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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Towards a critical discourse analysis of New Zealand security policy in Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

Rather than ask why New Zealand supported the intervention, this paper focuses on how representations of New Zealand and the international terrorist threat resulted in public acquiescence to a pre-emptive strike by the world's sole superpower against one of the poorest, most war-torn countries in the world. The paper concludes that legitimacy was achieved through the blending of themes of terrorism and war, national interest and democracy, rule of law and human rights, to produce an ambiguous 'international campaign against terrorism' that allowed for picking and choosing of the most convenient position on different matters. The alternative—to refuse moral and material support for the United States-led 'war on terror'—was to risk New Zealand's membership of the United States-led international community and a 'seat at the table' in future international trade and security negotiations. As such, any campaign benefits appear to have accrued to New Zealand rather than Afghanistan or the Afghan people, especially given the parlous state of that country in 2018. A wide-ranging debate within New Zealand on the purpose of such interventions is needed before similar commitments are made in the future.

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Introduction

On 12 September 2001, in the aftermath of the attacks on New York, Pennsylvania and Washington in the United States, New Zealand politicians set about making sense of the attacks for New Zealand. Who could have carried out the attacks? How would the United States respond? What would it mean for a small state at the far reaches of the South Pacific? Any hope that the United States' justification for war might be challenged was soon abandoned in light of an alleged groundswell of support for the United States to 'combat Al Qaeda and remove the medieval Taleban regime' (de Hoop Scheffer 2015, p. xxiii) and the Security Council's unprecedented willingness to invoke and reaffirm the United States' right to self-defence under Article 51 of the Charter. Beard (2002, p. 566) argues that it was the Security Council's stance especially that helped some states legitimise the United States military response as a legal use of force.

This paper is concerned not with an explanation for *why* New Zealand decided to support a military intervention in Afghanistan, of which there are many alternatives,

but rather with *how* public acquiescence, if not full support, for war was attained. *How* was New Zealand and the threats it faced in late 2001 discursively constructed such that the United States-led military intervention in Afghanistan was perceived as legitimate? Answering how possible questions requires investigating what is most often assumed—with how states are constituted as particular kinds of subjects for which certain courses of action are logical and proper rather than assuming, as conventional International Relations theories do, that states arrive fully formed with predetermined interests. Rather than assume ‘a particular subjectivity and background of social/discursive practices and meanings’ (Doty 1993, p. 298), it is concerned with the role of power in producing meanings, subject identities and relationships that enable certain courses of action whilst excluding others (Doty 1993, p. 299).

A commitment to a constitutive theory of foreign policy has, as Hansen (2006, pp. 11–12) notes, methodological consequences: its linguistic ontology and discursive epistemology demands discourse analytic methods. As such, concerns are with the combinations of identity and policy delineated within a foreign policy debate and on the ability of these combinations to incorporate discursively constituted ‘facts’ and ‘events’ (Hansen 2006, pp. 12, 17–36). From this perspective, identities are not pre-social but are linked performatively with policy and (re)produced—they are both (discursive) foundation and product (Hansen 2006, p. 21). Moreover, the identity–policy relationship and the practices entailed must be coherent if the state and its proposed policy are to be perceived as legitimate, especially where war is concerned (Hansen 2006, p. 28; see also Fairclough 2005).

Structure of the paper

The first section of this paper sets out briefly the methods of textual selection and analysis. This is followed by a brief overview of the debates leading to New Zealand’s response to the September 11, 2001 attacks, including military support. I then explore how representations of New Zealand and the existential threat allegedly facing humanity discursively legitimise the intervention and New Zealand’s role in it. My interest is not in producing a ‘true’ account of why New Zealand joined the so-called war on terror but rather, by illustrating how legitimacy was achieved, to convey the contingent, and hence political, nature of intervention. It is to destabilise common sense understandings of the necessity of such ventures and to promote debate about who benefits, of which there has been little, if any, in New Zealand to date. This paper focuses on the initial phase of the intervention: further research is required on how legitimacy was maintained for nearly a decade despite spiralling insecurity for Afghans and an ever-growing list of civilian dead and injured.

