaphor” in multimodal texts that my study aims to make a further

contribution to the existing research. In connection with this, it also aims to investigate the reinterpretation of meanings through different semiotic modes and the process through which symbolic representations are constructed and transferred from context to context, as outlined by Iedema (2003), but which has not as yet been extensively explored in the literature.

My particular interest in the theme of “terrorist threat” in newspapers derives firstly from the fact that it has been given and continues to be given extensive coverage in the press. More importantly, it involves the complex construction of relationships of “violence” and “power” that are fundamental to an understanding of social relations. In his work, *Textual politics*, Lemke (1995) refers to violence as the “fundamental mode of social control” (p. 14). Undoubtedly, then, there are forms of violence that are also a reaction against the “violence” of control. If seen from this perspective, all violence is political—a struggle for maintaining power or becoming empowered. It is this perspective on violence that has stimulated my interest in the discourse of “terrorism”, as “terrorism” takes the form of overt political violence or violence with explicit ideological motives. The meanings that the media constructs in relation to this are of particular interest because of the media’s ability to reach vast audiences. An issue raised here is whether the media in its discourse reinforces violence as a mode of control, as political struggle or, on the contrary, de-politicized it. Although these issues are far-reaching and extensive, they are implicit in any study dealing with the portrayal of violent events despite the specific focus of the study.

### **Research focus and questions**

Apart from some general ideological issues underlying the study, the research is also motivated by the way the verbal and visual modes function and interact in the construction of meanings in texts. In this study the visual images as well as the verbal texts are analyzed because of the increasing amount of space being given to visual images in the press. Thus, an investigation of newspaper texts would be incomplete without taking into account the visual representations. Recent studies (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996; Iedema, 2003; Martin, 2003) have recognized the increasing exploitation of the visual mode in a variety of texts and thus the need for multi-modal analysis—the interaction of different semiotic modes and the processes involved in the transference of meanings from one mode to another.

From a general observation of media texts, the theme of “violent conflicts” also seems to lend itself to the exploitation of metaphor and the direction of my study has also been influenced by the perceived need to analyze this further especially in relation to the visual mode.

Therefore the following research questions and some specific questions were formulated:

How is the theme of “the terrorist threat” in the immediate post-Iraqi war period constructed in the two newspaper texts and images?

- (1) What functions do the visual and verbal modes of the texts perform in the construction of this theme?
- (2) What specific role does visual “metaphor” play in this respect and how is it related to verbal metaphor?

### **3. Research Methods**

The data is from two newspaper articles and their related visual images. It was collected with a thematic link in mind: both texts refer to the bombings allegedly carried out by *Al-Qaeda* which took place in the period immediately following the US-led war against Iraq. The texts are both from the *Sydney Morning Herald* and were published on consecutive days—19 and 20 May 2003. Apart from thematic link, the selection of the texts was

influenced by the prominence of the images, in view of the fact that I wanted to explore in greater depth the construction of visual metaphors in multimodal texts.

The analysis is primarily based on Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (1996) visual semiotic framework, which applies the fundamental principles of systemic functional linguistics, in which meaning is conceptualized in terms of three functions: ideational, interpersonal and textual. The ideational relates to patterns of representation, (the relationship between represented participants). The interpersonal (patterns of interaction), i.e. the interaction of the viewer with the images is realized through, for example, the “gaze” of represented participants, “angles”, choice of “distance” (as in close-up, medium or long-shots). The textual relates to “composition” of the whole image and layout on the page. This framework is being increasingly applied to research on visual images as it makes a detailed analysis of the “grammar” and “forms” of visual representations within social context.

Besides, some of the concepts of cognitive metaphor theory as outlined by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) were also drawn on to analyze the constructions and meanings of visual and verbal metaphor and their interaction. The basic principle of this theory is that metaphor is a fundamental part of our conceptual system, which governs our actions, reactions and relationships (p. 3) and therefore metaphor is viewed as “understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another” (p. 5) and not just “speaking” of it in terms of another. This theory provides a basis, or another “level” of understanding of the construction of “metaphorical concepts” in both the verbal and visual texts and how they influence our ideologies and cultural attitudes.

