

# WHO'S UNDER ATTACK? : AN ANALYSIS OF NEWS PRESENTATION OF SEPT 11 BY MALAYSIAN NEWS NETWORKS

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## ABSTRACT

Based on alternative perspectives of news as ideological constructions or even postmodern phenomena, this paper presents the 'Third World' view of the suicide bombing of the WTC and the Pentagon on that fateful morning on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. The author attempts to do a comparative analysis of the approaches to news coverage and presentation via discourse analysis of the prime time news on the government and private Malaysian television stations. It would be interesting to reveal the intersection of political interests and religious affiliations in influencing the style of Malaysian news coverage and presentation on the Incident. This is in light of the occurrence of the Incident just before a state election where the 'moderate' ruling party was pitted against the formidable and 'fundamentalist' opposition that succeeded to erode its majority votes during the 1999 General Elections. Thus, via this paper, the researcher attempts to shed light on the dialectics between news text and social-cultural, political and, perhaps, economic contexts that contribute to the construction and representation of 'reality' via the news media.

## INTRODUCTION

The media images of the hijacked American Airlines planes ramming against the World Trade Center twin towers will forever remain etched in recent global memory. Audiences the world over who have access to global broadcast news stations would have witnessed the dreadful televised tragedy on that fateful September morning. Within a couple of hours, the symbols of American economic might were shattered to smithereens. Not since 1941, when the Japanese army bombed Pearl Harbor, had the United States been attacked within its own geographical boundary. But the difference this time around, it is not an attack by an identified nation-state but by an unidentified group of suicide bombers or international "terrorists" whose origin is yet to be verified.

The collapse of the Berlin Wall and the failure of state socialism in the late 1980s and early 1990s had ushered in the so-called 'New World Order' lauded by the then American President, George W. Bush Sr. The end of the Cold War or the era of the bipolar World,

when the Socialist or Communist Bloc acted as a check and balance to the American Capitalism, marked a new beginning for American global ascendancy. Under the guise of globalization, and its attendant corollaries of market liberalization and deregulation, the US succeeded in convincing other Super Powers such as the People's Republic of China and the former USSR to embrace its brand of capitalism and liberal democracy.

The tolerance for economic, political, ideological and cultural differences began to diminish with the rise of unipolarity in the New World Order. Samuel Huntington, an American political scientist or a key apologist for Western/US hegemony in world affairs, propagated ideas of social conflict based on culture in *The Clash of Civilizations*:

“ ... culture and cultural identities, which at the broadest level are civilization identities, are shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict in the post-Cold War period. In the post-Cold War world, for the first time in history, global politics has become multipolar and multicivilizational; the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural. The most important groups of states are no longer the three blocs of the Cold War but rather the world's seven or eight major civilizations. .... In this new world, the most pervasive, important and dangerous conflicts will not be between social classes, rich or poor, economically defined groups, but between peoples belonging to different cultural entities. The West is and will remain for years to come the most powerful civilization. Yet its power relative to that of other civilizations is declining. A central axis of post-Cold War politics is thus the interaction of Western power and culture with the power and culture of non-Western civilizations” (1993, 21-29)

And of these non-Western civilizations, Islam is seen as more of a threat to Western Judeo-Christian tradition compared to Confucianism, Buddhism or Hinduism.

## **BACKGROUND**

The September 11 Incident was a tragedy that shocked the whole world. The United States of America, which had been seen as an invincible superpower, was attacked within its own territorial borders by a group of international terrorists. The tragedy remained as a dark moment in contemporary American history. Apart from the disappearance of the most famous landmark in the New York City landscape, the death toll were estimated to exceed more than 5,000.

At 8:45AM (1245 GMT) on that fateful Tuesday morning, when New Yorkers were just about to start their day, a hijacked American Airlines Flight 11, en route from Boston to Los Angeles with 92 passengers on board, rammed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center (WTC). Many eyewitnesses thought that the pilot of the airplane had lost control. When another American Airlines Flight 77 en route from Washington D.C. to Los Angeles rammed into the South Tower 17 minutes later at approximately 9.03AM (1303 GMT), did they realise that something was amiss. Both towers were in flames after being hit by the hijackers/suicide bombers.