Methods

Discourse analysis is concerned with the politics of representation, with ‘the manifest political consequences of adopting one mode of representation over another’ (Jackson 2007, p. 394; see also Campbell 1998; Hansen 2006). It is a form of critical theorising concerned with illustrating how ‘textual and social processes are intrinsically connected ... and the implications of this connection for the way we think and act in the contemporary world’ (Milliken 1999, p. 225). Discourse scholars work across different epistemological paradigms but share a set of theoretical commitments amongst which the most important

are three analytically distinguishable bundles of theoretical claims (Milliken 1999, p. 228; Jackson 2007, p. 395). First, discourse is understood as structures of signification that construct social reality in terms of defining subjects and establishing their relational positions within a system of signification (Milliken 1999, p. 229; Jackson 2007, pp. 395–396). Second is a commitment to discourses as being (re)productive of things defined by the discourse, of ‘subjects authorised to speak and act, [of] legitimate forms of knowledge and political practices’ and of what counts as common sense at particular times and in particular social settings (Jackson 2007, p. 396). For Milliken (1999, p. 229), ‘discourse makes intelligible some ways of being in, and acting towards, the world, and of operationalising a particular “regime of truth” while excluding other possible modes of identity and action’. Discourse both defines and enables. It also silences by excluding and by limiting and restricting who is authorised to speak thereby endorsing certain views as common sense and rendering others nonsensical, inadequate or inappropriate (Milliken 1999, p. 229). Third, a commitment to discourse as productive directs us to study hegemonic discourse on the understanding that discourses are historically contingent and therefore subject to constant (re)articulation as attempts to fix meaning can only ever be partial in nature (Milliken 1999, p. 230). The recognition of this ‘play of practice’ leads scholars to investigate how hegemonic discourse works to stabilise and fix dominant meanings and how alternative discourses resist dominant understandings (Milliken 1999, p. 230).

The texts—parliamentary debates, ministerial statements and responses to parliamentary questions between September and December 2001—were selected for their authoritative status as government policy regarding the intervention in Afghanistan and New Zealand’s role in it (see Hansen 2006, Chapter 4). After this date, the debate on Afghanistan became entangled in that about the invasion of Iraq. The three analytical techniques used are predicate analysis, subject positioning and presupposition (Doty 1993, pp. 310–316; see also Fairclough 2005). Predicates are the descriptive characteristics, adjectives and adverbs attached to subjects that convey the subjects’ capabilities; subject positioning determines the agency afforded different subjects and the hierarchical relationships amongst them and presupposition indicates cultural and political understandings that must be held to be ‘true’ if a discourse is to resonate as it must where legitimacy is at stake. A dominant discourse can be said to exist when differences between subjects are consistently constructed according to the same logic in a variety of texts (Doty 1993, p. 309). At the centre of political activity, then, is the construction of a link that conveys the appearance of consistency between identity and policy (Hansen 2006, p. 28). An important methodological point is that whilst identity and policy are separated for analytic purposes, in practice the two, being discursively constituted, are inseparable (Doty 1993, p. 307; Hansen 2006, pp. 28–29).

Getting to war

On 12 September 2001, foreign policy debate in the New Zealand Parliament focused on making sense of the attacks and working out what they might mean for New Zealand and New Zealanders. Members of Parliament (MPs) expressed ‘incomprehensibility’, ‘disbelief’ and ‘horror’ that any human being could commit such ‘unspeakable acts’ of violence. ‘Acts’ that were ‘beyond the comprehension of civilised people’ were rendered comprehensible by being characterised in Manichean terms—as a battle between good and evil. ‘Evil’

people had conspired in these ‘cold and vicious’, ‘evil’ acts not just against the American people but against ‘humanity itself’ (Anderton 2001a). All ‘civilised countries’, Acting Prime Minister Anderton (2001a) concluded, must stand together against this ‘crime against humanity’, this ‘holocaust of innocent citizens’—and work swiftly to bring terrorists to justice.

