

# **Geopolitical discourses of the Bush administration after 9/11**

**A critical analysis of the attacks of  
September 11th 2001  
and the War on Terrorism**



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Master Thesis Human Geography  
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Supervision: Dr. Henk van Houtum**

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"Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror. The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge structures collapsing, have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness and a quiet, unyielding anger.

George W. Bush

"The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum - even encourage the more critical and dissident views. That gives people the sense that there's free thinking going on, while all the time the presuppositions of the system are being reinforced by the limits put on the range of the debate."

Noam Chomsky

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## Executive Summary

In the direct aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 attacks, President George W. Bush announced his intention to begin a 'War on Terrorism', a protracted struggle against terrorists and the states that aid them with the officially stated goal of ending worldwide terrorism by stopping terrorist groups and ending state sponsorship of terrorism. This campaign has become a central part of U.S. foreign and domestic policy and has had far reaching political and geographical implications. One of the most important geographical implications that we have seen in the past couple of years is the United States' invasion in Afghanistan and Iraq and the increasing U.S. military presence in Central Asia as a consequence of the war on terrorism.

It can be argued that the 9/11 attacks and the resulting discourse of war and retaliation provided the U.S. a justification for waging a global war without borders. After the U.S. military initially invaded and reshaped Afghanistan, it soon focused on Iraq and established a large military presence in the region. Today, the U.S. government continues to use 9/11 as a justification for their foreign policy. Listening to president Bush' speeches about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the struggle to bring freedom and democracy to the Middle-East and the nuclear threats of Iran and North Korea proves that the political and geographical relevance of 9/11 has strengthened rather than diminished. It is therefore without question that the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 and the resulting geopolitical consequences represent a major geopolitical transition.

However, if we look further than just the official rhetoric of the Bush administration and the mass media in the aftermath of 9/11 for reasons to be strongly involved in the Middle-East, we must seriously question if there is more at stake than just meets the eye. We must seriously question the underlying reasons and discourses for the legitimations for the war in Iraq and continuing U.S. military dominance. To take a deeper look into these issues the following research questions have been formulated:

- How has (critical) geopolitics evolved over the last decades and what is the contemporary importance of studying world politics through a "critical geopolitical" perspective?

- How are discourses and meanings of 9/11 created, how can we distinguish between different geopolitical discourses within texts and / or speeches, and how can Critical Discourse Analysis be used as a method to uncover and deconstruct these discourses?
- What was the official discourse explaining 9/11 ? The Threat of Weapons of Mass destruction and the careful build-up of the discourse

Finally, to combine both the theoretical and methodological framework in one summarizing question, in the conclusion the final research question has been answered:

- How can critical geopolitics and an investigation in official and contested “un”official discourses help us gain a wider understanding of the war on terrorism and the United States’ involvement in the Middle-East?

(Critical) geopolitics has always been understood and used in a variety of ways and is therefore deeply controversial. The term has been used to refer to many things, including a tradition of representing space, states and the relations between them. It has also been used to emphasize the strategic importance of particular places and political geographers typically invoke the term with reference to the geographical assumptions and understandings that influence world politics. Recently, there has been a major shift within contemporary political geography. One of the most important arguments is that understanding current world politics has to be understood on a fundamentally interpretative basis rather than on a series of divine ‘truths’ such as the fundamental decision of global politics between land and sea powers. The new, constructionist awareness in the postmodern political geography (according to Reuber, 2000) has led to a new perspective on how to conduct geopolitical research. The main focus is on the central point that any person’s view of the world is a subjective concept. The constructionist concepts that deconstruct geographical discourses have also had its influence for the debates and research within Critical Geopolitics. Critical geopolitics is basically an alternative way of conceptualizing geopolitics. It takes ‘a step back’ and views events through a somewhat different lens. This allows critical geopoliticians to see underlying or hidden reasons for policies and actions. In effect, it breaks down the traditional way of examining state actions and attempts to uncover the power interests behind the scenes.

One of the main contributors to the field of critical geopolitics, Gearóid Ó Tuathail, has suggested that popular sources of information that represent and construct knowledge about the

world have become increasingly important topics of geographical research. From these theoretical points of view I draw the conclusion that, in order to try to comprehend important political, economical and geographical world events, one must not only critically examine the official reactions by states governments or mass circulated documents in the media, but more importantly: take a step back, do not take all provided information for granted, apply your own interpretations and do your own research!

As for the methodological framework: The primary data used in this research consists of texts, whereby the main focus is on geopolitical discourses in these texts. Social Constructivism and Post-structuralism are philosophical approaches that help us explain how meanings are created in these texts. The method of discourse analysis challenges us to move from seeing language as abstract to seeing our words as having meaning in a particular historical, social, and political condition. By analyzing the various discourses through the method of Discourse Analysis, one engages in the process of deconstructing images or texts that are constructed as “real, truthful or natural through particular regimes of truth” (Rose, 2001). It is thereby not the quantity of the material that is important for the analysis, but quality. Most important is to gain knowledge and understanding of how particular discourses get their persuasive character.

The research method that has been used in this thesis is based on the Qualitative Data Analysis of Dey (1993). Categorizing is a crucial element in the process of analysis. According to Dey, three steps are crucial for good qualitative research:

- 1) Finding a focus, managing data, reading and annotating
- 2) Categorizing data, Linking data, Connecting categories
- 3) Corroborating evidence, producing an account

The focus of my empirical research is on discourses in key speeches delivered by George W. Bush in the period of September 11<sup>th</sup> until approximately two years later. These speeches have been thoroughly read and I have made many annotations (1). The data has been categorized in different discourses, whereby data is linked through overlapping meanings found in the speeches (2). Eventually, I have produced an account of my findings in a table with an overview of the different discourses found in my empirical research with key features of these discourses (3):

Discourse	Key features
War and Terrorism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The attacks of 9/11 were not just acts of terror but acts of war</li> <li>• The main intention of the terrorists is to frighten the American people</li> <li>• The only considerable option to respond to the attacks is with a global war on terrorism</li> <li>• This war will be a fought on a global scale and will probably be a lengthy one</li> <li>• Afghanistan and the Taliban regime are the first targets in this war</li> </ul>
Hero (Bush) vs. Villain (Osama Bin Laden)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The world is divided in two camps, with Bush as the elected leader “good”, and Bin Laden the self-appointed “evil” enemy of the terrorist</li> <li>• The cause of Bush is a just one to bring peace, were the cause of Bin Laden is to kill all Americans and declare war on the world.</li> </ul>
“Us” (all that is good) vs “Them” (all that is evil)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The “us” is the innocent victim of devastation caused by “them” as the evil perpetrators of violence and destruction</li> <li>• The “us” is identified as the courageous and brave, whereas “them” can be identified as cowardice and evil</li> <li>• The “us” is identifiable and relatable, the “them” is impersonal and objectified</li> </ul>
Historical and Biblical References	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usage of Christianity and God for legitimation of the just cause</li> <li>• Silicing critics by labeling them as un-American.</li> </ul>
The Clash of Civilizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinguishing between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Muslims</li> <li>• Warning for the global motives of Al Qaeda: to destroy the Western world and Western values like freedom and democracy</li> <li>• They hate us, they are morally inferior to us, they share immoral values amongst each other.</li> </ul>
The Coalition of the willing vs. Terrorist states	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North Korea, Iraq and Iran are part of an ‘Axis of Evil’ that is part of the war on terrorism</li> <li>• Escalating rhetoric allows expanding the war on terrorism</li> </ul>

In answering my research questions I can say that, as my empirical research has shown, critical geopolitics is not limited to uncovering or deconstructing speeches or texts in just one or two discourses. It is much more difficult than that, but therefore also more challenging. And with the help of a Critical Discourse Analysis, by grouping discourse research in different categories (Keller, 2004) and using an interdisciplinary approach to that focuses on the ways social and political domination is reproduced by text and talk, we can conduct interesting and successful research. Furthermore, the binary opposition created by the Bush administration is a very simplified perspective on how the world actually works, it does however show us that the Bush government in its response to the attacks of 9/11 deliberately tried to capture the moment and define the discussion in a simplistic “us” vs. “them” perspective in order to legitimize his policy. As there was hardly any critical discussion of how the U.S. would have to define the new world that had been created after the attacks and what its new role should be, not from the media nor from the academic world, Bush was (at least in the first few years after 9/11) highly successful in getting his policies on Afghanistan and Iraq legitimized. In retrospect we can conclude that maybe other, less destructive options to globally conquer international terrorism would have been possible, if only we would have adapted a critical geopolitical perspective from the start.

## Acknowledgments

When I started out this research project over two years ago, I had not foreseen that it would take me this much time to successfully finish it, nor did I have any intention to. It all began with an informal conversation in 2005 with my professor, Prof. dr. Huib Ernste, about the current geopolitical relevance of the September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 attacks. Thanks to his broad research network, Prof. Ernste brought me into contact with some senior researchers from the Institut für Geographie at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster in Germany (IFG), where they had just started a German project titled “*Der Anschlag von New York und der Krieg gegen Afghanistan in den Medien – Eine Analyse der geopolitischen Diskurse*”. Luckily for me, I was able to participate in the project and was invited to do an internship at the IFG from February until June 2005. After successfully completing this internship in Münster, I returned home for a well deserved vacation and with the intention to finish my thesis before the end of the year. However, when I was appointed as a student assistant for the Department of Human Geography in Nijmegen, I soon got so much work to do that I all about “forgot” that I still had a thesis to write. One and a half year later (!) I finally decided that it was time to wrap things up, so I stopped working at the Department of Human Geography and finally got to write my thesis. A little late, but nonetheless, it is now finally done.

I would like to thank the following persons who in some way contributed to the successful completion of my thesis: Prof. dr. Huib Ernste and Drs. Hans de Weert for setting up my initial research and helping me to an internship in Münster; Prof. dr. Paul Reuber and Dr. Anke Struver from the Institut für Geographie; Dr. Henk van Houtum for his critical and supportive comments during the final stages of my writings; and last but not least my parents and girlfriend for always being supportive, even though they must have doubted sometimes if I would be able to finish this thesis before the end of this decade...

Vincent Graauwmans, Nijmegen, August 2007



## List of images and figures

- Figure 1. Terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre
- Figure 2. U.S. Military Troops and Bases around the World
- Figure 3. Front page of New York Times on 12 September 2001
- Figure 4. Rudolf Kjellen
- Figure 5. America under attack CNN banner
- Figure 6. President Bush' speech to the nation on 9/11/2001
- Figure 7. Famous photograph of George W. Bush before his "Mission Accomplished" speech on May 1st 2003
- Figure 8. Osama Bin Laden portrayed with demonstrating followers
- Figure 9. Samuel Huntington
- Figure 10. The Axis of Evil

# Index

Executive Summary	3
Acknowledgments	8
List of images and figures	9
Index	10
1. Introduction and Research Design	11
1.1 Introduction	11
1.2 Research Design	15
1.3 Theoretical Background	17
1.4 Reason for the research and scientific relevance	19
1.5 Problem definition and Research questions	20
2. Theoretical Framework	23
2.1 Introduction	23
2.2 The origins of geopolitics	23
2.3 Critical geopolitics and the representation of space	25
2.4 Recent developments and the current debate after 9/11	28
2.5 Conclusion	29
3. Methodological framework	30
3.1 Introduction of the methodological framework	30
3.2 Social Constructivism, Post-structuralism and the creation of meanings	30
3.3 A Brief clarification of this methodological concept	33
3.4 Explanation of discourse analysis	35
3.5 Critical Discourse analysis (CDA)	36
3.6 Framework for the discourse analysis on Bush' speeches on 9/11	37
4. Analysis: Bush rhetorical response to 9/11	40
4.1 Introduction	40
4.2 The academic debate: 9/11 in national and global context	41
4.3 The initial framing of September 11th, 2001: "Evil" Terrorism and War	42
4.4 The Bush administration discourse of Terrorism and War	44
4.5 The personification of the hero and villain: Bush vs. Bin Laden	47
4.6 Framing the discourse in "Good Us" vs "Evil them"	49
4.7 Religion and biblical references in the rhetoric: Our God vs. Their God	51
4.8 Samuel Huntington and the Clash of Civilization	52
4.9 The Coalition of the willing vs. Terrorist states	53
4.10 Summarizing the six discourses	54
4.11 Alternative discourses	55
4.12 Conclusion	56
5. Conclusion	58
5.1 Introduction	58
5.2 Critical Geopolitics, discourses and interpretations	58
5.3 George Bush framing of the September 11th attacks	59
5.4 Some final remarks	60
Bibliography	61

# 1. Introduction and Research Design

## 1.1 Introduction

"September 11 shocked many Americans into an awareness that they had better pay much closer attention to what the US government does in the world and how it is perceived"

Noam Chomsky

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 two airplanes crashed into the World Trade Centre and for the first time in history, people around the world witnessed the sudden, total destruction of two significant buildings in a modern urban city center. Millions of people watched the events unfolding on television and some of the most defining images and statements of the twenty-first century were created. On television, on the Internet and in newspapers appeared thousands of images of the planes hitting the towers, the towers collapsing, Al-Qaeda training camps, Osama Bin Laden, groups of Muslims praying at a mosque, maps of the Middle-East and many more images that tried to explain, interpret and give meaning to these historic events.