But that was not all. At 9:25AM, a United Airlines Flight 175, also en route from Boston to Los Angeles with 65 passengers on board, hit and destroyed a part of the symbol of

American military might – the Pentagon in Washington D.C. At 10:05AM (1405 GMT), the South Tower collapsed followed by the North Tower 23 minutes later. (What was left of the stone and steel debris of the twin towers is now known as 'Ground Zero'.) New York City and Washington D.C. were put on alert. All airports in the US were closed and no flights were allowed to land or take-off. All government offices were immediately evacuated, including the Capitol and the White House. The US was in a state of Emergency. This Incident had dealt a harsh blow to the US financial and military might.

The media the world over was frantically trying to grasp the issue through its coverage and presentation of the Incident, including the media in Malaysia. But the most graphic reports and representations of the event were via the global news network, CNN. Even the sports channel, ESPN, suspended its programmes, in a show of respect for the victims of the tragedy and their families.

### **ANALYTICAL APPROACH**

Since televised news is audiovisual and ideological in nature, Semiotics is seen as the most appropriate conceptual and analytical approach in analysing news coverage and presentation in this paper. Semiotics has been defined as 'the science of the life of signs in society' (Saussure, 1974). So defined, everything in culture can be seen as a form of communication, organised in ways akin to verbal language, to be understood in terms of a common set of fundamental rules or principles. As a conceptual and analytical tool, "Semiotics offers the promise of a systematic, comprehensive and coherent study of communications phenomena as a whole, not just instances of it" (Hodge and Kress, 1988, 1). In other words, semiotics analysis involves the analysis of not only the news *text* or *discourse* but also the social context that produce the particular text or discourse.

It is necessary here to explain the key terms and concepts used in semiotics analysis, namely 'Ideology', 'Message', 'Text' and 'Discourse'. Viewed as false consciousness, *ideology* represents the world 'upside down' and in inverted form. But it also displays an image of the world as it ought to be, as seen from the vantage point of the dominant, or as it is, from the vantage point of the dominated group. In order to capture the contradiction characteristic of ideological forms, one has to address the term 'ideological complexes', a functionally related set of contradictory versions of the world, coercively imposed by one social group on another and on behalf of its own distinctive interests or subversively offered by another social group in attempts at resistance in its own interests. An ideological complex exists to sustain relationships of both power and solidarity, and it represents the social order as simultaneously serving the interests of both dominant and subordinate.

The *message* is the smallest semiotic form that has concrete existence. The message has directionality – it has a source and a goal, a social context and purpose. Meanwhile, 'text' is an extended semiotic sense to refer to a structure of messages or message traces which has a socially ascribed unity. 'Text' originates from the Latin word *textus*, which means 'something woven together'. On the other hand, 'discourse' refers to the social process in which texts are embedded. According to Hodge and Kress, discourse " ... is the site where social forms of organization engage with systems of signs in the production of texts, thus reproducing or changing the sets of meanings and values which make up a culture" (1988, 6).

Thus, televised news can be regarded as a discourse since it is a form of text by virtue of its role in informing and interpreting current events to audiences. Moreover, since news is widely disseminated to the audience, it is regarded as achieving the status of a dominant discourse within the context of public perception and consciousness.

According to M. Stubb, discourse analysis is “concerned with language used beyond the boundaries of a sentence/utterance; concerned with the interrelationships between language and society and concerned with the interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication” (1983, 1). Although this definition is not clear, discourse analysis is usually associated with linguistic analysis, that is the presentation of speech or written text as something given or ‘natural’. Discourse analysis is also related to the use of language in the social context, particularly interactions or dialogue between speakers within a community or society or, in the case of news presentation, ‘interactions’ between news presenters and their audiences.

Textual analysis, on the other hand, is a methodology that focuses on the text (written or produced in audiovisual forms) and views culture as a form of ‘narrative’ whereby the text, consciously or unconsciously, linked it to significant events in the society. Textual analysis of television news, therefore, is a treatment of “the formal qualities of television programs and their flow; the inter-textual relations of television within itself, with other media, and with conversation; and the study of socially situated readers and the process of reading” (Fiske, 1987, 6).