On her return to New Zealand a few days later, Prime Minister Clark (2001a) reiterated that the attacks were ‘not just on the United States’ but on ‘humanity as a whole’, and that New Zealand would, within the bounds of international law, ‘play our part’ to address this ‘common threat to humanity’ (Clark 2001b, 2001c). Clark (2001e) emphasised New Zealand’s support for the United States and international efforts to combat terrorism given the Security Council’s strong resolutions: New Zealand could be ‘counted on’ for maximum diplomatic and intelligence support, and would consider ‘what military support we might offer, including our crack people in the Special Air Services’ (Clark 2001a).

As it quickly became clear that the United States considered it was at ‘war’ (Williamson 2016, pp. 186–187), parliamentary debate turned more specifically to New Zealand’s support for military force. On one side were those who argued the importance of New Zealand standing by its traditional allies to defend freedom (English 2001a); others argued that New Zealand must work collectively and do nothing that was not consistent with international law (Locke 2001c). Clark (2001f, 2001h) reassured the House that Article 51 of the United Nations (UN) Charter provided for the United States military intervention and, moreover, that the ‘magnitude of the terrorist attacks justifies a military response in self-defence’ (Clark 2001f, 2001h). Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Goff (2001b) reiterated that the ‘scale, the audacity ... and the utter indifference ... that marked the attacks’ demanded a military response. Moreover, he argued, force must be a component of an international response because the organisation responsible for the attacks could not be negotiated with or held to account ‘because it does not operate within a justice system’ (Goff 2001b). Furthermore, as the Security Council had twice invoked Article 51 of the Charter a decision to support military action was ‘in line with those two resolutions and, indeed, with the statements made by the United Nations Secretary General’ (Goff 2001a). Besides, Clark (2001g) argued, the Taleban’s intransigence left the West with few options: had they complied with Security Council resolutions and handed over Bin Laden the international community would not be faced with this situation.

With alleged evidence attributing responsibility for the high jackings to al-Qaeda to hand and United States’ efforts at coalition building, Clark confirmed that if ‘there is a role for our intelligence services and our military, including Special Forces, we will consider that’ (Clark 2001a, 2001d). However, Clark reminded parliament, eliminating the threat of future attacks required a coordinated and comprehensive campaign to deny terrorists financial support along with strengthened intelligence gathering, sharing and cooperation amongst democratic states (Clark 2001f). All countries needed to fulfil their obligations regarding Security Council counter-terrorism resolutions and to work collectively to rid the world of terrorism’s ‘breeding grounds’—‘Ghettos, refugee camps, and slums’ (Clark 2001f).

Throughout the debates, Green Party MPs cautioned against an unreflective resort to violence that would simply ‘fuel a new cycle of hate and violence’ and generate more recruits to the terrorists’ cause (Locke 2001a). New Zealand, Locke (2001c) argued,

should not emulate the terrorists' tactics. Moreover, unilateral military action by America and a few allies 'undermines the authority of the United Nations and the rule of international law' and New Zealand should not be part of it: 'We should be championing the United Nations, not undermining it' (Locke 2001c). Terrorism, Locke (2001c) argued, resulted in large part from frustrations with the international community's failure to rectify, amongst other things, the injustices against the Palestinian people and Iraqi civilian deaths resulting from sanctions ostensibly aimed at elites (Locke 2001c).

On 3 October 2001, just days before the United States-led attack on Afghanistan, the House held a special debate on the commitment of New Zealand combat troops to the American-led intervention. The debate concluded with the House passing a motion declaring its support for

the offer of Special Air Services troops and other assistance as part of the response of the United States and the international coalition to the terrorist attacks ... and totally supports the approach taken by the United States of America, and further declares its support for the United Nations Security Resolutions 1368 and 1373. (Speaker 2001)

With this motion, Parliament achieved support for an international campaign against terrorism composed of inherently contradictory strategies—for a United States-led military intervention in Afghanistan aimed at disrupting Al-Qaeda and overthrowing the Taleban regime and a multilateral law enforcement strategy under the auspices of the UNs.