Figure 1. Terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre  
(Source: <http://www.911digitalarchive.com>)

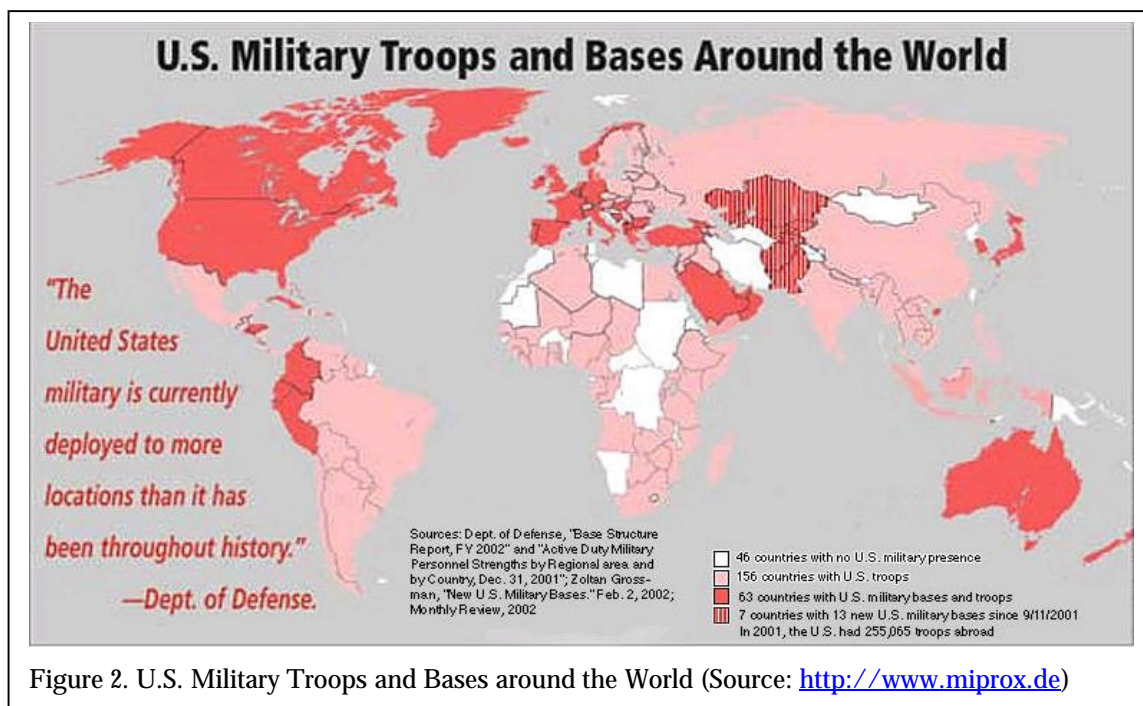
The terrorist attacks on '9/11' were unprecedented in terms of their scale, the geographical reach and the extreme impact of the deliberate targeting of non-combatant civilians by a non-state enemy. The event triggered massive coverage in the Western news media (especially in the United States) with hundreds of stories highlighting the grief, suffering and shock of the victims and their relatives, condemnation by the Bush administration and public officials, speculation about the underlying causes

and possible consequences of the events of 9/11.

In the direct aftermath of these catastrophic events, President George W. Bush announced his intention to begin a 'War on Terrorism', a protracted struggle against terrorists and the states that aid them with the officially stated goal of ending worldwide terrorism by stopping terrorist

groups and ending state sponsorship of terrorism. Leaders from other countries (Great-Britain, The Netherlands) also made it clear that the U.S. and their allies were now obliged to fight 'terrorist states' and the states that harbor them. Led by the U.S., the world became divided in a 'Coalition of the Willing' (states who support the U.S. in their global war on terrorism) and an 'Axis of Evil', a group of 'rogue states' (Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya, Cuba, North-Korea) who 'harbor terrorists'. This campaign has become a central part of U.S. foreign and domestic policy and has had far reaching political and geographical implications. One of the most important geographical implications that we have seen in the past couple of years is America's invasion in Afghanistan and Iraq and the increasing U.S. military presence in Central Asia as a consequence of the war on terrorism.

Now, more than five years after the beginning of the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq as part of the War on Terrorism, it can be argued that the 9/11 attacks have had both large geopolitical and rhetorical impact on world politics. The resulting discourse of war and retaliation after September 11<sup>th</sup> provided the U.S. a justification for waging a global war without borders against terrorists. After the U.S. military initially invaded and reshaped Afghanistan, it soon focused on Iraq and established a large military presence in the region. Today, the U.S. government continues to use 9/11 as a justification for their foreign policy. Not only has the U.S. now established military bases in Afghanistan and Iraq, it has also established military relationship with countries like Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and a growing military and economic relationship with Kazakhstan.



Also, listening to president Bush' speeches about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the struggle to bring freedom and democracy to the Middle-East and the nuclear threats of Iran and North Korea proves that the political and geographical relevance of 9/11 has strengthened rather than diminished. It is therefore without question that the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 and the resulting geopolitical consequences represent a major geopolitical transition. Looking back in retrospect, it can be argued that the 9/11 attacks put geopolitics back on the map as one of the most important themes of discussion in the twenty-first century.

However, if we look further than just the official rhetoric of the Bush administration and the mass media in the aftermath of 9/11 for reasons to be strongly involved in the Middle-East, we must seriously question if there is more at stake than just meets the eye. One of the most important question political geographers nowadays are dealing with is if the involvement of the U.S. in the Middle-East can be explained not only by rhetorical statements like "spreading democracy in the region", "bringing the terrorist to justice" and "providing stability for a safer world", but by alternative reasons for historical and contemporary U.S. interest in that specific region. We must therefore seriously question the underlying reasons and discourses for the legitimations for the war in Iraq and continuing U.S. military dominance, but even more so focus on how the "myth" of 9/11 has been created and how the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq have been legitimized in public discourse. The visual spectacle of the collapsing World Trade Centre, the mass destruction of the financial heart of New York and the thousands of civilian casualties that were to be mourned are terrible facts that can't be denied. There is no denial from my side that the 9/11 attacks were indeed one of the most horrible and catastrophic attacks in modern history, shattering the hopes and dreams of tens of thousands of people in just a few hours. What can be questioned in this whole matter is how the 'victim' of these brutal attacks, the United States of America', positioned itself in the aftermath and how the rhetorical representation of what actually happened could lead to such a annihilative response as the one we have seen in the last five years. I want to make it clear that the focus of my story lies not in the denying of the suffering that has been done on the United States or overestimating the importance of this event, but on the geopolitical strategies by the U.S. Government and the media to construct a specific, rather one-sided reality of 9/11 that would be used to legitimize the global retaliation mission that still shapes today's world.

Both government and contemporary media culture, where global, regional and even local events are covered 24 hours a day by the globalized media, images and other forms of representation of world politics are profoundly important in shaping patterns and responses to world political

events. Only a few days after the world-wide mourning around the victims of the terror attack on New York the events were already used in politics and media in order to develop the rhetoric of new binary geopolitics. As many scholars have noticed, numerous parallels were drawn between September 11 and the Second World War. Politicians and media repeatedly compared the shock of September 11 to that of Pearl Harbor (Postel-Vinay, 2005). Others regard the war on terror as a new Cold War, not against communism, but against terrorism. What is clear is that the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the resulting War on Terror is increasingly regarded as the new ordering principle of international relations, or as it is called, a new grand geopolitical narrative. It has become one of the dominating geopolitical discourses and principal explanations to explain current international situations. The expression is still widely used by the media and politicians to understand and interpret important world affairs from an 'objective' perspective, such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, global policy changes in the light of dealing with new kinds of 'security threats' and preemptive state strategies to fight terrorism.

In this light it is clear that hardly any event of the last decades has put out the power and dependence on discourses more clearly than the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. And it is precisely here where lies the main challenge for the critical, post-modern political geographer. Not only must we be aware of the fact that popular culture and its conventions are more and more contributing to the context in which our ideas about people and places are framed and interpreted, we also need to investigate how various sources construct these particular interpretations of events, places or processes.

In this thesis, I have set out to learn more about popular and critical geopolitics and the representations of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. I am mainly interested in the representation of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks as given to us by the U.S. government administration, mostly in the personification of president George W. Bush and his speeches, since the U.S. is, as some have called it, the last remaining superpower on earth. I chose to do so by a theoretical framework that is centered around the concept of critical geopolitics, poststructuralism and social constructivism. For the methodological part of this thesis I will use the method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze various speeches, transcripts and other important texts that were communicated by the Bush regime in the aftermath of 9/11. In the next part, I shall introduce several elaborations on these key concepts and then specify my main research questions. Moreover, I shall argue why the present research is of both scientific and societal importance.

## 1.2 Research Design

In the fields of geography, questions of how to read, interpret and understand space have always been fundamental for the study of phenomena on and around the surface of the earth. It is in space that we construct memories and identities, understandings and meanings, both individually and as members of collective entities that have far reaching consequences and effects on our daily spatial understandings, practices and behaviors. In this context, 'spatial' can be applied to very different concepts: it is not only physical space that is important, but also cultural space, economical space, experiential space or social space. Space is regarded as an ordering principle for human action.

Looking at the daily world headlines in the mass media in the days following 9/11 taught us that space and the conflicts resulting from claims on particular parts of that space, are issues that are

becoming more and more the center of attention in our contemporary society.

Within the study of Human Geography, it is commonly understood that the way man and society deal with these conflicts, limitations and claiming of available spaces are issues of growing importance. Amongst scholars in geography, it is commonly accepted that spaces are shrinking and defining the world becomes more and more important, especially in the context of interpreting and reading the world. According to Agnew (2003): 'The world is actively 'spatialized,' divided up, labeled, sorted out into a hierarchy of places of greater or lesser 'importance' by political geographers, other academics and political leaders. This process provides the geographical framing within which political elites and mass publics



Figure 3. Front page of NY Times on 12 September 2001  
(Source: <http://911research.com>)

act in the world in pursuit of their own identities and interests' (Agnew, 2003: p.3).



With that in mind, for researchers in Human Geography interested in media representations and the construction of spatial meanings, the (written) press is an important subject because it is, as said, a powerful shaper of public perceptions. It is commonly known that representations in the media are not neutral or objective, because media as organizations and institutions are not independent and journalists are neither impartial, nor autonomous observers. According to Foucault (1973), representations are forms of discursive practices, presupposing 'the truth', but in fact, they are not neutral or 'original'. Foucault argued that all representations are socially constructed. Nevertheless, it is often assumed that what is presented as news is factual.

Linking this to the media reports of 9/11 and the building of the war on terror discourse, it is, according to the critical geopolitics school, arguable that it are precisely these media that in the last few decades have gained importance for the understanding of our world. Nowadays, by reporting on a daily basis about current geographical developments, media messages contribute, construct and give meaning to events and thereby to the very concept of space. Giving meaning to spatial events has become a deeply controversial issue. Media (television, the Internet, radio, magazines, and newspapers) have in the last decades more and more become the source for individuals and groups to acquire knowledge of their environments. More than that, this knowledge shapes their attitudes and behaviors and creates meanings and representations of their worlds. Despite being a relatively recent development, the mass media play a crucial role in forming and reflecting public opinion. It communicates the world to individuals, and it (re)produces modern society's self-image. To put it differently: through their (textual) representation, media construct spatial meanings.

This is why the mass media play a vital role in the (textual) production of meanings and realities surrounding events and situations. Through the selective allocation of attention and the use of framing mechanisms the media influence audience perceptions, hence constructing their perceptions and conceptions of their spatial surroundings. But however, as Garth Myers (Department of Geography, University of Kansas), Thomas Klak and Timothy Koehl (both of the Department of Geography, Miami University) have pointed out, besides a few critical geopolitical studies (Dodds, 1993; Sharp, 1993) little research has been done in the analysis of representations of spaces and places in specific media like newspapers and magazines (Myers, Klak & Koehl, 1996). In a time where it is often claimed that media images have replaced reality to the extent that objective truth about any human experience has become an impossibility, I believe that it is time for a critical, geographical study of the attacks on the United States on September 11<sup>th</sup> and the construction of the 'war on terror' discourse.



“The mass media force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figures. They are constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about.”

Lang & Lang (1966), *The Mass Media and Voting*

### 1.3 Theoretical background

Although reports in the media and political statements on the war on terror may intend to be objective in their reporting, today more than ever, there is a general understanding in contemporary media as well as in geopolitical literacy that all media are constructed rather than reflective (Pungente, 1989; Johnston e.a., 2000; Ó Tuathail, 1996). The war on terror that media and politicians have adopted as their main point of view to explain the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the resulting global consequences therefore do not present simple reflections of reality. Rather, they present carefully crafted constructions that reflect many decisions and result from many determining factors. Thus, to understand the significance of the war on terror first of all is to understand that ‘the war on terror’ is a socially constructed perspective to read and interpret geopolitical space.

And now, more than five years after the September 11 attacks on the U.S., we are just beginning to understand the historical context of these events. Even now, a lot of important questions remain to be asked. For instance, how did the aftermath of the events that happened on 9/11 has come to be known as the war on terror? How did war on terror emerge from an initial response to 9/11 into such an important geopolitical narrative? What is the historical and political significance of 9/11? How does the war on terror discourse fit in to the new, constructionist awareness within Political geography that geographical discourses can be instrumentalized for (geo)political purposes (Reuber, 2000). And even more importantly is the question how the official discourse explaining 9/11 has been created, shaped, interpreted and constructed by the Bush regime.