#### **4. Analysis/Discussion of Data**

The article “Al-Qaeda serpent growing new heads” appearing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 19 May is referred to as Text 1. The analysis of this text forms the basis of the study while Text 2 “How to bomb friends and alienate us all”, which appears in the comment page of the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 20 May, is examined in terms of its relationship to Text 1.

##### **4.1 Analysis/Discussion of Text 1**

What is immediately striking about Text 1 is the centrality of the image on the page (see Figure 1 in Appendix). The text in fact begins in the first page of the paper in the right-handed column next to a much larger article on the Bali bombing (see Figure 2). The verbal text is not very noticeable in the first instance until one turns to the world page where it continues with the title appearing in slightly larger print with the added word “Wounded”, and the accompanying photograph, which is quite large in relation to the verbal text. Because of the photograph’s centrality on the page, and the common theme (of “terrorism” or “war”) in the other surrounding articles, the whole page can be seen as an “integrated text” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 183). A number of salient elements (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 212) combine in this photograph, allowing it to “dominate” the page and making it the “departure” point of the reading path and thus the immediate focus of the study. The represented participant (the figure of the soldier in the photograph) is foregrounded and takes up almost the whole image in the sense that the background is blurred and the black and white contrasts are sharp. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen, the absence of setting in photographs tends to construct represented participants as “generic” or “typical” examples (p. 165). In terms of ideational metafunction, the process here can be described as a symbolic attributive; the represented participant is a carrier, not involved in any action, and the “attributes” he wears and carries identify him. These attributes are the face of Osama Bin Laden on his T-shirt which is prominent or central

within the photograph and the gun slung over his shoulder—the symbolic relationship of these two salient elements on his back combine to construct his “generic” identity as an armed “terrorist”; or perhaps an armed black “terrorist” since a further attribute is his race. This generic identity is reinforced by the caption (“Face of terror...”) that at the same time adds slightly more specificity to his identity by reference to him as a “Congolese Patriotic Union soldier”. Nevertheless, he still remains “generalized” and “symbolic” because it is the “face” on his T-shirt that is the major and central element in relationship to the soldier and because it (“the face”) is already an internationally well-known and publicized figure which has been constructed by American political rhetoric and the Western media as a symbol of negativity.

#### **4.2 Significance of interpersonal dimension**

The photograph and its symbolism are more complex than this, though. The “face” on the T-shirt tends to take on more than an attributive role. In a sense it becomes the central participant because its “gaze” is what the readers have contact with—not the soldier’s face. It is this interpersonal dimension that becomes quite significant and ambivalent in the text. The “face” on the soldier’s back can be read in various ways: it has a concentrated or focused gaze looking out at something, not quite directly at the viewer, but “far-reaching”; it epitomizes someone with a mission—one could say that this is a “romanticized” representation of Bin Laden. Even though it does not fix its “gaze” directly on us, its field of vision still seem to encompass us. It is as if we are there, following it or being carried with it, so to speak. On the other hand, the whole figure of the soldier is at a slightly “vertical angle” to us, as if moving away from us (although stationary), not quite distancing us as the shot is too close, but perhaps defying us. The viewer is put in an unusual position here. There are two levels of relatively “close” interaction: one with the picture of Bin Laden (which is an attribute, an element worn by the soldier); the other indirectly with the soldier or the soldier’s “gesture” of wearing the T-shirt, which means that in a sense he is “speaking” to us through it—making a statement of his affiliation with Bin Laden’s political stance.