New Zealand, Other/s and the 'international campaign against terrorism'

As was the case in the United States, counter-terrorist discourse in New Zealand drew on familiar tropes and long-established discourses of threat and danger—World War II as the 'good' war, civilisation versus barbarians and the Manichean narrative of good versus evil (Jackson 2005, p. 154; Zehfuss 2012, p. 861). The perpetrators of the September 11, 2001 attacks are represented as an 'evil', 'invisible menace' that lies 'lurking in the shadows' like a 'plague' ready to strike indiscriminately and without warning. Representing terrorists as a 'new' kind of (irrational) actor that 'knows no boundaries, respects no nations, respects no individuals' that will 'stop at nothing' to achieve its ends produced a generalised anxiety about an imminent and existential threat, not only to New Zealand but also to 'civilised' societies everywhere. Whilst the 'evil' nature of terrorists renders them unknowable and unstoppable, the Wests presumed rationality and goodness means that it 'knows' what must be done to counter this 'clear and present danger', implying that limits might need to be imposed on civil liberties to protect 'civilised' societies from the 'barbarians'.

The essential amorality of the perpetrators is conveyed through 'overlexicalisation' ('evil', 'barbaric', 'inhuman', 'mad', 'obscene', 'hideous', 'murderers' and 'criminals') and elaborated by articulating 'discourses of malignity' from several social domains—law and order ('crime'), religion ('evil') and well-being ('scourge', 'mad' and 'plague') (Fairclough 2005, p. 47). The depravity of 'new' terrorists is conveyed through articulating discourses of 'mad' and 'bad', evil and mental instability, irrational hatred and a capacity for premeditated and deliberative acts of the criminally insane.

In contrast to the naming of each 'innocent' individual who died in the September 11, 2001 attacks, those who carried out the attacks are a 'nameless, faceless' group of 'evil murderers' of 'innocent fathers and mothers and their children'. Terrorists are presented as a monolith bloc lacking the individuality and agency of 'civilised' people with names,

families and relationships. Refusing to represent those who resort to terrorist tactics ‘in their singularity’ (Zehfuss 2012, p. 867) is to refuse to reflect on the diverse reasons for struggles of resistance and the reasons why some people and groups have felt they have no option but to resort to terrorism. Critically, it implies that it is the terrorists’ nature that is the problem to be addressed, not the conditions that give rise to resistance movements, conditions in which the West is implicated by its history of Empire and intervention in the region.

In contrast to the ‘overlexicalisation’ of ‘evil’ terrorists, the essential goodness of ‘civilised’ states is presumed and so in need of little elaboration (Fairclough 2005, p. 47). The presumption is that once again, history has called upon the United States to lead the world in the fight against ‘evil’ and oppression—for and on behalf of ‘humanity at large’. The United States is not only exercising a legal right to defend itself but also fulfilling a moral obligation to all peoples who the United States ‘knows’ would chose freedom if given the opportunity. Through a rhetorical strategy of ‘not only ... but also’, New Zealand and the United States are linked by shared values as well as with all ‘civilised’ states—hence making them all potential terrorists’ targets. They are all also linked by their shared determination to protect and extend freedom around the world by eliminating terrorists and transforming ‘underdeveloped’, ‘conflict ridden’ places in which terrorism ‘breeds’ into liberal market democracies after which they be welcomed into the fold.

Whilst New Zealand claimed it ‘abhorred’ the use of violence and was ‘repulsed’ by the terrorists’ use of violence, it also ‘knows’ that force is sometimes necessary, especially when the threat is existential. Just as the ‘free’ world stood against Nazism in the ‘good’ war, so it must stand and defend humanity from terrorism. Linking September 11, 2001 and World War II suggests that the answer to the current crisis is to be found in that parallel contest between dictatorship and democracy, good and evil, effectively silencing debate about the outcomes of other wars such as Vietnam and more recent Western interventions in Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo. Linking the attacks on the United States with the ‘good’ war serves to evoke memories of standing ‘side by side’ with the Americans after that other ‘cowardly’ and ‘treacherous’ attack on ‘Hawaii and Pearl Harbour’ and as a reminder that once again war is a ‘necessary evil’.