The focus in this thesis is on the various discourses created to explain 9/11 to the public. But it is not only important to investigate how these discourses are created, but also how and to what extent they are conveyed to the general public. This however is far beyond the scope of this research, but I do want to elaborate a little on this issue. Starting on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, there was an extraordinary effort made by U.S. newspapers to publish special editions on 9/11. Only a few hours after the WTC had collapsed extra newspapers were printed with many pictures and

editorials in which the events were described in terms of 'terror', 'attacks' and 'war'. And although especially in the U.S. people tend to turn to cable networks such as CNN, MSNBC and Fox News Channel for their daily news, cable is not the only source Americans are relying upon. Statistics show that overall, cable is the top source of news for all Americans (53%), regardless of age, gender, race, or other characteristics. Newspapers are rated second, with about one-in-three Americans saying they get most of their news this way. Different researches (Achugar (2004), Kellner (2003)) show that newspapers not only remain important media sources where people get their information from, but also remain important in the framing of news. This is a crucial first understanding, as frames are ideas or concepts used to make sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue.

It is arguable that the contemporary mass media played a crucial role in constructing meanings about the events that happened on September 11<sup>th</sup> that legitimised the political and military responses made by the U.S. government. When on 9/11 airplanes crashed into the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, all media immediately took notice and started reporting on these events. In the days following, many different views were given about what exactly happened on 9/11 and how to contextualize this, the identities and origins of the perpetrators and the expected global consequences. Already connections were established between the hijackers of the planes, radical Islamists, Bin Laden, Taliban and terrorist-cells in Afghanistan. Politicians and journalists, in line with the official statements made by the Bush administration, used a lot of geopolitical rhetoric, metaphors and symbols to construct an image of the enemy responsible for the horrible events of 9/11. Political correctness became a forgotten term, for all kinds of experts and professionals established countries or specific ethnic groups of people responsible. There was, as others have also noted, a quick reaction from the 'mainstream media in the U.S. that framed September 11th within the context of Islam, culture and civilization' (Abrahamian, 2003, p. 529). Words like Islamic fundamentalists terrorist(s), Jihad, (Islamic) terrorist networks and guerrilla fighters regularly appeared in the newspapers. Choosing these identities for the perpetrators in U.S. media shaped public opinion in the way that opinion makers actively produced an image of 'the enemy'. But it also gave a specific spatial meaning to the events, as we were to believe that the Taliban and Bin Laden, located in Afghanistan, were behind these attacks. The media tried to convince us that Afghanistan was a dangerous country and a threat to not only the United States, but to the whole Western world.

What these media tried to do was place the events of 9/11 in a context where it was seen as a direct attack on the U.S. through a clearly defined enemy. Spatialising and nationalising these

attacks was a precondition to justify and prepare for war in Afghanistan, in the (traditional) sense of military conflict between nation-states. In the media, this “spatialisation” was accompanied with keywords such as “rogue states”, “axis of evil”, “global front of Islam”, “war between the worlds”... thereby creating a geopolitical image of the new enemy that would become defining for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A complete overview and analysis of the discourses created after 9/11 can be found in chapter four.

#### 1.4 Reason for the research and scientific relevance

There are a couple of reasons why I’m interested in conducting a geographical study to the discourses of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the resulting war on terror. First: as a student of human geographer at the Department of Human Geography in Nijmegen, I’m always engaged in the process of trying to understand the world around us from a critical perspective. As our perceptions and conceptions of spaces and places are constantly changing in a highly developing world, it is imminent to maintain this critical approach towards these developments. The events of September 11<sup>th</sup> have radically changed our world, not only in the physical sense (destruction of symbolic buildings in the U.S. and military invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq, reshifting borders, causing mass migrations), but more importantly also in the mental sense (the way we nowadays look at middle-east states, the role of the nation-state, how people in the nation-state perceive ‘foreigners’ etc.). To understand why and how we think differently about the world around us than before September 11<sup>th</sup>, it is important to acknowledge that there are relationships of power inherent in official discourse and media consumption that construct spatial images that have far reaching effects on our everyday life. I like to use this opportunity to use my geographical knowledge to deal with this issue.

Secondly, the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and its aftermath have brought renewed attention to a spatial approach of which I’ve gained very much interest in the last few years: the geopolitical discussions and the concept that space is not only perceived but, more importantly, produced by people. As a human geographer, defining and conceptualizing space is one of the key issues of my study. In the last few years, I studied dozens of scholars who’ve tried to grasp this concept and relate in to our empirical world. I’ve drawn my own conclusions that spaces are socially constructed and we have to make a clear distinction between what constitutes physical space, mental space and social space. In defining these spaces, the keyword in the definitions is always the word meaning. What is important is that meaning is a socially constructed concept. The meaning of the same physical space can be very different according to the person who gets to define the physical space.

Thirdly, this research is of scientific relevance because it adds to the ongoing discussions about the geopolitical transition after 9/11 and the role of official discourse and perceptions in the creation of representations. Especially now, more than 5 years after the United States became involved in difficult, complex wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is essential to recognize how the specific rhetorical framing of an event such as 9/11 has led to the current situation of a deeply militaristic involvement of the U.S. army in the Middle Eastern region. My purpose is to uncover how, in the direct aftermath of 9/11, Bush used his rhetorical skills to frame the event in such a way that a long lasting, globally oriented military mission seemed like the only logical and possible response to such an attack.

### 1.5 Problem definition and Research Questions

This research starts from the consideration that the U.S. government created, through the repetition of consistent messages, a very specific interpretation of the 9/11 events (a war on terrorism frame) and attempted to export it globally in order to support its own foreign policy objectives. The focus of this research lies in the analysis of speeches delivered by George W. Bush in the direct aftermath of the 9/11 attacks to the world. In these speeches, he constructed a very specific discursive interpretation of these attacks and formulated his strategies on how to respond. It is important to point out that the construction of social meaning through discourse is a dynamic and fluid process, not solely a product (Hodge and Kress, 1993; Lemke, 1995). That is why in this analysis key speeches and texts as given by president George W. Bush are being analysed that cover a short period in which this development of representations and identities is instantiated.

In this research my goal is to dismantle or deconstruct the official discourse as given by the Bush administration. I will start by briefly outlining the concept of geopolitics and elaborate on how this concept has evolved to the current critical geopolitical school of thinking. Secondly, since the focus in this thesis is on the creation of discourses I need to understand how meanings are created in the first place. I therefore must explore the theory behind the construction of meanings, focusing on the constructionist approach that claims that meaning is constructed through language. Parts of the empirical research in this thesis have been done at the Institut für Geographie at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster in Germany (IFG). There, I've cooperated in a project titled 'Der Anschlag von New York und der Krieg gegen Afghanistan in den Medien – Eine Analyse der geopolitischen Diskurse'. This project focuses on media coverage in German and

U.S. media after 9/11 with a special interest in geopolitical narratives, rhetoric and framing 9/11. The results of this empirical investigation will be partly used in chapter four.

To summarize: this paper is both an investigation into the discourses of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the war on terrorism, as well as a contribution to the ongoing discussions about how to concept geopolitics in the twenty-first century, which seems more and more to evolve around the concept of critical geopolitics. The first research question that I deal with in the following chapter is:

- How has (critical) geopolitics evolved over the last decades and what is the contemporary importance of studying world politics through a “critical geopolitical” perspective?

As the primary data used in this research consist of texts and speeches, the methodological framework of this thesis is focussed on the creation of discourses, interpretations and meanings. I have used Critical Discourse Analysis and the Qualitative Data Analysis method by Dey (1993) to analyse the empirical material. The question that will be answered in the third chapter is:

- How are discourses and meanings of 9/11 created, how can we distinguish between different geopolitical discourses within texts and / or speeches, and how can Critical Discourse Analysis be used as a method to uncover and deconstruct these discourses?

Thirdly, I have explained to find it important to deconstruct the current war on terrorism from a critical geopolitical point of view. I have therefore looked at both the official explanations for the U.S. political and militaristic response to the attacks of 9/11 by analyzing official speeches made by George Bush in the aftermath of 9/11, as well as the for alternative reasons. My third and fourth research questions are:

- What was the official discourse explaining 9/11 ? The Threat of Weapons of Mass destruction and the careful build-up of the discourse

Finally, to combine both the the theoretical and methodological framework in one summarizing question, in the conclusion I answer the question

- How can critical geopolitics and an investigation in official and contested “un”official discourses help us gain a wider understanding of the war on terrorism and the United States’ involvement in the Middle-East?

## 2. Theoretical Framework

“First learn the meaning of what you say, and then speak”  
(Epictetus, 55 AD – 135 AD)

### 2.1 Introduction

One of the first goals of my research is to give a contribution to the ongoing discussions about geopolitics in the twenty-first century by exploring how representation and interpretations in popular geopolitics contribute to these discussions. In this chapter I answer the question how (critical) geopolitics has evolved over the last decades and what is the contemporary importance of studying world politics through a “critical geopolitical” perspective. I start with a (brief) historical overview of (critical) geopolitics, before moving on to the current debates and issues of importance.

### 2.2 The origins of Geopolitics

Geopolitics is the study of the political and strategic significance of geography. Traditionally it is concerned with the study of the state, its borders and its relations with other states (Heffernan 1998, p. 61). But geopolitics has always been understood and used in a variety of ways and is therefore deeply controversial. The term has been used to refer to many things, including a tradition of representing space, states and the relations between them. It has also been used to emphasize the strategic importance of particular places and political geographers typically invoke the term with reference to the geographical assumptions and understandings that influence world politics.

The term geopolitics was introduced by the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and has developed and changed ever since.



Figure 4. Rudolf Kjellén

(Source: <http://home.swipnet.se>)

For Kjellén, the aim of the discipline was to appeal attention to the statesman and decisionmaker upon the role of the geographic characteristics in the conception of the State and the practice of statecraft. Kjellén was inspired by the German geographer Friedrich Ratzel, who published his book ‘Politische Geographie’ in 1897. After World War I, Kjellén's thoughts and the term were picked up and extended by a

number of well known scientists like Haushofer, Mackinder and Vidal De La Blache. Mackinder controversially argued that physical and human geography should be treated as a single discipline. In 1904, he formulated his famous Heartland Theory. In this doctrine he conceptualized the significance of navies (sea power) in world conflict. The Heartland theory suggested the possibility for a huge empire to be brought into existence in the Heartland, which would not need to use coastal or transoceanic transport to supply its military industrial complex, and that this empire could not be defeated by all the rest of the world coalitioned against it. With this theory, Mackinder extended the scope of geopolitical analysis for the first time in history to encompass the entire globe. According to Mackinder, the earth was divisible into two regions. The world island, comprising the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa, was the largest, most populous and richest of all possible land combinations. Along its periphery were the large insular groups of the Americas, Australia, Japan, and the British Isles. At the center of this world island lay the heartland. Protected from sea power by ice to the north and mountains and deserts to the south, the island's vast land area was threatened only by land invasion on its western border from Western Europe to Russia. According to Mackinder, effective political domination of this space by a single power had been unattainable in the past because of a lack of proper transportation. Previous invasions from east to west and vice versa were unsuccessful because of the inability to assure a continual supply of men and supplies. Mackinder believed that the introduction of the railroad as a means of transportation had removed the island's invulnerability to domination by a single power. As Eurasia began to be covered by an extensive network of railroads, there was an excellent chance that a powerful continental nation could extend its political control over the Eastern European gateway to the Eurasian landmass. This would be a prelude to that nation's bid for mastery first of the Eurasian land mass and then the entire globe:

"Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland;  
who rules the Heartland commands the world-island;  
who rules the world-island controls the world."

The Heartland Theory was enthusiastically taken up by the German Nazi regime in the 1930s, in particular by Karl Haushofer. Mackinder was always extremely critical of the German exploitation of his ideas. He was particularly worried about the interpretation of his Heartland theory by Ratzel, for whom the State was a territorial entity with two essential coordinates: the space (Raum), that included the total surface or extension, and the position (Lage), the situation of the territory in relation to other states. Ratzel and Haushofer found the Heartland theory



compatible with the desire to control the centre of Europe and to claim territories. This was indicated by the slogan “Drang nach Osten”, which would be (rather poorly) translated by me “driving force to the east”. Although the fascists took much of Ukraine in World War II, nonetheless they were defeated. Another point which Mackinder missed was that the Soviets could actually move their factories out of the Heartland. For a time it seemed as though the theory was defunct, at first because conventional air force had been falsely touted as capable of destroying industries thousands of miles from the seacoast, and shortly afterward with the appearance of nuclear weapons. Geopolitics remained important after the second world war and through the fifties, and with the coming of the Cold War, Mackinder's theory regained some plausibility when instead of war, influence upon other nations was considered. This would be projection of power in other terms.

Then in the sixties and seventies, geopolitics entered (not without a huge amount of criticism) a wide variety of disciplines and geographical regions. Work on geopolitics had always been conflicting, contradictory and confusing because of the variety of approaches brought to the historical examination of this intellectual field and contemporary analyses of world politics (O Tuathail and Dalby, 1998; Agnew, Mitchel and O Tuathail, 2003), but as more and more academics would become involved in geopolitics, the field of research became even more controversial. For decades, academics have struggled with challenges about considerations over the nature and significance of the different political connotations that are attached to geopolitics within and outside academic discourse.