#### **4.3 Construction of Visual Metaphors and their Recontextualization**

The T-shirt image highlights here what Iedema (2003) calls a process of resemiotization. “Resemiotization is about how meaning making shifts from context to context, from practice to practice, or from one stage of a practice to the next” (p. 14). The political rhetoric that followed the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and that was conveyed through media texts both visual and verbal led to a personification of “terrorism” and thus a “de-politicization” of the issues involved. A fight with terrorism is a fight with Bin Laden who is depicted as the criminal reminiscent of the Western movie *Bad Guy*. This personification is further “demonized” through associations with metaphors of “evil” as is exemplified in the title of our text.

This simplified metaphor of terrorism can now be seen to undergo a new social process of transformation, a shift from the embodiment of “evil” in Bin Laden’s image in the Western press, to an “idealized” “romantic” poster image transferred onto a T-shirt in a totally different cultural context (in the “developing” world). The T-shirt is not only an “intimate object” (something you wear) and a product (something you buy), but the “T-shirt as a statement” is also a popular phenomenon. The reconstruction of Bin Laden’s image into symbol of popular culture by putting his face on a T-shirt is further recontextualized by the armed African’ wearing of it. The T-shirt here becomes a highly political statement that expresses the values of the person wearing it; it opens up new perspectives, and a totally different set of values are now embodied in this visual symbol. The whole photograph, through the relationship of its elements, could even be read as an implicit metaphor of solidarity and struggle of the less powerful peoples of the so-called “developing” world against the more powerful.

This example of visual metaphor serves to reinforce the dynamic process through which texts are constructed and reconstructed. It also seems to reinforce the point made by El Refaie (2003, p. 91) that visual metaphors are often implicit, opening up “a wide range of possible interpretations, which depend on the attitudes and the level of knowledge of the reader”. The photograph of the soldier could be viewed “literally” as an armed man wearing a T-shirt with a print of a face on it. But the concepts invoked by the image through the wider context in which it occurs (the socio-political context) and by the relationship of the elements in the photograph, create metaphorical meanings. Their interpretation is dependent upon the cultural context of the viewer as is their emotional impact; the shared cultural values and ideological perspective of the viewers heighten or lessen the emotional appeal and create “negative” or “positive” affect.

#### **4.4 Relationship of the verbal and visual representations**

The extremely “negative” verbal metaphors of the title and caption that seem to contrast with the ambivalence of the photograph unequivocally construct the reader’s position in opposition to and fear of the “growing” influence of Al-Qaeda. The verbal metaphor in the title presents us with a “reworking” of classical mythology—Al-Qaeda is being compared to the mythical serpent monster Hydra who terrorized the citizens of Lerna and who would grow new heads as they were cut off. The serpent/monster image carries on through Western or European Christian literature as a symbol of evil and deviousness, the classical monsters being replaced with Satan. Thus, in these cultures the term “serpent” is commonly associated with negative character and evokes negative emotion.

The photograph demonstrates or reinforces the idea that is stated through the highly evaluative negative metaphors of the verbal text; that the “terrorist” network (the mythical “Hydra” of our times) is “growing” new heads—that it is spreading violence in different parts of the world—that it is “dangerous” even though “wounded” (the text refers to the arrests of key leaders of Al-Qaeda and briefly to the war in Iraq). This is also being done through the other texts above and below this text, which relate to East African terrorism and the bombings in Morocco (Figure 1). If we see the whole page as an integrated text, we can perhaps read the newspaper’s creation of a negative affect through the central photograph’s indirect relationship with the other texts and the smaller photographs of these “other texts” which show a victim’s bloodied face and a hotel bombed in Morocco.

The choice of central photograph—a black African armed adult male could also be read as the creation of a sense of “menace”. Another characteristic that may add to the sense of “menace” is that the Congolese soldier is not in uniform, thus constructed as not belonging to a “legitimate army”; a photograph of a soldier in a recognized uniform perhaps does not create or would not be intended to create the same “threat”. It is this position of being outside institutions or organizations recognized as “legitimate” that constitutes the “terrorist” just as much as violent action does.