Whereas terrorists’ use of violence is presented as irrational and indiscriminate, ‘civilised’ democratic states, presumably use violence only for ‘good’ ends. The irrational, hate-filled ‘gut reactions’ of terrorists are implicitly contrasted with democratic states’ capacity for careful military planning and precision targeting, albeit with ‘unfortunate’ ‘collateral damage’ in the form of civilian casualties. The risk of ‘civilian casualties’, moreover, is lain at the feet of the terrorists because, had they handed over Bin Laden, the West would not have been forced to resort to violence. Essentialising terrorists, and denying history and context, serves to naturalise the proposed response to ‘wipe [terrorists] from the face of the earth’ and render it logical, sane and rational—as common sense.

Playing our part: New Zealand’s (collective) response

New Zealand’s statement in the Security Council on 12 September 2001 echoed that of Security Council and non-Security Council members alike as well as that of the Secretary General (UNSC S/2001/864). All expressed horror at the attacks, not only against the

United States but also against ‘civilised nations’ and ‘humanity at large’, and anticipated an international response that would identify, find and bring the perpetrators to justice (UNSC S/2001/864; Williamson 2016, p. 186). The United States alone argued that the world must stand together ‘to win the war against terrorism’ (Williamson 2016, p. 187).

Whilst Acting Prime Minister Anderton’s (2001a) initial statement in the House presented the attacks as not only against the United States but also ‘humanity itself’, and advocated for a law enforcement strategy, the events and possible response quickly began to be framed in terms of New Zealand’s ‘curious birthmark’—war (O’Brien 2016, p. 6). Samuels (2001) referred to the attacks as evoking ‘memories of Pearl Harbour’—a similarly ‘undeclared’, ‘treacherous’ and ‘cowardly’ act—and of ‘standing side by side with the Americans in the Second World war’. Goff, too, likened September 11 to that other ‘day of infamy’ (2001a).

A week later, debating the government’s response to the attacks, Clark again reiterated the attacks were not only on the United States but also on ‘humanity at large’ and that New Zealand was ‘determined’ to ‘be part of combating terrorism and bringing to justice the perpetrators’ (Clark 2001a). ‘Our bit’ turned out to be an offer of ‘maximum diplomatic support and intelligence support’, and military support in the form of ‘our crack people in the Special Air Services’. Clark commented on the ‘positive contribution’ intelligence could make ‘in the battle against terrorism’ and noted that New Zealand would continue to ‘swap intelligence’ with the United States (Clark 2001a).

Turning from New Zealand’s contributions to the ‘broader issue’ of the international community’s response, Clark (2001a) suggested New Zealand’s response as a ‘small and friendly Western country’ was ‘entirely consistent’ with that of other ‘like-minded countries’ such as the United Kingdom. Like the United Kingdom, New Zealand welcomed the American’s efforts to build a coalition that potentially included ‘Pakistan, India and possibly even Iran’ for the moral authority it would provide.

Clark (2001a) was ‘compelled’ to repeat the Security Council’s ‘strong sentiments’ calling on all States ‘to work together urgently’ to ‘bring the perpetrators to justice’ and to ‘redouble its efforts to prevent and suppress [future] terrorist acts’. Most important, Clark added, the council ‘unanimously expressed its readiness to take all necessary steps to respond to the terrorist attacks ... and to combat all forms of terrorism in accordance with its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations’ (2001a). New Zealand, Clark (2001a) added, ‘stands absolutely solidly behind efforts to deal to terrorism’. The ‘international community/coalition’, it is implied, must avail itself of all necessary means in this existential battle and New Zealand, too, commits to do whatever it takes to protect humanity from the barbarians. It is the representation of terrorists as inhuman and ‘evil’ Other and existentially threatening that Jackson (2005, pp. 89–90) argues made possible torture and other forms of inhuman and degrading treatment that came to characterise the ‘war on the terror’.