In the last few decades, many authors (see for instance Taylor and Flint, 2000) have used several different models to identify the geopolitical world orders of the last centuries. Many of these analyses include the geopolitical transition during the First World War, the Second World War, the Cold War (which itself can be divided into different periods) and the fall of the Soviet-Union in 1989. Taylor and Flint (2000) argue that the period 1989 to 1991 represents a geopolitical transition, but at the same time they claim that ‘knowing that we have just experienced a transition does not particularly help us to predict what the next geopolitical order will look like. (...) We have to be honest at this time and admit that we just do not know what the distribution of power across the world will look like in the medium future (p.86).

### 2.3 Critical geopolitics and the representation of space

Before September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, there was an overall consensus that that our world was in a period of geopolitical transition, but that it was impossible to predict what consequences and outcomes this

would have for the geopolitical world of the twenty-first century. But even Taylor and Flint could not have foreseen the events that would happen on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, when the two hijacked airplanes crashed into the World Trade Center in New York, which totally collapsed and another plane flew into the Pentagon in Washington, partially destroying it. A fourth hijacked airplane crashed near Pennsylvania and altogether nearly three thousand people died that day as a result of these tragic events

For a long time before September 11th, 2001, 'traditional' geopolitics assumed that the geographical assumptions, designations and understandings of world politics were restricted either to the formal geopolitical models of well known theorists, such as Mackinder, Ratzel, Haushofer and Wallerstein, or to policy statements of national leaders and their political colleagues. Traditional geopolitics focused on the international order by making spatial maps of the earth, defining and explaining relationships between (nation)states and investigating the role of (inter)national borders.

One of the most important points of focus for geopoliticians is the representation of geographical spaces, as geopolitics provides a way of seeing the world in which a great deal of emphasis is placed on exploring and explaining the role of geographical factors. Ideas about places and populations are mobilized to construct geopolitical visions (Dijkink, 1996).

Recently, there has been a major shift within contemporary political geography. As many poststructural scholars argue, political geographers now perceive geopolitics as an intellectual terrain concerned with and influenced by the interaction of geography, knowledge, power and political and social institutions (Dodds, 2000, p.31). From a theoretical point of view, the majority of the attention that political geographers have brought to bear on discourse comes under the rubric of critical geopolitics. The study of critical geopolitics "analyzes the production, circulation and consumption of geopolitical knowledge" (Jones, Jones and Woods, 2004). It engages with official geopolitical discourses in an effort to demystify and expose their instrumental worldviews in official rhetoric, revealing the means by which colonization, hegemonic domination, and military aggression have been legitimized (Dodds, 2005). One of the most important arguments is that understanding current world politics has to be understood on a fundamentally interpretative basis rather than on a series of divine 'truths' such as the fundamental decision of global politics between land and sea powers. According to Dodds (2003, p.33) the really important task is interpreting theories of world politics rather than repeating ill-defined assumptions and understandings of politics and geography.

These ideas are all part of the poststructural and postmodern debates of the last centuries. The new, constructionist awareness in the postmodern political geography (Reuber, 2000) has led to a new perspective on how to conduct geopolitical research. According to Reuber, two research perspectives have been recently developed within political Geography:

- 1) An action-oriented concept that includes an increased awareness of place, regional diversity and differences etc. in the context of space-related conflicts
- 2) A constructionist concept that deconstructs geographical discourses, narratives and maps as strategic representations used by politicians in international politics as well as in conflicts on regional and local scale

In political geography, the constructionist approach led to the development of 'critical geopolitics' which has been concerned with deconstructing the one-sided geopolitical world views in international politics. The main focus is on the central point that any person's view of the world is a subjective concept. I will elaborate further on the poststructural debates within geography in the third chapter.

The constructionist concepts that deconstruct geographical discourses have also had its influence for the debates and research within Critical Geopolitics. Critical geopolitics is basically an alternative way of conceptualizing geopolitics. It takes 'a step back' and views events through a somewhat different lens. This allows critical geopoliticians to see underlying or hidden reasons for policies and actions. In effect, it breaks down the traditional way of examining state actions and attempts to uncover the power interests behind the scenes.

One of the main contributors to the field of critical geopolitics, Gearóid Ó Tuathail, has suggested that popular sources of information that represent and construct knowledge about the world have become increasingly important topics of geographical research. According to Ó Tuathail (1996), there exist sites of popular forms of geopolitics (for example the media, architecture, and schools). According to Popke (1993) and Sharp (1993), investigating those popular sources of information or forms of knowledge about the world has become an increasingly important topic. Sharp (1993) states that it are especially the media that gain acceptance and power because they are generally perceived as providing knowledge of the world: geopoliticians cannot ignore it (1993, p. 494)

One of the primary objectives of critical geopolitics is to challenge state-centrism. It uses discourse analysis to show that the production of geopolitical knowledge is a contested political activity. Knowledge is not objectively produced, and there can be no such thing as objectivity with regards to geopolitics. Only by examining the power structures and interests that lay behind geopolitics, it is possible to discern a somewhat different, but perhaps more accurate, post structural picture of what a state's real geopolitical interest may be.

#### 2.4 Recent developments and the current debate after 9/11

The progression made in the last few decades from traditional geopolitics to a more critical geopolitics that challenges the original strategic and military importance of traditional geopolitics, applying itself to modern discourse, has become a deeply controversial and widely discussed issue. Critical Geopolitics 'theory' however is not fixed or homogeneous, but has some core features, like texts in movies, television, newspapers, books, music, and art that can tell a lot about how people collectively and individually view what happened. And though each of these works tells something very different about the ways people have changed since September 11, they do raise a whole bunch of questions concerning how we use culture to deal with the event.

Currently, a dynamic debate is going on between different groups with each a different view on the subject, on different areas, and through different perspectives. Dominating the current discussions is a new, critical way of thinking that has emerged that highlights how popular culture and its conventions contribute to the context in which our ideas about people and places are framed and interpreted. This lies at the heart of what has been called 'popular' geopolitics (Dodds, 2005), a term that is used to signify how political and media elites often attempt to represent the world and their position in consistent and regular ways (Sharp, 2000; McFarlane and Hay, 2003).

Popular geopolitics, which is a rapidly emerging field of interest within critical geopolitics, seeks to explore how the media contribute to the representation and interpretation of global political space and associated events. It recognises that the media including newspapers on the one hand can contribute to the projection and reinforcement of particular national and / or transnational identities and ideologies, and yet on the other hand, help subvert and contest such hegemonic positions. Contemporary literature on popular and critical geopolitics (O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge, 1998) has produced a number of analyses that recognize that various media can be used to examine how different forms of communication and imagery represent the social and political world.

With the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, a new chapter was written in United States critical geopolitics, as the manner in which Americans viewed the globe and understood its borders shifted. According to Smith, the post 9/11 world-image is that of a binary, zero-sum model much like the perspective produced by the hegemonic stalemate between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. That is, American's geopolitical imagination is now largely constrained to assessing the world in terms of "us" and "them". The rhetoric and policies of the United States government of George W. Bush have advanced a sweeping shift in the manner Americans interpret and see the world. Furthermore, debate in the academic community and the geopolitical ideas marketed in American popular culture have also contributed to this change in perspective (Smith, 2000).

## 2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the various discussions and debates that are currently held in the aftermath of the attacks of 9/11 and the war on terrorism. From my literature research I can conclude that the research field of geopolitics has evolved from a study that was originally mainly interested in the functioning of the state and the claims of territory, but has evolved into a field of study that is nowadays especially interested in the construction and representations of world affairs. By deconstructing various images, stories and representational features of territories, people, borders etc. critical geopolitics is now engaged in the process of understanding the world from a constructive perspective where historical, geographical, economical and political affairs are all part of particular representations. I conclude that it has become necessary to apply a critical perspective when it comes to analysing media representations or statements made by politicians, because it is the only manner to (at least partly) try to uncover and see what is not so obvious. What a particular actor hears, sees and explains is what is 'true' for that particular actor. And although it is impossible to uncover the one and only 'truth', as it does not exist, it is of utter importance to acknowledge that there are different kinds of 'truth'.

In the next chapter, I will outline my methodological framework, which elaborates on issues dealt with in the second chapter, like poststructuralism and constructivism.

# 3. Methodological Framework

## 3.1 Introduction of the methodological framework

The primary data used in this research consists of texts, whereby the main focus is on geopolitical discourses in these texts. In this third chapter I will outline the methodological framework for analysing the speeches, interviews and other transcripts. The main goal of this chapter is to explain how meanings and discourses are created, how we can learn to distinguish different geopolitical discourses within texts and/or speeches and understand the differences between “hegemonic” geopolitical discourses and how they are contested by subversive discourses, which are used to deconstruct the hegemonic discourse.

## 3.2 Social Constructivism, Post-structuralism and the creation of meanings

All words we speak and write are used to convey a broad sense of meanings and the meaning we convey with those words is identified by our social, historical and political condition. We have to understand however that there are different accounts of theories that explain how meanings are socially constructed. The origins of research into methods of textual and methodological analysis lies in post-structuralism that emerged in France in the 1960s as a critique of structuralism. Writers like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault reacted against the analytical processes of structuralism, which believed that meaning could be derived from a text or work of art by treating it independently of its cultural context. Post-structuralism views the cultural context of a work as an inextricable element in its ability to communicate meaning. This includes the time and place in which the work was created, the individual(s) who created it, the format of the work, the audience's position in relation to the work, and the personal contexts of the audience. In essence, the meaning of a work shifts depending upon who is examining it, where and when. Basically, poststructuralism is concerned with the way a text is constructed by criticism and concerned with structuration (Peet, 2000). Peet argues that in poststructural thinking representational theories of truth at best provide perspectives from the view of particular thinkers. For poststructural philosophy the relations between reality and mind are not direct, and therefore objectively accurate, but instead are linguistically mediated and historically specific. A text is read in a reflective and self-conscious way looking at its values and motivations. Post-structuralists find in the text unconscious and unintended meanings, which may be directly contrary to the surface meaning. Poststructuralists bring to the foreground the root meanings of words and similarities in sound and affirm a texts plurality, fragment and disperse it, instead of unifying it. Poststructuralists go against their grains of what common sense is and show how a text comes to

embarrass its own ruling system of logic. Poststructuralist critics identify a unit, such as a phrase, a sentence or a couple of sentences and analyse its multiplicities of meaning making it impossible to sustain a univocal reading. Lastly, poststructuralists look for fault-lines, which are shifts and breaks in meaning hidden within a text.

According to Hall (1997), when it comes to the social construction of meanings, one has to make a distinction between three different accounts of theories: the reflective, the intentional and the constructionist approaches to representation. The reflective theory argues that language simply reflects a meaning which already exists. What is important to notice is that this theory implies the existence of meaning that already has been constructed. That leaves the subject with no other possibility than to interpret a meaning that is already there, denying him/her the possibility to subjectively construct an other meaning. The intentional theory states that language expresses only what the speaker or writer intentionally wants to say. Finally, the constructionist approach claims that meaning is constructed through language. Personally, I think it depends both on the sender and on the receiver to give meaning to a message. It is not just the medium that constructs the message, it is also the messenger that communicates it, and the subject who interprets it. I believe that this is the essential key to understanding how representations work. Both sender and receiver create meaning to a language (message). Things do not mean something by themselves, but we (sub)consciously construct meaning. Speeches, texts, articles, transcripts and so can not only represent intentionally what the writer of an article wants to say. The reader (receiver) of the message has the choice to either accept or reject the statements read in an article.

Elaborating on the constructionist approach, there are two major variants of models: the semiotic approach, influenced by De Saussure and the discursive approach, associated with the French philosopher and historian, Michel Foucault (Hall, 1997). The semiotic approach basically draws on the idea that there is a link between the forms of expression used by language (which Saussure called the signifier) and the mental concepts associated with them (the signified). The connection between these two systems of representation produces signs. Signs then produce meanings.

Hall defines representation as 'the production of the meaning through language' (Hall, 1997, p. 16). It is about how we give meaning to our world. We give objects, people and events meaning by the framework of interpretation which we bring to them, or, in which they are brought to us. One has to acknowledge that these representations in general are neither neutral nor objective. Representations are forms of discursive practices, presupposing the truth, but in fact, they are not neutral or original (Foucault, 1973)

However, representations in general are not mere carriers of information. They rather play a crucial role in producing information's' interpretations, i.e. they are constitutive of meanings (Strüver, 2004), thus creating representations. Social constructivism and post-structuralism can not be regarded as one theory, but rather as a framework for a range of theories that have developed from structuralism, mostly by radicalising structuralism. Structuralism refers to principles that rely on linguistics and linguistic philosophy: it is assumed that language does not reflect reality, but meanings are constructed through a relation of difference between signs. It was believed that social life is shaped by 'uniformed formations' as underlying structures. What I'm talking about here is part of the theory known as social constructivism, which is part of the larger concept of post-structuralism. Post-structuralism is the generic term for those theories that are critical of universal knowledge, that are concerned about social power-structures as well as subjects' positions within these power structures and that emphasise the variety of meanings. Social constructivism is the theory that assumes that knowledge is produced or fabricated, not the discovery of a pre-existent reality, meaning there are many possible knowledges. In the broad and general approach of social constructivism, the main issues of inquiry are the socially constructed meanings of things.