#### **4.5 Relationship of Text 1 and Text 2**

The text “How to bomb friends and alienate us all” (see Figure 3) not only continues the same theme as Text 1 but seems to exploit and recontextualize elements of Text 1 in its construction of this theme. The image (a sketch) is a visual reworking of the verbal metaphor of the previous text. The Hydra serpent metaphor is now conceptualized visually as a map of the world in the shape of an egg out of which a number of serpents are hatching. The heads of the serpents are “aggressive” “ready to strike” or “bite”, “mouths open”, “fangs showing”. The verbal metaphor of Text 1 “Serpent growing new heads” has undergone a process of resemiotization which not only renders the effect more immediate, but also makes the metaphor more explicit; the serpent is now not

only “growing” new heads but there is no doubt that the heads are “vicious”. The threat is no longer dependent upon associations of serpents with negativity, or shared cultural knowledge of classical and Christian mythology, nor on the inferences could we draw from the photograph of the African soldier. The sketch has combined the verbal metaphor of the Al-Qaeda/Hydra serpent with the other texts on the previous day’s page that refer to “terrorist” attacks to create a direct, explicit and unambiguous image of the “demon” enemy.

Text 2 draws an all-inclusive “us” through the reference to “us all” in the title. From a position of ‘implicit’ readers (an implied “we”) in the previous text, Text 2 has brought “us” into the text as represented participants. “We” are “everyone” without distinctions: the “friends”, the “victims” and those “alienated” by Al-Qaeda are one and the same. The body of the text makes reference to “all men and women of all faiths and nationalities” as being potential targets, so that our religions and ethnic origins have become irrelevant. “We” are explicitly constructed as a universal us and what constitutes us is our fear (we are all potential victims), our feelings of ‘alienation’ and thus our rejection of the actions of Al-Qaeda—(they who “bomb friends” and “focus on soft even non-Western targets”). They are portrayed as having no limits, no sense of affiliation with any people or place; they will attack those that are easily attacked, and “sacrifice” even their “friends”, (those countries that may have supported or tolerated them—implied in the image by the serpents hatching out various places, which are explicitly named in the body of the text). The text constructs *them* as positioning themselves outside and in opposition to “our human values”; thus, they undermine their own ideological base and support system and become “self-destructive” (as stated in the caption: “Al-Qaeda’s apparent new focus...could be its death knell”).

As the “us all” incorporates also those that have tolerated “them”, the text places “us” in a position of “guilt” and well as “fear”; since “they” are drawn as “evil” and the antithesis of humanity, any tolerance is by implication also ‘evil’ as it allows or facilitates their existence, which then threatens “us”. (Hence the “egg” in the image—the world which gives birth to “the serpents” and the reinforcement of this throughout the text with references, such as “tolerating... will have deleterious consequences”). The text unequivocally constructs “us” in allegiance to the “war against terrorism” and in “support of the West”. If the image in Text 1 created the perception that we could open up the text to multiple readings because our allegiance was not spelt out, Text 2 eliminates these possibilities and leaves *us* in no doubt as to where *we* stand, because by implication, if “we” are not a part of the “us” we break the consensus and therefore are as guilty as “they” are. If we were inclined to read a metaphor of solidarity in the photograph of the African soldier, this solidarity is now transferred to the “us”.

The reality, however, is that newspaper’s readers are multiple and diverse and bring with them diverse ideological positions and viewpoints. Whether or not the readers position themselves on the side of “war against terrorism” depends on what “meanings” they read in the phrase, on how they view “war”, on whether or not they see “difference” between “war” and “terror”, on how they construct their position in relation to the “violence of control” in contrast with the “violence” opposed to that control. The war against Iraq, for example, which had just ended at the time of this publication, caused “division” both locally and internationally, and these divisions may affect the “readings” of the construction of the “renewed” terrorist threat.