### **Textual/Discourse Analysis of News Presentation on the September 11 Incident by Local Television Stations**

The analysis in this study covers a period of two weeks (11-25 September 2001) and looks at news presentation of the September 11 Incident during the 8:00PM prime time news, namely **Berita Perdana** and **Buletin Utama** via the government (TV1) and commercial (TV3) television stations. The analysis attempts to reveal, compare and interpret the types of dominant discourse that are presented by the two television stations. This is followed by a discussion of the types of dominant discourse and its inferences on local television audience.

#### **The Types of Dominant Discourse/s**

##### **“The USA as No.1 International Terrorist” (American Backlash or ‘Westoxification’)**

At the onset of its presentation of the Incident, TV1 was of the position that Islamic groups were not responsible for the tragedy since Islam forbids violence and terrorist activities. The following news excerpt from September 16 2001 illustrated this standpoint:

*“Apa yang berlaku di WTC dan Washington adalah bertentangan dengan Islam. Islam tidak mengajar penganutnya bertindak ganas, malah jika berlaku peperangan sekalipun, ada etika yang perlu diikuti termasuk tidak boleh membunuh orang awam dan merosakkan harta benda. Serangan berani mati di Amerika merupakan satu jenayah besar; Islam tidak boleh menerima tindakan itu, tidak ada mana-mana pihak yang patut menyokong mereka. Membunuh seseorang yang tidak ada kesalahan jenayah adalah satu dosa besar. Apa yang berlaku di Amerika jelas satu jenayah*

*terbesar yang tidak boleh diterima oleh Islam. Islam dengan keras melarang pertumpahan darah sama sekali dan melarang membunuh mereka yang tidak berdosa."*

(Translation: "What happened at WTC and Washington was against Islam. Islam did not teach its followers to act violently; even in the event of war, there are ethics to be adhered to which include not killing civilians and destruction of property. The suicide attacks in America is a heinous crime; Islam cannot accept this act, no parties should support them. Killing innocent people is a big sin. What happened in America is clearly a biggest sin that cannot be accepted by Islam. Islam strongly condemns bloodshed and forbade the killing of innocent people.")

However, it later changed its viewpoint to conclude that the Incident was the outcome of the lack of humanity and the cruelty that the US had inflicted on other countries. One of the lead news on September 18, 2001 reported that:

*"Serangan ke atas New York dan Washington mencabar keegoan Amerika. Seluruh dunia musuh dan kawan berkabung apabila berlaku pembunuhan Presiden J.F. Kennedy yang ditembak mati 30 tahun dulu. Tetapi sekalipun kematian beribu-ribu orang di WTC dan Pentagon, perasaan dunia sudah tidak sekata lagi. Mungkin adalah sukar untuk mengukur apabila Kennedy terbunuh, tetapi seorang penyair Malaysia terkemuka, Usman Awang, berkata dalam sajaknya 'Kemanusiaan':*

*Jika kita menyesali kematian seorang dan hati tidak berdenyut untuk kematian yang lain; maka kemanusiaan tidak wujud di mahkota kebenaran; sebab bukanlah kemanusiaan bila ia ada perbatasan.*

*Media Malaysia semua bahasa mengutuk serangan keganasan yang berlaku di New York dan Washington yang membunuh beribu-ribu orang, tetapi pada keseluruhannya mereka tidak menampakkan sentimen dan emosi seperti yang terlihat dalam kematian J.F. Kennedy dan Princess Diana di Paris tidak lama dahulu. Pada kedua-dua kematian tanpa diminta ini, rakyat Malaysia tunduk bertafakur bersama dengan manusia lain di dunia ini yang melambangkan kemanusiaan negara yang melampawi kebatasan agama dan bangsa. Tetapi kenapa tidak pada kematian beribu orang yang lebih dahsyat kali ini? Tidakkah manusia terfikir bahawa malapetaka ini adalah pembalasan daripada kekejaman?"*

(Translation: The attacks on New York and Washington challenged America's ego. The whole world both friends and foes grieved when President J.F. Kennedy was assassinated 30 years ago. Even though thousands died at WTC and the Pentagon, the world's sentiments are no longer unanimous. Maybe it's difficult to gauge when Kennedy was shot, but a well-known Malaysian poet, Usman Awang, wrote in his poem 'Kemanusiaan' (Humanity): If we pine for someone's death yet our hearts do not beat for the death of another; Then humanity cease to exist in the crown of truth; Since it's not humanity when there is a boundary.