When talking about these socially constructed meanings or representations, one has to distinguish between two different systems of representations (Hall, 1997, p. 17). First of all, there is the system by which all sort of objects, people and events are correlated with a set of mental representations which we carry around in our heads. Thus, the meanings we create in our mind depend on the system of concepts formed in our thoughts. What is important to understand is that these concepts are not neutral and objective. Poststructuralists, like Hall but also Lacan, Althusser, Derrida and Foucault, argue that everything we perceive is already coded by our societies in the form of certain sets of beliefs and attitudes. This means that the individual mental representation is partly constructed by sociological, psychological and linguistic structures over which the individual has little control. Our society is socially constructed and the human agent is constructed and a self-constituting social subject within culture. Interpretations are context-bound and partial rather than detached and universal. Therefore, the system of concepts Hall talks about need to be understood as historically, geographically and culturally constructed. This is what Hall (1997) labels as the conceptual map; a kind of mental map that constructs meanings.

But in order to represent and exchange meanings and concepts, a conceptual map alone is not enough. We must also be able to represent or exchange meanings and concepts, and we can only



do that when we also have access to a shared language. Language is therefore the second system of representation involved in the process of constructing meaning (Hall, 1997).

### 3.3 A Brief clarification of this methodological concept

To briefly clarify this rather abstract theoretical understanding and link it to my empirical research, I'd like to take a moment to relate this theoretical approach to my own research on the geopolitical representations of 9/11. From my point of view I can relate with the arguments made by Hall as mentioned above. I will work with the assumption that all representations are socially constructed and for a great deal depend on historical, geographical, economical and cultural aspects. I'll give a short example of this, referring to the media representations of 9/11. Like most of the people I rely for a great part on broadcast media for the bulk of my international news. When I watched the unfolding events of 9/11 on Dutch television channels as well as on CNN, it where not just the images of the planes crashing into the World Trade Centre that I saw. Media representations immediately framed the events in a context of terrorism and war. For example, within an hour of the first attack on the WTC, CNN had replaced its headlines banner from 'WTC attacked' to 'America under Attack' (see also Smith, 2001).



Figure 5. America under attack CNN banner  
(Source: <http://parallelinfo.mur.at>)

So, while structuralists might argue that only fixed, empirically knowable reality exists and CNN was just representing reality, I believe that by consciously choosing headlines like the ones CNN did, this broadcast media was constructing a particular reality rather than representing it. The headline 'America under Attack' spatialised 9/11 in a national context (that is, from an America point of view of course), making me, as the receiver of the

message, believe that these terrorist attacks were indeed part of a conflict between nations. Also, the Dutch television text information system Teletext also ran the headline 'Aanval op Amerika' (Attack on America). And even though broadcast media like television are nowadays the most influential sources of information for the public, the daily press remains very important. According to a study by Bromley and Cushion (2002), the attacks on September 11 have confirmed the traditional role of newspapers to report, inform, analyze and comment, and despite TV and the internet daily newspapers remain important. Newspaper articles in general are

longer, give more and also more detailed information and are also more in depth than the average television or radio stories. Also, the accompanying pictures and images with the articles play a crucial role. The visual representation by article texts as well as the images can frame a story in a certain context. Conducting a research on media representation and the story of 9/11, Andreolle (2003) found that all the front pages of 122 American newspapers the day after 9/11 framed the event around the theme of war. She found that the terminology of description in the headlines used words like war (It's war, this means war, act of war), variations on the war theme with the use of the word attack in different forms (we're under attack, attacked!), and terminology situating the events in a larger contextual field (A New Day of Infamy (linking it to the events of Pearl Harbor in 1944) and The Longest Day (referring to WW II)) (Andreolle, 2003). Also, on the morning after the terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush said in a speech to the nation: "The deliberate and deadly attacks which were carried out yesterday against our country were more than acts of terror, they were acts of war (...) This will require our country to unite in steadfast determination and resolve (...) This will be a monumental struggle of good versus evil, and good will prevail". This carefully and consciously chosen rhetorical language used by the US government (Bush' speech) and copied by the media did the initial framing of the events of 9/11. From the first official responses to 9/11 on, the main way of dealing with the situation was of framing the events in the context of war. This is striking for two particular reasons. Firstly, an (terrorist) attack on a building or city does not necessarily lead to a war. The attack itself is not an act of war; it only becomes an act of war once it is declared as such. Secondly, the traditional definition of war involves conflict between states or nations. Even now, more than 5 years after September 11th 2001, it is still not 100% certain which nation, state or organization was behind the attacks on 9/11. Declaring the attacks as an act of war seems to be rather premature.

Despite the lack of any accepted form of evidence, the US government as well as US newspapers framed the events around the theme of war anyway. From the first moments the newspapers started representing their views on the events of 9/11, the public was told that America was at war. This also shows in different aspects of newspapers. For example, immediately after September 11, the New York Times, one of the biggest and influential newspapers in America, launched a new section entitled 'A Nation Challenged', which continued to appear for the next 4 months (Abrahamian, 2003). Hence, from the very early beginning of the attacks of 9/11 these were framed in a nationalistic context of war, of our nation vs. 'the other', where these frames were a direct product of the way in which information was portrayed through media channels. I do believe that these representations and frames have structured 9/11 in a way that has become an accepted belief that the attacks of September 11 had everything to do with a war against

America. To conclude this small methodological example (thereby also briefly hinting on some of my findings in my analysis as written out in chapter four) and returning to the main methodological issues of this chapter, I conclude this section by stating that this example confirms my understanding that frames, structures and representations that order the way we perceive the world. To find these various meanings or discourses I will apply a discourse analysis.

### 3.4 Explanation of discourse analysis

Discourse analysis challenges us to move from seeing language as abstract to seeing our words as having meaning in a particular historical, social, and political condition. According to Johnston e.a. (2000), a discourse is a specific series of representations, practices and performances through which meanings are produced, connected into networks and legitimized. Other characteristics of discourses are that they are heterogeneous, regulated, embedded, situated and performative. Geopolitical discourse refers to how the geography of the international political economy has been “written and read” in the practices of foreign and economic policies during different periods of geopolitical order. By written is meant the way geographical representations are incorporated into the practices of political elites. By read is mean the ways in which these representations are communicated (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995).

By analyzing the various discourses through the method of Discourse Analysis, one engages in the process of deconstructing images or texts that are constructed as “real, truthful or natural through particular regimes of truth” (Rose, 2001). It is thereby not the quantity of the material that is important for the analysis, but quality. Most important is to gain knowledge and understanding of how particular discourses get their persuasive character.

The institutional context is crucial for the legitimacy of a discourse. In his 1995 published book “Security Metaphors: Cold War Discourse from Containment to Common House (Conflict and Consciousness)”, Paul Chilton describes how metaphorical discourse contributed to the beginning and ending of the dangerous competition between “East” and “West”. A good example of this is how the Reagan administration, to counter the threat of Soviet expansion, talked publicly about nuclear weapons as a way to win a nuclear war. This new mode of representing nuclear weapons breached the deterrence convention, which until then was that the purpose of nuclear weapons was to avoid war, not fight a war. In response many protests were organized by peace activists fearful of nuclear destruction. The sinful nature of nuclear war was strongly condemned and activist demanded an end of the production of nuclear weapons. The Reagan administration then repaired its breach by advocating a strategic defense and considered

abolishing nuclear weapons entirely. However, although the Reagan administration was rather unsuccessful in their attempt to change the convention of nuclear weapons, this example shows that the U.S. administration tried to legitimize a discourse of nuclear war by placing it in the institutional context of the Cold War and the Soviet threat.

There are various topics of interest to discourse analysts. For instance, one could be interested in the various levels of dimensions of discourse, various genres (types) of discourse in politics, media, education. For other researches the relation between discourse and interaction or discourse and cognition or memory might be interesting. However, at present it is generally understood that discourse research can be grouped in six categories (Keller, 2004):

- (1) Ethics of discourse. Drawing on the works of Jurgen Habermas, discourse is regarded as an organised and ordered deliberative process to which a normative ethics of discourse is applied.
- (2) Discourse analysis. A master frame for the micro-orientated analysis of language in use, which is based on pragmatic linguistics and conversation analysis.
- (3) Corpus linguistics builds up enormous corpuses of text data around selected themes (such as political issues) in order to look for statistical correlations.
- (4) Critical Discourse Analysis is based in linguistics, but with slightly different discourse-theoretical elaborations; they direct discourse research to the ideological functions of language in use.
- (5) Discourse theories are designed to analyse the social macro-levels of power/knowledge relationships or the articulation of collective identities.
- (6) Culturalist discourse research could be the label for a field of research derived from three different traditions: Symbolic Interactionism (i.e. the analysis of the construction of social problems in public discourses), the investigation of language use and symbolic power, or the analysis of "circuits of representation/culture" in Cultural Studies.

Foucault's discourse theory is about the powerful ways meanings get legitimised, normalised and finally accepted as reality and social rules and thus, about the effects and consequences of these meanings for social life. Discourse as a phenomenon cannot be reduced to language in the sense of text and talk. Discourse, in Foucault's framework, is about various practices that produce, maintain and sometimes transform meanings, all of them embedded in power relations and knowledge systems, or, as Foucault calls it, power/knowledge. Discourses are those principles that structure, govern and rule a society, its organisations and institutions and their meanings and

effects on the one hand and its subjects and their meanings on the other (and the multiple relationships between organisations and subjects, of course).

Although this is rather important, it is also way beyond the scope of this particular research that focusses on the creation of discourses by a specific agent (the Bush administration) that creates meanings and context about an event (September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks) in a way to constitute the truth in a specific way (legitimation for war). For practical purposes, I will now continue with my explanation of the method of Critical Discourse Analysis that is used in this research, which focusses more on the ideological functions of language.

### 3.5 Critical Discourse analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse, which views "language as a form of social practice" (Fairclough 1995: 20) and focuses on the ways social and political domination is reproduced by text and talk. It investigates how language is used and abused in the exercise of power and the suppression of human rights (Widdowson, 1998). CDA developed within several different disciplines, both in social theory drawing from the likes of Marx, Gramsci (Hegemony), Althusser (Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses), Habermas (Rationalization), Foucault (Power-Knowledge relations) and Bourdieu (Language as a mechanism of power), as well as on linguistic theories, thereby heavily drawing on the works of Norman Fairclough. The examples above show us that CDA has an interest in theories of power and ideology, however on the other hand there is also a great deal of attention for the dialectical relationship between structure and agency. Giddens's theory of structuration is used as theoretical background to CDA's claim that linguistic communicative events can be formative for larger social processes and structures (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000, p. 452).

As is pointed out by Gunther Kress (Kress, 1990), CDA has an "overtly political agenda," which "serves to set CDA off...from other kinds of discourse analysis" and text linguistics, "as well as pragmatics and sociolinguistics." While most forms of discourse analysis "aim to provide a better understanding of socio-cultural aspects of texts," CDA "aims to provide accounts of the production, internal structure, and overall organization of texts." One crucial difference is that CDA "aims to provide a critical dimension in its theoretical and descriptive accounts of texts."

According to Keller (2004), there are a few general principles of CDA. First of all, CDA studies power in discourse and power over discourse. Language is often used for ideological or rhetorical purposes. A critical analysis is necessary to investigate the interpretation, reception and social

effects of texts. Furthermore, society and culture are dialectically related to discourse. CDA states that discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). Secondly, discourses are based on history and can only be understood in relation to their historical, spatial and political context. The analysis of texts is both interpretative and explanatory, whereby the interpretations of these texts are always dynamic and open to new contexts and interpretations. CDA tries to make interest, ideologies, rhetorical usage of language and power relations of discourses explicit. It focusses on criticism in the nexus of language, discourse, speech and social structure and tries to uncover ways in which social structure impose on discourse patterns, relations and models (Titscher, 2000).

In this research it is not only important to uncover the underlying ideological messages in the speeches by George Bush and statements made by his administration, but also to look how, by careful choice of words, the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and the war on terrorism are framed within a specific framework. To conclude this methodological chapter, I will now explain the method of data analysis that has been applied in this research.

### 3.6 Framework for the discourse analysis on Bush' speeches on 9/11

The research method that has been used in this thesis is based on the Qualitative Data Analysis of Dey (1993). For Dey, the basis for the organization and conceptualization of data is created by clustering that data. Categorizing is a crucial element in the process of analysis. According to Dey, three steps are crucial for good qualitative research:

- 4) Finding a focus, managing data, reading and annotating
- 5) Categorizing data, Linking data, Connecting categories
- 6) Corroborating evidence, producing an account

The focus of my empirical research is on discourses in key speeches delivered by George W. Bush in the period of September 11<sup>th</sup> until approximately two years later. These speeches have been thoroughly read by me and I have made many annotations (1). The data has been categorized in different discourses, whereby data is linked through overlapping meanings found in the speeches (2). Eventually, I have produced an account of my findings in a table with an overview of the different discourses found in my empirical research with key features of these discourses. The relevant quotes are highlighted in my text in chapter four, however, for clarification that has also been added to the model as is used in the fourth chapter.