## **5. Conclusion**

As we have seen, the texts greatly exploit the visual image and create visual metaphors that condense and convey the impact of the message, thus becoming (in the case of Text 1) the primary mode of the construction of

meaning, or at least (as in Text 2) adding a significant dimensions to the whole text and interacting with the verbal representation “equally” rather than simply complementing it. The two texts differ, however, in the way they exploit the visual resources and because of this, differ to some extent in the meanings they construct. Text 1 exploits the visual image in a more complex and implicit manner, constructing multiple layers of meaning and in so doing exemplifies or points to the social process of the creation of symbolic representations and the cultural transformations they can move through. It also adds a different and deeper dimension than the verbal text to the overall construction of meaning, Text 2, by taking elements of verbal language and transferring them into visual language, reinterprets them and shifts, to a degree, the “focus” of Text 1, highlighting aspects of the text that may have been “subdued” or ambivalent, creating more definite categorizations and divisions. Through the explicitness of its image, it reduces, in a sense, the reader’s realm or field of vision, reduces the reader’s choices in order to reinforce through simplification the concept of a “threat”. Thus, the reader cannot engage in a mental “discussion” with the text and can only either “accept” or “reject” it.

Nevertheless, the study of these texts reveals an instance of intertextuality and what we have referred to as resemiotization—the dynamic process of the construction of texts not only in relation to other texts, but also through transference of one semiotic mode into another, or one context to another, and the way in which this process changes, or “shifts” meanings. The study also reinforces the idea that metaphors play an important role in media texts and that they need to be studied as a ‘fundamental’ part of our cultural conceptions.

It is clear that much still needs to be done in relation to the study of visual representations and multimodal texts, especially in the analysis of the process of resemiotization. The study points to the need for analysis that is inclusive of different approaches so that the exploration of this dynamic process can be further extended.

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Appendix



Figure 1: View of whole World page, Sydney Morning Herald, 19 May, 2003 p.9



# Police want to stay

ng: more will die in Bali



**Q** Will there be more bombs in Bali?  
**A** There will be more bombs until the Westerners are finished.

**Q** Are you sorry?  
**A** Ask the Australians if they are sorry they killed Iraqis.



## Al-Qaeda serpent growing new heads

David Johnston and Don Van Natta in Washington

Al-Qaeda leaders are believed to be regrouping in a number of countries including Kenya, Sudan, Pakistan and Chechnya, and preparing to unleash multiple strikes over a short period to prove the network is still viable.

Counter-terrorism officials believe that Saif Adel, the Egyptian said to be al-Qaeda's new military commander and mastermind of last week's bombings in Saudi Arabia, is hiding in Iran with other leaders.

These include Saad bin Laden, son of al-Qaeda's leader, Osama bin Laden; Abu Mohammed Masri, the network's head of training; and Abu Musab Zarqawi, who was holed up in Baghdad last year. Another group of leaders is believed to be on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

"There are some senior members of al-Qaeda in Iran... who might have had a hand in this," a Bush Administration official said of the Saudi attacks, which killed 34 people.

US intelligence agencies have also picked up signs just as strong as those before the Saudi bombing that al-Qaeda is plotting further attacks and that they are imminent, US officials said.

The "chatter" among terrorism suspects may be even more definitive than before the coordinated car bombings of residential compounds in Riyadh, one official said. Another said the signs were just as strong as before these attacks.

Both officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said it was not known where al-Qaeda might strike next, but there were potential threats to Western interests in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, east Africa - including Kenya - and South-East Asia, including Indonesia and Malaysia.

The terrorist leaders have begun recruiting members, training

*Continued Page 9*

esses as sufficient evidence - including Silvester the merchant who bomb chemicals, and ne of Amrozi's co-will be asked to give nony.

ralian police, or relatives and victims of the blasts, will be called to give their accounts of the attacks.

Meanwhile, a political brawl has erupted in Australia about the level of the terrorist threat to the country and its interests.

While the Labor leader, Simon Crean, said the high-profile role

of Australian forces in Iraq had increased the risk of terrorist attacks on Australians, the Minister for Defence, Robert Hill, said the country was safer.

Senator Hill yesterday announced the creation of a Reserve Response Force, army reservists who will support com-

mandos if there is a terrorist strike in Australia.