Malaysian Media of all languages condemn the terrorist attacks that happened in New York and Washington that killed thousands of people, but on the whole, they did not show their sentiments and emotions that was revealed during the deaths of J.F. Kennedy and Princess Diana in Paris not long ago. During these sudden deaths, Malaysians lowered

their heads in silence with their fellow humankind that symbolised humanity that transcended religion and race. But why not at the horrible deaths of thousands of people this time? Didn't people think that this disaster is a punishment for violence?")

Not only is this piece more of a commentary than a report, but the total lack of empathy towards the loss and grief faced by the families of victims in the tragedy is simply appalling. Probably it is easier to sympathise with well-known individuals rather than unknown victims, even in the thousands. But the fact that JFK and Princess Diana were both popular icons created by the media seemed to escape the writer/editor/producer of the news programme. In addition, to assume the role of spokesperson for the rest of the world and to be judgemental are totally inappropriate in a supposedly straight news report. However, the reason for this can be traced to an earlier diplomatic 'faux-pas' made by the former US vice-president in 1998, as evidenced by the following excerpt:

*"Tidak lama dulu, bekas Naib Presiden Amerika, Al Gore, melawat negara ini ketika dalam krisis, dengan menghasut rakyat supaya mengadakan demonstrasi dan menuntut reformasi. Beliau tidak menghormati demokrasi negara ini, sebaliknya bersekongkol dengan anasir-anasir revolusioner dan militan untuk menjatuhkan kerajaan Malaysia yang dipilih oleh rakyat. Rakyat Malaysia yang marah memanggilnya biadab."*

(Translation: "Not long ago, the former US Vice President, Al Gore, visited this country when it was in a crisis, by urging its people to hold demonstrations and demand reforms. Not only did he not show respect for democracy in this country, he collaborates with revolutionary and militant elements to overthrow the Malaysian government that was chosen by the people. Angry Malaysians called it rude.")

Not only is the Incident seen as a punishment for the wrongs that the US had inflicted on Malaysia but also for its oppression of other small nation-states. Another news text on the same day (September 18 2001) stated that:

*"Salah atau benar macam manapun, Amerika dianggap sebagai penjajah baru, kuasa raja yang cuba berkhutbah, campurtangan dan menawan dunia di samping mengamalkan talam dua muka. Mungkin banyak orang di seluruh dunia termasuk di Amerika sendiri yang pernah marah dan benci kerana Amerika tidak melaksanakan peranannya sebagai pemimpin dunia dengan adil dan saksama."*

*Kita tidak memaafkan pembunuhan manusia yang tidak berdosa tetapi bagaimana dengan 500,000 kanak-kanak di Iraq yang tidak berdosa mati akibat dari sekatan ekonomi oleh Amerika yang berlanjutan selepas perang 11 tahun."*

(Translation: "Rightly or wrongly, the US is regarded as the new colonialist, the kingly power that tries to preach, interfere and capture the world while practising a Janus-like act. Perhaps many people the world over including in America itself who are angry and hateful because the US did not play its role as a world leader fairly and justly.

We cannot forgive the killing of innocent people but what about the 500,000 innocent Iraqi children who died as a result of American economic embargo that went on 11 years after the (Gulf) War.")

This commentary could have been couched in a critique of the US foreign policy in the Middle East and the Incident as one of the consequences of that policy instead of haranguing and resorting to 'name-calling' and 'finger-pointing'. The following excerpt from September 19 2001, however, showed a more critical analysis of the US foreign policy in the Middle East and urged the US and its allies to deal with the injustice towards the Muslims, Palestinians, Lebanese and Iraqis:

***"US dan sekutunya mestilah menangani ketidakadilan yang terlihat oleh orang Islam di seluruh Timur Tengah yang menyebabkan kebencian kepada Barat. Yang membangkitkan keganasan atas nama Islam adalah kematian beribu-ribu orang awam yang dikatakan dibunuh oleh Amerika atau Israel di Palestin, Lubnan dan Iraq."***

(Translation: "The US and its associates must address the injustice witnessed by Muslims in the Middle East that caused their hatred towards the West. What provoked the violence in the name of Islam is the death of thousands of civilians that was said to be killed by Americans or Israelis in Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq.")