Discourse	Key features	Relevant Quotes
First Discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
Second Discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
Third Discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>

## 4. Analysis: Bush rhetorical response to 9/11

### 4.1 Introduction

In this fourth chapter I present the findings of my discourse analysis of George W. Bush's administration's response to the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (as explained in the previous chapter) as a framework for analyzing his public speeches, I've found that there are several main discourses in which the Bush administration explained the terrorist attacks and crafted the authority to dominate the public interpretation of those events and the appropriate response to them. These main discourses can be grouped in the following six categories:

- 1) The Bush administration discourse of Terrorism and War
- 2) Personified "Friend and Foe-images": George W. Bush vs. Bin Laden
- 3) Framings 9/11 in the context of Islam and culture: the "Good Western We" vs. the "Evil Muslim Other"
- 4) The Historical and biblical Discourse: Legitimations for a just war: Our God vs. Theirs
- 5) Inspired by the work of Samuel Huntington: the "Clash of Civilizations" discourse
- 6) Coalition of the willing vs. the Axis of Evil

In this chapter, I will present the findings of my research according to these six main discourses. Before I present these findings, I start with a short overview of the academic debate that took place in the aftermath after 9/11 and how academic scholars have analyzed the event in both a domestic as well as a more international context. It is, as we now can see in hindsight, important to understand how scholars, political analysts and other social scientists, who are under normal circumstances able to conduct academically independent research, were strongly affected by the official U.S. government lines as well as the enormous rhetoric in the media in the direct aftermath of 9/11. As I will describe in the next paragraph, outspoken criticism on the Bush administration or the call for critical investigation into national security, foreign affairs or Middle-East policy were practically impossible. At the end of this chapter, after the presentation of my empirical analysis, I will show how the academic debate has been changed over the last few years, abandoning the original discourses and slowly progressing towards some alternative discourses.

As a short introduction to my empirical research, I start with the analysis of the initial speeches made by Bush, the first given September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2001. I will then continue, in order of discourse,



this analysis of speeches, texts and transcripts, whereby the main focus is on how the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C have come to be known as "9-11" in the American cultural imagination. By deconstructing these speeches I can uncover the underlying meanings and main discourses that are used to frame the events in a specific context. At the end of this chapter I'll summarize my findings in a table and focus on some alternative discourses and elaborate on how these subversive discourses contest the hegemonic discourse.

#### 4.2 The academic debate: 9/11 in national and global context

It has been widely cited (see for instance Montgomery: 2005) that immediately after the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, public discourse turned to war. Now, more than five years (and many wars in which the United States is involved) later, this may within hindsight seem obvious. However, if we try and recapture the process as it unfolded, it is clear that there were other discursive choices available that could have opened up other frameworks of description and other courses of action. Indeed, in its details and at the time the discursive turn to war was not smooth, obvious or inevitable. For, although war became very quickly the decisive term for articulating a public response to events, it was used tentatively at first, uncertainly and awkwardly.

In her in 2002 published book 'War of Words', professor Sandra Silberstein's of Washington University identifies a trajectory that leads from 'terror' to 'war'. It is important to notice that Silberstein identifies herself not only as an applied linguist, but also personally: "New York is my city of origin. I came of age on its streets, in its schools, in its libraries and parks (...) for me, it is important to honor the horror and loss of 9/11" (Silberstein (2002), p. xiii). This self identification is crucial for framing her examination of the language surrounding the attacks of 9/11, which she does this by giving interpretative commentary on the speeches of President Bush, from the day of the attacks up to his remarks at the national day of prayer and remembrance in the national cathedral on September 14.

Important work on the initial framing and discourses of 9/11 has also been written by Lazar and Lazar (2004) and Graham et al. (2004). The general theme that runs through these accounts, which also is the basis for my empirical research as described here in this chapter, is the construction of many discourses: a dualism between self and other, West versus East, good versus evil, 'us' versus 'the enemy', freedom/democracy versus barbarism/tyranny. The use of binary oppositions is, indeed, most likely a common feature of populist rhetoric.

Besides noting the initial framing of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks in discourses of war and revenge, other scholars have also noted how the interplay of private and public reactions to the crisis is an example of well-functioning populist politics. According to Steinert (2003), after the initial shock of the attacks the general public soon experienced a desire to mentally or physically do something to help. This was turned into identification with the new heroes who could do something: fire-fighters, steel-workers, and the politicians who presented themselves as organizers of their efforts (Steinert, 2003). Cultural norms and assumptions about family, community and masculinity were utilized by media and U.S. government for the mobilization of political attitudes of patriarchal protection, patriotism and retaliation, with the effect of creating the perfect 'populist moment' out of the situation of on the basis of needs and sentiments.

Another explanation for the framing of the crisis of September 11<sup>th</sup> resorted to Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of civilizations'. When Huntington's initial article was published in 1993 (Huntington, 1993), it was mainly criticized by the academic community. In this article, Huntington formulates the theory that people's cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. Political scientists however pointed out that international politics, even in the post-cold war world, are still made by governments, and governments pursue state and national interests, not cultural ones. But after the attacks of 9/11, Huntington was credited with forecasting the cultural and religious context in which a 9/11-type incident could emerge. The Taliban regime of Afghanistan and the terrorist organization of Al Qaeda became the first religiously and culturally inspired enemies that would, according to Huntington's argument, become representative for upcoming conflicts between the East and West. In paragraph 4.8 I describe how the Clash of Civilizations discourse was adopted by the Bush government as one of the main political explanations for the underlying motives of Al Qaeda to attack the United States.

I will now continue with my empirical analysis of George W. Bush response to the events of 9/11 and his particular geopolitical framing to legitimize his policy of war.

#### 4.3 The initial framing of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001: "Evil" Terrorism and War

President Bush's initial frame for September 11 overwhelmingly dominated the news. On Tuesday, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the day started out as a day like any other. Less than eight months before, George W. Bush was sworn in as the 43<sup>rd</sup> president of the United States and had he inherited a rather prosperous and peaceful nation, although the U.S. was, as it has always been,

involved in numerous (semi)militaristic conflicts (for instance in former Yugoslavia). This day however, that would all forever change. On the morning of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, Bush was set to take part in a reading program demonstration and address parents and teachers at Emma E. Booker Elementary School in Sarasota, Florida. While being on this visit, Bush learned about the news of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. The morning after these terrorist assaults, when it was clear that both towers of the World Trade Centre had collapsed, the Pentagon was heavily damaged and thousands of people had been injured and killed, Bush spoke in a televised speech to his nation: “The deliberate and deadly attacks which were carried out yesterday against our country were more than acts of terror, they were acts of war,” he said. “This will require our country to unite in steadfast determination and resolve. This will be a monumental struggle of good versus evil, but good will prevail.” In these remarks, and in many others that were to follow in the months after, Bush immediately defined the events of 9/11 in simple and emotional terms as an “act of war” and identified its clear cause as an “enemy” that was “evil.” These same expressions (acts of war, an evil enemy) were used many more times in the days and months following September 11<sup>th</sup> by Bush, Cheney, Powell and other government officials. In his State of the Union speech on January 29, 2002 Bush invoked the terms “evil” fully five times and “war” twelve times.



Figure 6. President Bush' speech to the nation on 9/11/2001  
(Source: <http://www.science.co.il>)

The continuing and deliberate repetition of these terms was part of the Bush administration's strategy of framing September 11 in order to unite the country behind it, what was already presented as the only, causal solution: a war against terrorism and military intervention to topple the Taliban government of Afghanistan. The administration might have identified other enemies,

chosen other ways of interpreting and responding to the attacks than a global war on terror, but the president sought immediately to close them off. Apparently, it was of vital importance to Bush and his administration to convey an unambiguous and emotionally compelling frame to the public before the first stage of war commenced. This way, when combat in Afghanistan began, it

could receive virtually unanimous assent from Congress and the media and overwhelming public approval. Reminding the public of the “evil” that had been done to the nation by an “evil” enemy helped to maintain their support. It has been mentioned that merely mentioning the word evil could cue a whole series of conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings about September 11, and thereby promote the deference to presidential authority that occurs during wartime.

#### 4.4 The Bush administration discourse of Terrorism and War

The first discourse that can be distinguished in Bush rhetorics is one of terrorism and war. Calling the post-9/11 policy a war on terrorism was (and still is) a contestable but effective framing choice. It is mainly contestable because Bush did not do what almost every president before him had done during times of war to certify the country was truly at war. In stead of calling for sacrifices from the civilian population and proposing tax increases to cover costs, Bush did the very opposite: urging Americans to consume more and asking Congress to cut taxes. Even in his first public speech to the nation after the attacks on September 12<sup>th</sup> he stated: “The functions of our government continue without interruption. Federal agencies in Washington which had to be evacuated today are reopening for essential personnel tonight, and will be open for business tomorrow. Our financial institutions remain strong, and the American economy will be open for business, as well.” With this framing strategy, Bush sought the best of both worlds politically: the advantages of heightened deference, without the disadvantages of having to alter his domestic agenda or of imposing politically unpopular costs on the average American.

In the same speech, it was also recognized that the attacks on the WTC and Pentagon could only be described in terms of terrorism and terrorists: “our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts”, that is, the main goal of these attacks was not to destroy buildings and take lives, but to send fear into the American population. Bush was fast to assure the American people that, at least according to him, the terrorists had not succeeded in this attempt: “These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed. Our country is strong. A great people has been moved to defend a great nation. Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve.”

Even stronger language is used in the State of the union speech on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001: “On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. Americans have known wars -- but for the past 136 years, they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941. Americans have known the casualties of war -- but not at the center of a great city on a peaceful morning. Americans have known

surprise attacks -- but never before on thousands of civilians. All of this was brought upon us in a single day -- and night fell on a different world, a world where freedom itself is under attack.” It is still remarkable to recognize how fast the discourse of war was adopted as the only explainable interpretation of 9/11. It seems there was the immediate necessity to attach the terrorists to a place, space, or state, in order to legitimize the traditional sense of war as a military conflict between nation-states. Striking is also the fact that Bush recognises the fact that “The evidence we have gathered all points to a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations known as al Qaeda” (emphasis on the word loosely), and “are recruited from their own nations and neighborhoods and brought to camps in places like Afghanistan, where they are trained in the tactics of terror.” This passage makes it clear that it is not by far assumable that Afghanistan will be the only target of military vengeance by the United States, since Al Qaeda is defined as a “loosely affiliated terrorist organization” that apparently operates in a far larger region than just Afghanistan. Still, Afghanistan is the initial and eventually only nation-state that will be punished for 9/11 in the first few months of the war on terrorism: “The leadership of al Qaeda has great influence in Afghanistan and supports the Taliban regime in controlling most of that country. In Afghanistan, we see al Qaeda's vision for the world.” Afghanistan is represented as the root of all evil and must therefore be the first target of retaliation. But in this same speech, Bush also hints that the global war on terrorism will probably not only be fought in Afghanistan, although the initial focus of attention will be placed at destroying the Taliban regime, because it is aiding and supporting Al Qaeda and thereby supplying terrorist, making the regime also responsible for what happened on 9/11. What we can now, in retrospect, regard as one of the most important statements made by Bush in that speech that would have far-reaching consequences in the years to come, is his announcement that the war on terrorism will be a global event, that will include many nations and could take many years: “Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.” This of course is a ridiculous claim to make if one realizes that terrorist groups have operated throughout the world for hundreds of years. Globally, we can identify many examples of terrorism and terrorist groups. From the extreme-left we have seen violent terrorism, like the Red Brigades who were active in Italy in the eighties, to the Rote Armee Fraktion in Germany in the sixties and seventies, the IRA which was active in Northern-Ireland for many decades or the atrocities committed by the Japanese Red Army throughout the seventies and eighties. From the extreme-right, we have witnessed many bombings by the Organisation de l'Armée Secrète in France, have we seen neofascist groups in Germany targeting foreigners, especially Turkish and Moroccan migrants, or the organisation Boeremag that is active in South Africa and wants to re-install the apartheid regime. These few examples show that it is next to impossible to claim that a war on terrorism will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been defeated.

The only plausible argument that can be given for this statement is that it was not (yet) clear exactly where the organization of Al Qaeda was located, geographically speaking. In the years to follow it would however become clear that Bush did not really intend to fight every terrorist group of global reach, but only specific, mostly Islamic terrorist groups would be focussed on by his regime.

Bush did not only hint that the war about to be fought would be a lengthy one that would be fought on a global scale, he was also quick to prepare the American public and the world that not only it would become a lengthy war, but also one that we would not be able to define in traditional conventions: "Now this war will not be like the war against Iraq a decade ago, with a decisive liberation of territory and a swift conclusion. It will not look like the air war above Kosovo two years ago, where no ground troops were used and not a single American was lost in combat. Our response involves far more than instant retaliation and isolated strikes. Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen. It may include dramatic strikes, visible on TV, and covert operations, secret even in success. We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place, until there is no refuge or no rest. And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." This famous last sentence would become known as the Bush Doctrine, seen within a perspective that by creating "peace and democracy" through preemptive war and regime change the United States creates conditions for a successful battle of global terrorism. The Bush Doctrine argues for a policy of pre-emptive war in cases where the US or its allies be threatened by terrorists or by rogue states that are engaged in the production of weapons of mass destruction. This policy of pre-emption represents a rejection of deterrence and containment as the principal foundations of U.S. foreign policy because, it is argued, terrorists cannot be deterred in the same way as states.