Leader of the Opposition, Bill English, also framed a possible response in terms of war—especially the ‘good’ Second World War. New Zealand, he argued, had always had the option to ignore the ‘great arguments and wars’ but had never done so. It had always chosen to stand with its allies, often doing more than its ‘fair share’, because ‘we stand for the same values as those allies ... the rule of law, respect for human rights, individuality, tolerance ... [and] that is where our long-term strategic interest lies’ (English 2001b). To break with such tradition, it was implied, would be to disrespect those ‘New Zealanders

who paid the ultimate sacrifice [at] Gallipoli, Alamein and Crete' (Prebble 2001). Not invoking the Australian, New Zealand, United States (ANZUS) Security Treaty was presented as a missed opportunity to demonstrate commitment at a time when the United States was 'looking to see who its friends were': moreover, it would risk New Zealand's hard-earned international reputation (Prebble 2001). It was also likely that many New Zealanders would have perceived such a commitment as the beginning of a process to reverse nuclear free legislation, which would probably have led to significant public opposition to any New Zealand involvement in the intervention. Minister of Agriculture Sutton (2001) was careful to emphasise that a commitment to the United States and being nuclear free were not mutually exclusive: '[o]ur friends know the truth. [ours] is not an anti-American position; it is an anti-nuclear position'.

Green Party MPs again counselled strongly against a unilateral response involving military force. The UN was the body set up to deal with issues of peace and security: New Zealand must work through it with other nations and should take this opportunity to strengthen its ability to deal with terrorism (Locke 2001a). The role of an independent government, Locke (2001b) contended, was 'not to say in a knee-jerk way' that we support another government. The 'international community' had a responsibility to ensure 'that the right people are brought to justice, treated in the right way, and punished. We do not want to go off half-cocked' (Locke 2001a). New Zealand must work with all nations but especially the United States, to find peaceful and rational solutions that do not 'sink us to the inhuman level of the terrorists' (Locke 2001a).

Deputy Prime Minister Jim Anderton hastened to reframe New Zealand's response in terms of support not only for the United States but also for the UN. It was not, he said, a 'contest' between support for 'the United States of America and its people' and support for the 'the United Nations Security Council resolutions, which are very strong, indeed' (Anderton 2001b). Rather, support for the United States had been clearly stated as 'our country's revulsion' at the 'random' nature of the terrorist attacks and our acute awareness of a 'grave responsibility', a 'supreme obligation' to avoid unnecessary future deaths (Anderton 2001b). There is, Anderton added, 'nothing higher than [the United Nations Charter] that this country is committed to ... when the United Nations Security Council calls on the world and its collective countries to do something, this country responds every single time' (Anderton 2001b). New Zealand, he continued, is not only fulfilling an obligation to the United States but also to the international community of which we are a member 'in the context of common humanity and international cooperation. Those are *higher callings than just a response to one single country* ... We have to stand shoulder to shoulder with all the nations of the United Nations on this planet' (Anderton 2001b, author emphasis). At first glance, the 'grave responsibility' and 'supreme obligation' to avoid unnecessary future deaths appears to refer to all and any deaths. However, as support for military action unfolded it became clear that lives of those in 'civilised' countries were most worthy of protection in the failure to recognise the paradox inherent in the notion that warfare can promote human protection (Zehfuss 2012, p. 864).

In early October, the Labour/Alliance coalition finally agreed to a special debate on New Zealand's 'offer' of the Special Air Services as part of the response of the United States and the international coalition to the terrorist attacks. Opening the debate, Clark commented that the offer of 'crack troops' was not made 'lightly' but because the 'New

Zealand people are not neutral about terrorism’—they want to see ‘something done’ and to be ‘part of that effort’. New Zealand, like the United States, was ‘determined’ to root out Al-Qaeda’ and the other terrorist groups and so must ‘play its part’ (Clark 2001f). Not being neutral and the use of ‘crack troops’ are linked as if one leads inexorably to the other and avoids consideration not only of the many other possible options but also the context in which the decision is made. President Bush’s charge that ‘you are with us or with the terrorists’ meant neutrality was in fact not an option. ‘Civilised’ states could only choose the side of right—who could be against humanity? (Zehfuss 2012, p. 866).