Another excerpt from September 23 2001 reiterated the fundamental factor of the lopsided US foreign policy that is responsible for the rise of terrorism and the US as its primary target:

***"Adalah penting bagi Amerika dan kuasa Barat mempertimbangkan dan mengkaji faktor asas yang membawa kepada kegiatan pengganas sehingga Amerika menjadi sasaran utama serangan tersebut. Mungkin disebabkan oleh faktor penindasan akibat ketidakadilan seperti mana konflik yang berlaku di Palestin. Justeru itu, Amerika dan negara Barat perlu mengkaji peranan dasar luar yang ditetapkan."***

(Translation: It is imperative for the US and the Western powers to assess and examine the basic factor that led to terrorist activities and the US as the prime target for the attack. It could be caused by the oppressive factor as a result of injustice such as the conflict that happened in Palestine. Thus, America and the West need to reassess their foreign policy.")

### **"Not a Clash of Civilisations"**

Contrary to TV1's virulent rebuke of the US, TV3's prime time news, *Buletin Utama*, was more restraint in accusing the US as a global terrorist. It did, in fact, attempt to present a semblance of objectivity in its report. In an excerpt from September 16 2001, it cautioned the US to be right on target in launching its counter-attack so as not to involve the lives of innocent civilians:

***"Sebarang usaha Amerika Syarikat memerangi pengganas haruslah tepat pada sasarannya, tanpa menganiayai mereka yang tidak berdosa."***

***Barat patut melayan semua negara Islam dengan adil dan tidak mengaitkan mereka dengan kemunduran dan keganasan. Salah faham Barat terhadap Islam mesti dijelaskan agar serangan balas Amerika Syarikat yang tidak menguntungkan sesiapa boleh dielakkan."***

(Translation: “Any effort by the US to fight terrorism should be right on target, without victimizing those who are innocent. The West should entertain all Islamic countries and not identify them with underdevelopment and terrorism. Misunderstanding on the part of the West towards Islam must be clarified so that counter-attacks by the US that will not benefit anyone can be avoided.”)

An excerpt from the news report of September 18 2001 is another attempt at presenting a more balanced representation of the US. It showed how President Bush tried to stem a wave of anti-Islamic sentiment from spreading in America:

*“Bush yang sebelum ini dengan pantas menuding jari serangan didalangi Islam kini cuba memenangi hati umat Islam di Amerika. Beliau meluangkan masa melawat sebuah masjid di Washington, 3.2 kilometer dari White House.*

*Islam adalah keamanan. Pegganas ini tidak memperjuangkan keamanan – mereka mewakili kejahatan dan peperangan. Apabila kita fikirkan Islam, kita lihat kepercayaan yang mampu memberikan kegembiraan kepada bilion penduduk di seluruh dunia – berbilion penduduk mendapat kepuasan serta ketenangan daripada keamanan.*

*Lawatan ini dilihat cuba untuk meredakan sentimen anti-Islam yang ditiupkan ke seluruh rakyat Amerika. Beliau kini menggesa rakyat Amerika supaya tidak melepaskan kemarahan mereka kepada umat Islam secara am. Bush mengakui, berjuta-juta rakyat Amerika yang beragama Islam memberikan sumbangan berharga dalam bidang profesional hingga ke sektor perdagangan. Dianggarkan terdapat 7 juta umat Islam berketurunan Arab tinggal di Amerika.”*

(Translation: “Bush who was quick to point fingers towards Islam as responsible for staging the attacks now tries to win the hearts of Muslims in America. He took his time to visit a mosque in Washington (D.C.), 3.2 kilometer from the White House.

Islam is peace. Terrorists do not fight for peace – they stand for evil and war. When we think of Islam, we see a faith that is capable of bringing happiness to billions of people around the world – billions of people found satisfaction and serenity from peace.