A final feature of the discourse of war and terrorism that is worth mentioning is Bush' active request to other "willing" nations to come to aid the United States in their war on terrorism. "We ask every nation to join us. We will ask, and we will need, the help of police forces, intelligence services, and banking systems around the world. The United States is grateful that many nations and many international organizations have already responded -- with sympathy and with support. Nations from Latin America, to Asia, to Africa, to Europe, to the Islamic world. Perhaps the NATO Charter reflects best the attitude of the world: An attack on one is an attack on all. The civilized world is rallying to America's side. They understand that if this terror goes unpunished, their own cities, their own citizens may be next. Terror, unanswered, can not only bring down buildings, it can threaten the stability of legitimate governments" In this statement it is made clear that other countries now have a choice to be part of the "civilized world", or choose side with the

terrorists. There is however little room left for an alternative path in this discourse. All nations are forced to take sides in the war and no country is left to stay neutral. This therefore indeed becomes a global war, but only because the Bush administration intentionally chooses to frame the discourse on the international community.

#### 4.5 The personification of the hero and villain: Bush vs. Bin Laden

A second discourse that is well present in all of Bush' speeches is one of Bush and Bin Laden as opposite angles in the spectrum of good and evil. If it is one thing that September 11 has produced, it is a radical estrangement and categorical division between the two rival camps. Bush outlines this point in his speech of October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2001, pressing a complex world into a tidy schema of two rival camps. The binaries of this structure of good vs. evil, hero vs. villain, threat vs. threatened are made clear: "Every nation has a choice to make. In this conflict there is no neutral ground. If any government sponsors the outlaws and killers of innocents, they have become outlaws and murderers themselves. And they will take that lonely path at their own peril" Paradoxically, by consciously placing Bin Laden and Al Qaeda, who intend to create fear amongst the American public, in the spectrum of evil, it is not Bin Laden but Bush who reaches this goal. By constantly reminding the American people of the danger, evil and commitment to destruct the American will, he emphasizes the intentions of the actor at the "evil" side of the spectrum, while his main argument should be on his own, "good" side of the spectrum.

In this short but important excerpt of his speech, Bush denounced his adversaries, not just the perpetrators of September 11, but any government associated with them, as outlaws, murderers and killers. In other passages, he calls his adversaries "barbaric criminals" who harbored "evil plans" .



Figure 7. Famous photograph of George W. Bush before his "Mission Accomplished" speech on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2003

(Source: [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca))

For the most part, however, his favored term is "terrorists," a word repeated so often in his and in common parlance that its meaning has come to seem transparent and its appropriateness self-evident.

It is also very important to notice how often Bush refers to himself as the righteous protector of the weak. Bush's is official and governmental, grounded in elections, laws and the Constitution

of a nation-state. He begins his address by alluding to the state authority vested first in his office and second in his person: "Good afternoon. On my orders the United States military has begun strikes,". At two other points, he made explicit reference to his title and office, first proudly placing himself among American presidents: "I'm speaking to you today from the Treaty Room of the White House, a place where American presidents have worked for peace. We're a peaceful nation. Yet as we have learned so suddenly and so tragically, there can be no peace in a world of sudden terror. In the face of today's new threat the only way to pursue peace is to pursue those who threaten it", and explicitly mentioning that he is speaking "from the Treaty Room of the White House, a place where American presidents have worked for peace" as he defined the struggle in terms of his nation's traditional ideals. These ideals center on peace ("We're a peaceful nation"), justice ("your goal is just" (a statement to the military)) and freedom ("We defend not only our precious freedoms but also the freedom of people everywhere to live and raise their children free from fear.").

This of course is in stark contrast with how Osama Bin Laden is portrayed. Bin Laden is the leader of Al Qaeda, the group said to have carried out the attacks of 9/11. In his state of the union address of the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 2001, Bush leaves no doubt at who Bin Laden is, and what his group is responsible of: "The terrorists practice a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has been rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim clerics, a fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam. The terrorists' directive commands them to kill Christians and Jews, to kill all Americans, and make no distinctions among military and civilians, including women and children. This group and its leader -- a person named Usama bin Laden -- are linked to many other organizations in different countries, including the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. There are thousands of these terrorists in more than 60 countries. They are recruited from their own nations and neighborhoods and brought to camps in places like Afghanistan, where they are trained in the tactics of terror. They are sent back to their homes or sent to hide in countries around the world to plot evil and destruction." What is interesting to acknowledge about this particular fragment is that, although it is only nine days after the attacks and still very little is known about causes and perpetrators of 9/11, let alone Al Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden is portrayed as THE personification of an Islamic extremist group that intends to kill Christians, Jews and "kill all Americans, and make no distinctions among military and civilians, including woman and children". Would this speech have been given under normal circumstances, there would have been critical comments and questions by journalists and political analyst about the (obviously) overstated intentions and threats of this group called Al Qaeda. However, we now realize that this speech was given in the direct aftermath of one of the most shocking tragedies that happened on the soil of the United States of America, and therefore, at that particular time in history, there was only little room for critical investigations in allegations towards "the enemy" made by the Bush regime.





#### 4.6 Framing the discourse in “Good Us” vs “Evil them”

A third major discourse that can be found in the speeches is a general one of “us” vs. “them”. At first, a lot of emphasis is placed on how “they”, the evil perpetrators of undue violence and harm, have committed something utterly, truly horrible against “us”, the innocent victim of devastation: “Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The victims were in airplanes, or in their offices; secretaries, businessmen and women, military and federal workers; moms and dads, friends and neighbors. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror”. A lot of emphasis placed on the courageous, exceptional behaviour of average

Americans. In his statement of the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2001, Bush explicitly mentions the man who is supposed to have fought the terrorist in the airplane that crashed over Pennsylvania: “We have seen it in the courage of passengers, who rushed terrorists to save others on the ground -- passengers like an exceptional man named Todd Beamer” The goal of highlighting this one out of the thousands of stories related to 9/11, is to imagine the “us” as one people (Americans), juxtaposed to “the enemy”. People can easily relate to a guy like Todd Beamer as he could have been your part of your family, friends or neighbours. The example of Todd Beamer as a courageous, strong American that stood up and fought terrorists strengthens the “us” vs. “them” discourse by emphasizing the nation as a contained entity threatened by outside forces wishing to destroy it and its members. Todd Beamer is not just an average American; he became an American hero, an icon for American nationalism. Another example of this is the mentioning of Americans willingness to help out each other in times of need: “And we responded with the best of America -- with the daring of our rescue workers, with the caring for strangers and neighbors who came to give blood and help in any way they could.” With this speech, Bush produces the sense that “The Enemy” and other dangers that threaten the safety of American civilians are outside the realm of the “us.”, because we can not relate to and identify with them. Thus, horrors and other atrocities perpetrated on “us” must come from “out there,” from someone or something outside the notion of “us.” “The Enemy” is represented as an impersonal, inferior objectified entity. Describing them as

anonymous, evil terrorists exacerbates the social construction of "The Enemy's" cultural and moral difference from "Us." They, according to Bush, are "cave-dwellers" that need to be "smoked out". Describing the enemy as creatures dwelling and hiding in caves represents them as primitive, inferior human beings, while the American people stand for all that is civilized.

The lack of self-reflection in the speeches of Bush and the deliberate choice of not placing 9/11 in a wider framework is also worth mentioning. It is well known that the United States has a large history of violence and war. For instance, enormous atrocities against Vietnamese people were committed by the American military forces during the Vietnam war in the sixties and seventies. But yet despite the fact that Americans are used to be barraged with catastrophic images of acts of war, terrorism, genocide and general violence on a regular day-to-day basis in the media, it is only when acts of war and terrorism are committed against "us" that they have any major relevance that call for retaliation and revenge: "Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered great loss. And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment". This is also a statement that emphasises on the loss and grief of the "us" but fails to recognize that in history, atrocities have also been committed against others who have suffered much of the same. One might draw the conclusion that the atrocities that happen to someone else, "the other", on the other side of the world, is just part of the normal everyday occurrences around the globe. They do not seem to be personal to us, yet the collapse of the Twin Towers and loss of life evokes great emotional outburst and outright fear among "the self". In his speeches, Bush framed the "us" vs. "them" discourse in a way it seems like events only apocalyptic, earth shattering and horrific if and when they directly effect the own personal reality. When acts of horror are occurring around the globe, we are able to relegate these events to a specific time, place and space which we see as other and separate from ourselves and our lives. It is as if we are not implicated in these events. Thus, we are able to place the event in a specific context that we see as separate and outside our own being. In other words, we see ourselves as immune to the happening of the event. In constituting ourselves as immune, we refuse to see a connection between these events and our own historicity and sociality. Cynically speaking: when it happens to "us," it is unique, a tragedy, a catastrophe, something we personally can relate to. When it happens to "them", it is mundane, not a part of our reality, something that occurs in a different historical time, place and space. When talking about deliberate attacks, if "they" do it, it is part of their nature, part of their culture. However, everything we have done in the past and will do in the future is because of certain circumstances that need resolutions, sheer coincidence or because of bad luck: "It is my hope that in the months and years ahead, life will return almost to normal. We'll go back to our lives and routines, and that is good. Even grief recedes with time and grace"

#### 4.7 Religion and biblical references in the 9/11 rhetoric: Our God vs. Their God

The fourth important discourse that can be found in speeches by Bush is one of religion and biblical references, especially when it comes to noticing how “our” God is involved in an epic struggle with “their” God. After the September 11th attacks, Bush soon committed an error when he spoke of leading a “crusade” against terrorism: “They have attacked America because we are freedom’s home and defender; This crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take a while, but we will rid the world of the evil-doers.” Muslim leaders reacted with anger and bewilderment, saying that people of Islamic faith could interpret the war as being directed at them. Ari Fleischer, at that time Bush’s spokesman, said that “the president would regret if anything like that was conveyed.” But although he never mentioned the term “crusade” again, the biblical references continued in his other speeches. In his speech of September 14<sup>th</sup>, Bush ended his speech with a quote that was taken directly from the bible, namely Paul’s Letter to the Romans (8:38), assuring the American people that “neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities, nor powers nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth can separate us from God’s love. May he bless the souls of the departed. May he comfort our own. And may He always guide our country”. Notice that in these words, God would “comfort our own.” But what about others? What about the families of all people that had died in the attacks who have faith in other religions than Christianity (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism) and are not citizens of the United States? In this speech Bush makes it very clear that they are not included in his thoughts and prayers, and that he is solely concerned with the religious well being of all Christians who have faith in God. He would continue with his biblical references on the one-year anniversary of 9/11, when Bush delivered a speech from Ellis Island in New York Harbor about the war on terrorism, warning that America had “entered a great struggle.” “Our prayer tonight is that God will see us through and keep us worthy,” Bush said. “Hope still lights our way, and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it.” Critics argued that these speeches became overtly Christian, but references to God and the religious tasks ahead for the Bush administration are still very much constructed within his speeches. It is almost as if Bush is given not an opportunity to legitimize his foreign policy but a direct call from the higher forces to wield his power of religious purposes: “I believe there is a reason that history has matched this nation with this time. America strives to be tolerant and just. We respect the faith of Islam, even as we fight those whose actions defile that faith. We fight, not to impose our will, but to defend ourselves and extend the blessings of freedom. We cannot know all that lies ahead. Yet, we do know that God had placed us together in this moment, to grieve together, to stand together, to serve each other and our country.”

The intention of the historical and biblical references is to raise patriotic sentiment to the highest possible levels and leave potential opponents to American retaliatory efforts absolutely no margin for criticism without risking to be labeled as “anti-American” or “un-American”.

#### 4.8 Samuel Huntington and the Clash of Civilization

As introduced in paragraph 4.2, Samuel Huntington’s theory of the clash of civilizations was an important element in the academic discussions in the aftermath of 9/11.



Figure 9. Samuel Huntington  
(Source: <http://arts.anu.edu.au>)

In his speeches, Bush refers more than once, although mostly indirectly, to the religious and cultural elements of Al Qaeda: “The evidence we have gathered all points to a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations known as al Qaeda (...) The terrorists practice a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has been rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim clerics -- a fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam. The terrorists' directive commands them to kill Christians and Jews, to kill all Americans, and make no distinction among military and civilians, including women and children”. Note how in this small fragment Bush frames the whole crisis within the context of Islam, of cultural conflicts, and of Western civilization threatened by

the other. Bush does reassure us that he doesn’t hold a grudge against the whole Muslim world (“The United States respects the people of Afghanistan -- after all, we are currently its largest source of humanitarian aid”), but it is rather curious to distinguish between good and bad Muslims, between the correct and incorrect interpretations of Islam, and between peaceful and violent understandings of the Koran. Thirdly, these religious fundamentalists are portrayed as people who have no respect for non-Muslims and will even target women and children. And to further highlight that the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks are not just incidents or independent attacks but part of a larger Islamic effort to start a war between cultures, Bush mentions the global motives of Al Qaeda: “The leadership of al Qaeda has great influence in Afghanistan and supports the Taliban regime in controlling most of that country. In Afghanistan, we see al Qaeda's vision for the world.” It is of course highly questionable if Al Qaeda indeed has or had a global agenda. More than five years after the attacks I think it is safe to assume that Al Qaeda mainly has regional influences in the South Western parts of Asia, but is of less importance in Europe and the United States. What is important is that Bush creates an image of a global cultural and religious struggle that lies ahead, and with his statements acknowledges his beliefs in Huntington’s theory of the Clash of Civilizations. But

even more than acknowledge the Clash of Civilizations theory, I would also argue that Bush, with his specific, strong statements on the nature of the cultural and religious Other, actually helps to create and feeds this controversial discourse: “Americans are asking why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber -- a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms -- our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other”. Note how ‘they’ are portrayed as the ones with who are on the lower moral level, who do not share our sacred values and beliefs. They are not only culturally different from us, but religious beliefs are also a strong element in the discussion: “They want to drive Christians and Jews out of vast regions of Asia and Africa”. Reading all these various quotes the different nature of The Other, it is almost as if the Bush administration is trying to create its own Clash of Civilizations in order to legitimize his upcoming global struggle. This is a consciously taken discursive choice to frame the attacks of 9/11 in a specific context. What is made very clear from the early beginnings is that we can expect a long, ideological struggle that has not just the purpose of retaliation for 9/11, but also to destroy any potential threat that The Other may cause in the future: “They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century (...) “We will direct every resource at our command -- every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war -- to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network.”