Despite the announcement and a flurry of new travel warnings for Australians travelling overseas, the overall threat assessment has not been raised above medium, the level set after the Bali bombings.

Figure 2: 'AL-Qaeda serpent growing new heads' Front page, Sydney Morning Herald 19 May, 2003

# How to bomb friends and alienate us all

FROM New York City and Washington, to Bali and Mombassa and Riyadh and, now, Casablanca. It seems likely that probably all, and certainly most, of the recent suicide-homicide attacks on civilians are linked to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network.

In her study of al-Qaeda titled *The Bure* (Simon & Schuster, 2002), British journalist Jane Cobin quotes bin Laden as having declared in 1998 that "Our duty is to arouse the Muslim nation for jihad against the United States, Israel and their supporters, for the sake of God."

No doubt that is how he sees his calling. But the last four suicide/homicide attacks—in Indonesia, Kenya, Saudi Arabia and Morocco—have seen many more local inhabitants killed than Americans and Israelis.

Writing in last Friday's *Wall Street Journal*, Sharon Begley drew attention to work being done by the US academics, Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, in applying game theory to a study of terrorism and anti-terrorism. The theory was invented by the mathematician John Nash and popularised by Russell Crowe, who played Nash in the film *A Beautiful Mind*. Enders and Sandler are interested in the likely outcome when two rational agents—in this case, the terrorist and the anti-terrorist—make choices as to action.

The evidence suggests that the decision by US authorities to clamp down on terrorism (following the September 11 attacks) has led to a situation where terrorists have decided to choose softer, non-American, targets. Both decisions are rational.

Al-Qaeda's apparent change of tactics has been an unintended consequence. Now bin Laden targets not only Westerners, but also non-Westerners, not only Christians and Jews, but also Muslims, Buddhists and more besides. This provides some opportunities for the counter-terrorist cause.

Before the Bali murders, the US had been highly critical of what it regarded as the Indonesian Government's slack attitude to terrorism. Not any more.

In February, Ralph Boyce, the US ambassador in Jakarta, commented that "progress on every one" of the US's anti-terrorist benchmarks had "been extraordinary" since the October 12 bombings.

This change of attitude is recognised in the US State Department publication *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2002*, which was released last month. It records that "in the wake of the Bali bombing of 12 October, the Indonesian Government stepped up internal investigations against international



Gerard Henderson  
*Al-Qaeda's apparent new focus on soft, even non-Western, targets could be its death knell.*

terrorist groups, although it had provided limited support for the global coalition against terrorism before this event."

Co-operation between Indonesia and Australia has been excellent since the Bali bombings. President Megawati's Government has overseen the arrest and prosecution of at least some of the alleged killers and the matter has proceeded quickly to trial.

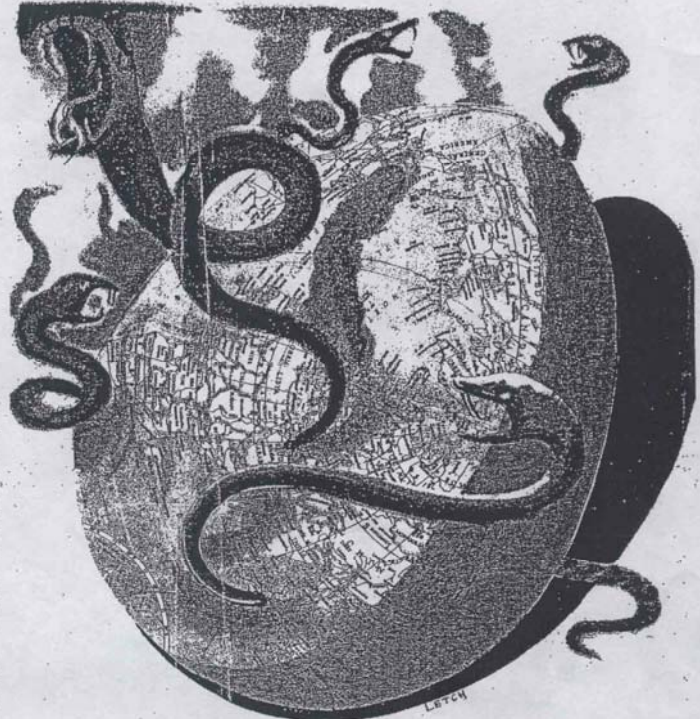
In addition, the previous attitude of denial has dissipated. Last week I Made Mangku Pastika, the police chief of Bali, said publicly that up to 30 terrorists, who trained at al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, remain undetected in Indonesia.