This visit is seen as an attempt to curb anti-Islamic sentiments that swept throughout the whole of the American people. He now urges the American people not to unleash their anger at Muslims in general. Bush admits that thousands of American people of Islamic faith gave invaluable contribution to various sectors, from professional to business. It is estimated that seven thousand Muslims of Arab descent live in America.”)

In another excerpt from September 20 2001, the news text showed Bush as trying to reassure the Muslim countries that its “War on Terrorism” is to “smoke out the terrorists from their hiding places”, not an attack on an Islamic state:

“President George W. Bush cuba memberi gambaran kepada dunia bahawa ancaman serangan ke atas Afghanistan dan negara Islam lain bukan bermakna perang terhadap Islam dan negara-negara Arab.



*Washington sendiri tidak pasti sejauh mana tindakan mereka akan memberi kesan kepada hubungannya dengan negara-negara Islam.*

*Presiden mahu dijelaskan bahawa ini bukan perang terhadap tamadun, ini bukan perang terhadap Islam. Ini adalah perang terhadap mereka yang merosakkan perjuangan Islam. Islam menegakkan keamanan dan mengutuk keganasan dan beliau mahu ia dijelaskan."*

(Translation: "President George W. Bush tries to portray to the world that threats of attacks on Afghanistan and other Islamic countries does not mean war against Islam and the Arab countries.

Washington is not certain how far their action will affect their relations with Islamic countries. The President wants to clarify that this is not a war against civilization or Islam. This is a war against those who destroys the Islamic struggle. Islam supports peace and condemns violence and this he wants to clarify."

However, TV3 is aware that this is a tactical strategy on the part of George W. Bush (Jr) who had to convince his (European) allies that his 'War on Terrorism' is not a war against Muslim countries or Islam.

#### **"PAS: the Malaysian Equivalent of the Talebans"**

Apart from presenting the government's point of view, TV1 also employed the tactic of co-optation of the Opposition Voice, that of Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS). In the report on September 13 2001, PAS was given the opportunity to give its opinion on the terrorist attack on the WTC and the Pentagon. The opinion of the PAS' spokesperson did not deviate much from that of the official viewpoint in condemning the attack:

*"Keganasan tidak akan mendatangkan sebarang kebaikan sebaliknya keadaan akan bertambah buruk. Pemimpin PAS Kelantan dan Terengganu turut mengutuk serangan tersebut, dan menyatakan Islam melarang sama sekali perbuatan kejam, terutama membunuh orang awam dan merosakkan harta benda."*

(Translation: "Violence will not bring any good; on the contrary, the situation will worsen. Kelantan and Terengganu PAS leaders also condemn the attacks and said that Islam forbade any cruel deeds, especially the killing of civilians and the destruction of property.")

However, by employing the Voice of the People (Vox Populi), the news report on the next day (September 14 2001) indirectly rebutted the statement made by PAS, implying that PAS leaders intentionally change the extremist position that it held prior to this incident:

*"Rakyat Malaysia terkejut dengan beberapa pemimpin PAS yang selama ini tidak percaya ada tindakan penganas militan-militan di antara tengah mereka sendiri, tiba-tiba turut membantah tindakan penganas anasir-anasir yang sama dalam peringkat antarabangsa.*

*Serangan ganas yang berlaku di Amerika Syarikat memberikan peluang kepada PAS untuk sekarang bersekongkol dengan pemimpin negara.*

*Untuk membersihkan pandangan serong rakyat terhadap PAS, maka semalam PAS dengan cepat menyertai pemimpin negara untuk mengutuk serangan ganas ke atas kubu-kubu strategik Amerika oleh kumpulan militan Islam yang menyebabkan ribuan orang terkorban.*

*PAS perlu segera memisahkan dirinya daripada dilihat sebagai penyokong keganasan."*

(Translation: "The Malaysian people are surprised that several PAS leaders who had all this while did not believe that there was militant terrorists in their own midst, suddenly also protested against the actions of the same terrorist elements at the international level.

The terrorist attacks that happened in the US gave the opportunity to PAS to now collaborate with the country's leaders. To exonerate the negative perception of the people towards PAS, so PAS yesterday quickly joined the country's leaders in condemning the terrorist attacks on the strategic American bases by militant Islamic groups that caused thousands of lives to perish.