#### 4.9 The Coalition of the willing vs. Terrorist states

The final (sixth) discursive approach that plays a major factor in Bush’ representation of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks is a spatial distinction between the states on “our” side that are willing to confront the “other”, terrorist states on the other side, the so-called Axis of Evil.



Figure 10. The Axis of Evil

(Source: <http://edition.cnn.com>)

The term Axis of Evil was used in the State of the Union Address on January 29, 2002 to describe governments that Bush accused of sponsoring terrorism and seeking weapons of mass destruction. Iraq, Iran, and North Korea are specifically named in this speech: “North Korea is a regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens (...) Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom (...) Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror (...) States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world”. Striking is that in this speech, only 4

months after his initial speech on September 11<sup>th</sup>, Bush does not make a single direct reference to either Al Qaeda or Osama bin Laden. Seemingly forgotten are his previous comments about wanting bin Laden ‘dead or alive’. Instead, he states that the United States will be "Steadfast and patient and persistent in the pursuit of two great objectives. First, we will shut down terrorist camps, disrupt terrorist plans, and bring terrorists to justice. And second, we must prevent the terrorists and regimes who seek chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons from threatening the United States and the world". Already we can see how the rhetoric surrounding the war on terrorism is applied to form new military objectives in the war. In hindsight we can say that the escalating rhetoric allowed the Bush administration to expand the war with virtually no question or opposition. And the real dangers with this inflamed rhetoric is that a foundation is laid for the United States to engage in military operations against any opponent of its choosing, whether such action has anything to do with Al Qaeda and preventing further attacks on the United States.

#### 4.10 Summarizing the six discourses

I have identified six main discourses as communicated by Bush in the aftermath of the attacks of 9/11 and the beginning of the war on terrorism. I have summarized the findings in the following table:

Discourse	Key features
War and Terrorism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The attacks of 9/11 were not just acts of terror but acts of war</li> <li>• The main intention of the terrorists is to frighten the American people</li> <li>• The only considerable option to respond to the attacks is with a global war on terrorism</li> <li>• This war will be a fought on a global scale and will probably be a lengthy one</li> <li>• Afghanistan and the Taliban regime are the first targets in this war</li> </ul>
Hero (Bush) vs. Villain (Osama Bin Laden)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The world is divided in two camps, with Bush as the elected leader “good”, and Bin Laden the self-appointed “evil” enemy of the terrorist</li> <li>• The cause of Bush is a just one to bring peace, were the cause of Bin Laden is to kill all Americans and declare war on the world.</li> </ul>

<p>“Us” (all that is good)</p> <p>vs</p> <p>“Them” (all that is evil)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The “us” is the innocent victim of devastation caused by “them” as the evil perpetrators of violence and destruction</li> <li>• The “us” is identified as the courageous and brave, whereas “them” can be identified as cowardice and evil</li> <li>• The “us” is identifiable and relatable, the “them” is impersonal and objectified</li> </ul>
<p>Historical and Biblical References</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usage of Christianity and God for legitimation of the just cause</li> <li>• Silencing critics by labeling them as un-American.</li> </ul>
<p>The Clash of Civilizations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinguishing between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Muslims</li> <li>• Warning for the global motives of Al Qaeda: to destroy the Western world and Western values like freedom and democracy</li> <li>• They hate us, they are morally inferior to us, they share immoral values amongst each other.</li> </ul>
<p>The Coalition of the willing</p> <p>vs.</p> <p>Terrorist states</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North Korea, Iraq and Iran are part of an ‘Axis of Evil’ that is part of the war on terrorism</li> <li>• Escalating rhetoric allows expanding the war on terrorism</li> </ul>

#### 4.11 Alternative discourses

I have identified in these empirical findings six main discourses that explained and framed the attacks of 9/11. These are the discourses as created and communicated by Bush to the general audience, and, at least in the direct aftermath, these were accepted as valid interpretations and explanations. The question that is immediately raised at the same time is if and how these geopolitical discourses are contested by various subversive discourses that explain September 11th 2001 in an alternative way that consequently de-legitimizes the discourses as described in this chapter.

The answer is as simple as it is shocking: in at least the first year after 9/11 and the start of the war on terrorism, hardly any alternative discourses or explanations were to be found in the popular culture of the United States. It became regarded as highly unpatriotic, unsympathetic and even un-American to criticize the Bush administration and their interpretation of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. The war on terrorism had diverted all attention from other important issues, for example the militarization of America and a looming social and economic crisis, marked by rising levels of poverty and unemployment which were a direct result of what happened on 9/11. A

teacher that wrote in a local newspaper “Osama bin Laden did us a favor. He vulcanized us, awakened us and strengthened our resolve” was fired from his job because his remarks were regarded as inappropriate.

There were also no real critical investigations done by the mainstream media. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, it seemed that every United States news station and journalist had the tendency to wearing American flag labels and avoid critical reporting about Bush’s handling of the crisis. The few remaining skeptics were silenced. A famous example for this is the canceling of the talk show of Phil Donahue, one of the most important TV-personalities in the United States, because he invited too many war opponents on his show. A study by Ingleby (2003) shows that the coverage of The Washington Post and The New York Times during the run up to the war in Iraq in 2003 was also very on-sided and un-critical. The occasional critical articles were buried deep inside, while stories accepting the administration’s claims about Iraq’s alleged weapons of mass destruction were bannered on Page One. Even the official report of the events leading up to the September 11, 2001 attacks, the ‘Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States’, failed to answer many questions.

It is only now, more than five years later, that some critical investigations begin to take place and people start asking serious questions about the events of 9/11 and the fully patriotic legitimization of the Bush doctrine. We only have to search briefly on the internet to find thousands of websites which question the official rhetoric of the Bush administration (often labeled as conspiracy theories). More and more questions are also arising about the collapse of the World Trade Centre, which some believe was demolished on purpose with explosives. Many websites, books and papers deal with the question if the war on terrorism is not just a cover-up operation for the real reason the United States is in Iraq: namely oil and energy resources.

Still, in the mainstream media, even nowadays only little critical reflections on the Bush policy can be found.

#### 4.12 Conclusion

Concluding this chapter, I have found by analysing various speeches by George W. Bush and critical analysis of parts of these speeches, he adopted six main discourses to give meaning to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks in New York and Washington and explain them as such to the world:



- 1) A discourse of terrorism and war, where the attacks are explained as acts of war that can only be answered with a global war on terrorism
- 2) The personified story of the hero and the villain: George W. Bush all that represents justice as opposite to Bin Laden who is an evil terrorist
- 3) The framings 9/11 in the context of the “Good Western We” vs. the “Evil Muslim Other”
- 4) The Historical and biblical Discourse: Legitimations for a just war, our God versus their God
- 5) The Clash of Civilizations approach as originally formed by Samuel Huntington
- 6) A legitimation to include other (terrorist) states in the war on terror by forming an Axis of Evil

And even now that 9/11 and the invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq are more than five years behind us, only now we start seeing the emergence of alternative discourses for explaining 9/11.

# 5. Conclusion

## 5.1 Introduction

In this final chapter the research questions as described in the first chapter of this thesis are answered and I summarise the main findings of my research. I end with some final remarks on this work and some recommendation for further research on this topic.

## 5.2 Critical Geopolitics, discourses and interpretations

As for Geopolitics, what has become clear in this research is that the shift from contemporary political geography to a more critical geopolitics has some important consequences for conducting research into global political events. The most important shift is that now we acknowledge the importance of understanding how the world is perceived is a key element of contemporary geopolitics. The original political geography focused mainly on the interaction between borders, nations, states and nation-states. What was often neglected or taken for granted is that how we perceive the world in the first place is a factor that can't be denied when doing research. Scholars like Dodds, O Tuathail and Reuber have been very influential in formulating theories that we need to deconstruct speeches, texts, policy documents, images, media-stories, movies and official statements to uncover discursive elements to see what is often not so obvious. I want to make it clear that even the most educated scholars can not always be correct in interpreting presidential statements or particular arguments by state governments as a reaction to particular (political) situations. What critical geopolitics can do is create an academic platform for understanding the world from a constructive perspective where historical, geographical, economical and political affairs are all part of particular representations. Social constructivism and post structuralism are the two schools of thought that help us understand this new way of thinking within political geography. As I have showed with various examples in chapter 3 (for instance the Reagan response to the Soviet threat of expansion), a discursive approach towards a (geo)political situation is often consciously chosen with the goal of legitimizing a policy or particular response to a problem, but it does not necessarily have to be predetermined, let alone be successful. As my empirical research has shown, critical geopolitics is not limited to uncovering or deconstructing speeches or texts in just one or two discourses. It is much more difficult than that, but therefore also more challenging. And with the help of a Critical Discourse Analysis, by grouping discourse research in different categories (Keller, 2004) and using an interdisciplinary approach to focus on the ways social and political domination is reproduced by text and speech, we can conduct interesting and successful research. This answers my first two research questions on how (critical) geopolitics evolved over the last decades and what the

contemporary importance is of studying world politics through a “critical geopolitical” perspective and how we can distinguish between different geopolitical discourses and CDA can be used as a method to uncover and deconstruct these discourses.

### 5.3 George Bush framing of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks

My empirical research of George Bush particular interpretation in his speeches of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on the World Trade Centre started out from the premise that I was going to uncover the official U.S. government discourse. I soon found out that it is impossible to uncover one official discourse, as discourse research is much more complex than just limited it to one single official explanation. I can conclude that I have failed a part of my third research question, which was “what was the official discourse explaining 9/11 and how has a specifically constructed reality of 9/11 been created to legitimize the attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq?” However, as I have elaborately described in the fourth chapter, there were many explanations given by the Bush government for a) why the U.S. had been attacked, b) how the U.S. was going to interpret this attack and c) what the world could expect from the U.S. states in response to 9/11.

According to Bush, the world can be divided in a binary opposition, which is a tendency of Western and Western-derived thought. In the arguments Bush is giving, he continually assumes a role of dominance over the Other. Two examples: Bush as the positive Hero vs. Bin Laden as the negative Villain and representing “us” as all that is good and stands for strong moral values vs. “them” representing immoral behaviour and inferior ways of thinking and handling. This categorization of binary oppositions is value-laden and ethnocentric. The Other is portrayed as the evil, impersonal and objectified, while the Self is the courageous, the brave the relatable and most important, identifiable.

In Bush’ speeches to the world in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, I have discovered six dominant discourses that were used to frame 9/11 in a wider, global context and that were used to legitimize a policy of war and retaliation. These six discourses are:

- 1) The Bush administration discourse of Terrorism and War
- 2) Personified “Friend and Foe-images”: George W. Bush vs. Bin Laden
- 3) Framings 9/11 in the context of Islam and culture: the “Good Western We” vs. the “Evil Muslim Other”
- 4) The Historical and biblical Discourse: Legitimizations for a just war: Our God vs. Theirs
- 5) Inspired by the work of Samuel Huntington: the “Clash of Civilizations” discourse
- 6) Coalition of the willing vs. the Axis of Evil

Each one of these six discourses contains the binary opposition that were just mentioned. We stand for peace, justice and liberty, they stand for war, oppression and injustice (1); We have strong, moral leader while they have an evil, despicable man in charge (2); Our culture is build upon the freedom of speech, democracy and good Christian values while They pursue Muslim oppression and want to silence any critic(3); We have just legitimations for our struggle with the enemy, because Our good God is on our side, while Their God represents destruction and intolerance (4); We are on the brink of a Clash of Civilizations that We have not chosen but has been triggered by Them (5); and finally all nations that stand for just, respectful moral values are on Our side, whereas at the other end of the spectrum we find an Axis of Evil with terrorist states that threaten world peace and stability (6).

The binary opposition is a very simplified perspective on how the world actually works, it does however show us that the Bush government in its response to the attacks of 9/11 deliberately tried to capture the moment and define the discussion in a simplistic “us” vs. “them” perspective in order to legitimize his policy. As there was hardly any critical discussion of how the U.S. would have to define the new world that had been created after the attacks and what its new role should be, not from the media nor from the academic world, Bush was (at least in the first few years after 9/11) highly successful in getting his policies on Afghanistan and Iraq legitimized. In retrospect we can conclude that maybe other, less destructive options to globally conquer international terrorism would have been possible, if only we would have adapted a critical geopolitical perspective from the start. And that answers my final research question on how critical geopolitics and an investigation in official and contested discourses can help us gain a wider understanding of the war on terrorism and the United States’ current involvement in the Middle-East.

#### 5.4 Some final remarks

What we can and must learn from this research is that even in times of terror, fear and angst for future developments, we must always remain critical at how we define the world. Even more than that, we must especially be critical at those who try to hijack the discussion and want to make us believe that the world can simply be divided in two separate divisions.

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## Documents used for the empirical research

All speeches used for the empirical research can be found on the official website of the White House: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/>