Terrorism remains a serious problem in Indonesia. But the authorities have moved decisively against those accused of the Bali bombings. What's more, individuals thought to be associated with the radical Islamist group Jemaah Islamiyah are being tracked down and Abu Bakar, JI's spiritual leader, has been charged with treason concerning alleged crimes not associated with the Bali events. It is hard to imagine such actions would have been taken if the bombings had not occurred.

It remains to be seen whether Saudi Arabia will experience a similar awakening following last week's suicide/homicide attacks in Riyadh. To some extent, Saudi Arabia is al-Qaeda's base. Bin Laden was born there—as were most of those involved in the September 11 attacks on the US. Officially the Saudi royal family are allies of the US.

Unofficially, Saudi Arabia's dictatorial rulers have allowed bin Laden's followers to operate within the country and to be essentially financed by fellow Saudis.

This may just very change following the Riyadh murders. In Washington last Friday Adel al-Jubeiri, who is chief foreign policy adviser to Crown Prince Abdullah, conceded that the terrorist attacks were a "massive jolt" which had already led to a substantial



reassessment of Saudi security. He added: "We will do whatever we need to do, unilaterally or with the support of our friends, to ensure this does not happen again."

Maybe. It's just that, up to now, the Saudi regime has effectively tolerated terrorism. This has posed particular problems for the US since Saudi Arabia is, formally, a US ally. The American political analyst Michael Ledeen sets out the problem in his book *The War Against the Terror Masters* (St Martin's Press, 2002). He described Saudi Arabia as a "country that is simultaneously our major oil supplier and the main financier of our terrorist enemies".

Ledeen argued that the US "cannot tolerate a continuation of the current situation" and that Saudi Arabia's "hate-preaching schools and mosques "must either be closed or fundamentally changed". It was quite a "call had all but impossible to imagine being achieved before last week's bombing. Now

it's just possible that the regime in Riyadh will realise that even tolerating al-Qaeda's existence on Saudi soil will have deleterious consequences.

Followers of game theory and others besides, will not have been surprised that al-Qaeda and like organisations appear to have changed tactics after the September 11 attacks. The immediate targets are no longer the World Trade Centre or the Pentagon but, rather, Western residential compounds, hotels and religious entities.

Yet progress has been made since the September 11 attacks. The war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan—in which Australian special forces played an important role, most notably in the Battle of Anarouda—has been successful in that it has denied bin Laden's forces a base to train and launch operations. This is likely to diminish al-Qaeda's ability to launch major hits against high-profile targets.

What's more, due particularly to

Pakistan's decision to support the West in the war against terrorism, a number of important arrests have been made, most notably that of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in Rawalpindi in March. He was the third in the al-Qaeda hierarchy and is believed to have been the military planner of the September 11 attacks. Then there is the change of attitude in Indonesia, which is of particular benefit to Australia and other nations in the Asia-Pacific region.

However, small successes aside, the war against terrorism is likely to be a long one—possibly one of the longest in history. This is the first conflict in which civilians have been the prime target. So—in this sense at least—it is a total war. And, as the recent tragedy reveals, all men and women of all faiths and nationalities are potential targets.

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Figure 2: Text 2: 'How to bomb friends and alienate us all', Sydney Morning Herald, 20 May, 2003, Comment page 11.

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