PAS need to immediately separate itself from being seen as the supporter of violence.")

In the same report, TV1 also implied that the two main opposition parties, PAS and the DAP (Democratic Action Party), were trying to 'cleanse' or 'whitewash' their public image by condemning the suicide bombing:

*"Dua parti yang juga dipimpin oleh golongan pelampau cuba membasuhkan imej mereka terutama di kalangan bukan Melayu. Tetapi sandiwara mereka ini tidak meyakinkan. Keganasan yang berlaku di sini pada bil-bila masa, sekiranya rakyat tidak memberikan sokongan yang sepenuhnya kepada kerajaan yang ada sekarang untuk melumpuhkan gerakan mereka dengan apa cara sekalipun."*

(Translation: "These two parties that are also led by extremist groups tried to clear their image especially among the Malays. But their act is not convincing. Terrorism can happen here anytime, if the people do not give their full support to the government of the day to paralyze their movement in whatever way.")

The negative portrayal of PAS was reinforced in the news report a week later (September 22 2001) when PAS was associated to the Talebans, the ruling Islamic extremist leaders of Afghanistan:

*"Maka apa-apa kenyataan yang dikeluarkan oleh pemimpin PAS dalam soal tindakan keganasan yang paling dahsyat di Amerika, tetap menimbulkan keraguan di kalangan rakyat negara. Ini sama sahaja seperti pemimpin-pemimpin pelampau Islam menafikan bahawa mereka terlibat dalam serangan di Amerika.*

*Perlu disebutkan pemimpin pembangkang-pembangkang negara ini dari semasa ke semasa terlibat dengan gerakan asing untuk menentang kepimpinan negara dari dalam."*

(Translation: "Thus, whatever statements made by PAS leaders on the issue of terrorist acts of the highest order in US, will raise doubts among the people of this country. This

is the same as extreme Islamic leaders who denied that they are involved in the attacks in the US.

It is necessary to say that the opposition leaders in this country from time to time will be involved in a foreign movement to go up against the country's leadership from within."

To further support its allegations, TV1 news report quoted *Asiaweek*, the regional news magazine owned by Dow Jones, that urged PAS to renounce its intention of establishing an Islamic state which is antithetical to the secularism practiced by the DAP, its strongest partner in the Alternative Front:

*"Majalah Asiaweek dalam keluaran terbaru menyatakan parti tersebut patut melupakan hasratnya untuk mewujudkan negara Islam di negara Malaysia, kerana apa yang diimpikan oleh PAS membawa unsur sistem pemerintahan Taleban di Afghanistan, yang sekaligus bertentangan dengan semangat sekularisme yang diamalkan oleh DAP, iaitu sekutu kuat PAS dalam kerjasama pembangkang. Di samping menyatakan dasar-dasar perjuangan PAS sebagai konservatif, majalah Asiaweek juga menyuarakan kebimbangannya di atas PAS meneruskan dasarnya yang melampau.*

*Majalah Asiaweek bagaimanapun menyarankan supaya DAP terus bersama PAS dan rakan-rakan lain sebagai usaha mengimbangi kuasa Barisan Nasional. Majalah itu berkata pandangan sempit PAS terhadap agama Islam dan wujud pengaruh Taleban di kalangan ahli parti itu adalah bertentangan sama sekali dengan semangat sekularisme yang dipaparkan oleh DAP. Katanya DAP ada mempunyai tanggungjawab untuk mengawal kecenderungan melampau PAS dan PAS mestilah memberi perhatian kepada rakan-rakannya dan membuang agenda Islam. Kedua-dua parti haruslah menerima hakikat bahawa tidak ada sokongan dari semua kaum, malah dasar melampau akan menghalang perniagaan tempatan dan pemodal asing – dasar yang amat bahaya, kata majalah Asiaweek."*

(Translation: "*Asiaweek* in its latest edition said that the party should forget its intention of establishing an Islamic state in Malaysia, since what is dreamt by PAS brings the element of the Taleban administrative system in Afghanistan, which is at once against the spirit of secularism that was practiced by DAP, PAS' biggest ally in the opposition front. Apart from stating that the basis of the PAS as conservative, *Asiaweek* also voiced its concern that PAS will continue with its extremist policy.

However, *Asiaweek* urged that DAP to continue to be with PAS and its other allies so as to serve as check and balance to the National Front. The newsmagazine said that PAS limited perspective towards Islam and the existence of Taleban influence among its members is against the spirit of secularism shown by DAP. It said that DAP has a responsibility to control PAS' extremist tendency and PAS must listen to its allies and discard its Islamic agenda. Both parties should accept the fact that there is no support from all races, in fact an extremist policy will hamper local businessmen and foreign investors – an extremely dangerous policy, said *Asiaweek*.)

TV3, on the other hand, did not link the terrorist attack to the Opposition Parties nor did it exploit the event to give a negative portrayal of both PAS and DAP.

## **Discussion of Analysis**

Based on the two weeks' analysis of the news presentation on the September Incident, it is clear that TV1 is used as a vehicle for the government's retaliation against the diplomatic blunder of the former US administration and the ruling party's campaign against the Opposition parties, particularly PAS. Although TV3, as a quasi private commercial station, attempted a semblance of objectivity and neutrality in its news presentation of the Incident, it nevertheless invited local experts to give their opinions in condemning the US in other segments.

It would be incomplete, however, to discuss the interpretation of the types of dominant discourses in the analysis of news presentation of the Incident without taking into consideration the political context at the time the event occurred. At that particular moment, Barisan Nasional was challenged by PAS in the two-way contest for the Indera Kayangan seat. The Incident then served as one of the means to put its challenger in a negative light. TV1, as the primary government television station, had to play its role as part of the ruling party's machinery in its campaign for the by-election.

The practice of using the government (and quasi-private) broadcast stations as well as the mainstream media as part of the ruling party's machinery in election campaigns has been well documented by both foreign and local academics (Ubonrat, 1990; Mustafa Kamal Anuar, 1993). So is the Asian/Malaysian media practice of 'Westoxification' or 'demonising the West' (Yao Sou Chew, 1995).

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this paper is an attempt at revealing the 'Ideological Constructions' via a semiotics or textual/discourse analysis of the presentation of news about the West by the Malaysian media, TV1 and TV3 in particular. This 'ideological constructions' by the dominant political group, which controls the two national television stations, represented the image of the US and the Opposition parties from its vantage point. However, one can also detect the contradiction of ideological forms of the text or discourse via 'ideological complexes' when the government channel defended Islam as a religion of peace while it simultaneously attacked PAS for its Islamic state agenda.

The workings of 'ideological construction' can also be traced to the 'inter-textual' relations between television news and other media texts to other events that occurred at that particular moment in time or in the past. Examples of these are (1) Al Gore's speech that supported 'People Power' and 'Reformasi' in 1998, (2) PAS' alleged link to the Talebans via its spiritual leader's son's alleged connections with the extremist Islamic group, and (3) the 'concern' that the local university students' are becoming more 'militant' by expressing independent viewpoints about national issues.

However, in its attempt to sustain power and solidarity via news representation about the West and the Opposition parties, the Barisan Nasional may in fact alienate the audiences by adopting a paternalistic approach to informing and persuading the people to accept its perspective. With the rise of the educated middle class and the advent of new communication and media technologies, such as the Internet, the local audience can easily avail themselves to alternative local and foreign news and information sources.

This was what happened following the sacking of the ex-Deputy Prime Minister when even housewives have access to printouts about the event from the Internet. And the result is the proliferation of alternative news web-sites such as 'Laman Reformasi', *harakah.com* and *malaysiakini.com* at the expense of the circulation/readership and audience ratings of 'mainstream' newspapers and broadcast stations. Both TV1 and TV3, which have the Malay viewers as the bulk of their audience (73% and 61% respectively) (Media Index 2001), should adopt a more neutral and objective representation of the 'reality', even that of their opponents. Furthermore, according to theories on audience response, not all readers, listeners or viewers subscribe to the dominant reading of media texts. There are 'negotiated' and 'oppositional' readings as well.

If communication scholars in both the developed and developing countries had long berated the Western news agencies and broadcast networks for their biased reporting about the East (Dahlgren and Chakrapani, 1988, 45-65), then the mainstream media in Asia is equally biased in its reporting about the West as shown by this analysis.

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