Nor was it enough to eliminate terrorists, Clark reminded the House. The global ‘ramifications’ of terrorism and the existential nature of the threat required a very broad response involving as many countries as possible (Clark 2001f). Finding and bringing terrorists to justice alone would not suffice—it was also necessary to deal with those ‘troubled parts of the world where religious and ethnic violence provide a fertile ground for terrorism to develop’ (Clark 2001f). The current ‘struggle’ against terrorism was compared to the United Kingdom’s former ‘struggle’ with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Japan, Italy and Germany’s problems with Red Army factions in the 1970s. International cooperation amongst intelligence agencies, Clark (2001f) implied, was ‘integral’ to this campaign too.

Referencing the United States’ ‘forged’ multinational coalition, alleged evidence of al-Qaeda’s responsibility for the attacks and the Security Council’s ‘very strong resolutions’, Clark argued that the House would be remiss if it did not support the ‘military elements’ of the international campaign proposed by the ‘United States and the international coalition and the United Nations Security Council Resolutions’ (Clark 2001f). In addition to an implied moral authority afforded by a broad coalition, Clark argued that the United States’ action against the al-Qaeda network was ‘at the very least a military action that would be authorised under chapter LI of the United Nations Charter, which provides for self-defence, and we would support such action on that basis’ (Clark 2001f). New Zealand would be remiss if it failed to support such ‘strong’ Security Council resolutions (Clark 2001f). Furthermore, the resolution before the House was important in confirming full support for New Zealand’s ‘already public offer’ of special forces as a military contribution to the campaign against terrorism (Clark 2001f).

Anderton (2001c), too, reiterated the importance of the UN and international law, which ‘make the world a safer place for small countries like ours’. It was clearly not in New Zealand’s interests to ignore the UN so bringing it into ‘disrepute’. Moreover, he concluded, the

Charter authorises the use of military force as an act of collective security authorised by the United Nations Security Council, and, in accordance with that charter, the Security Council has adopted very strong resolutions against terrorists, and we support those resolutions. Our actions here today show that, writ large. (2001c)

However, as Williamson (2016, pp. 181–202) has made clear, in the climate of ‘overwhelming sympathy’ for the United States, neither New Zealand nor any other member of the international coalition ‘forged’ around the intervention, nor the UN Security Council, felt able to challenge the United States’ claim that it was exercising the right to self-defence albeit against one of the poorest, most war-torn countries on the planet. Clark’s awareness that the Security Council had neither endorsed nor commended the

United States and its coalition partner, the United Kingdom, was made clear in her annual address to the Labour Party Conference: ‘The United Nations has not questioned the United States right to act in self-defence in Afghanistan ... and nor has New Zealand questioned that right’ (Clark 2001i).

Green Party MPs continued to advocate against the use force, convinced ‘that sending SAS troops to Afghanistan as part of the American-led task force’ would not serve an international justice strategy or ‘reduce the threat of terrorism in the world’ (Locke 2001b). Rather, military action in Afghanistan would simply compound the difficulties facing a population ‘devastated by civil war and the oppressive policies of the Taliban regime’ (Locke 2001b). It would lead to more civilian deaths, ‘create more anger in the Islamic world towards the Western powers, the United States in particular’ and ‘fuel a new cycle of hate and violence’ (Locke 2001c). New Zealand should not imitate terrorists in resorting to violence:

we should be part of military action only if it is consistent with international law, if it comes under the authority of the United Nations ... Unilateral military action against Afghanistan by America and a few allies undermines the authority of the United Nations and the rule of international law. ... We should be championing the United Nations, not undermining it. (Locke 2001c)

Interestingly, given the presumed rationality guiding ‘civilised’ states, dissenting views are dismissed as those of ‘communist sympathisers’ seeking to exonerate terrorists (Butler 2002). The Greens, Leader of New Zealand First Peters (2001) claimed, were a ‘bunch of pinkos’ deluded in their belief that ‘even though terrorists were in control of the aeroplanes ... the United States ... is guilty’ and ‘interested only in attacking the United States’ (Peters 2001). Clark responded similarly to the Green Party’s challenge as to the legality of the United States-led attack: ‘the Greens have a concern for international law ... I happen to take a different view of how the law applies’ (2001h) As Prime Minister, Clark imposed a hierarchy on who can ‘know’ the meaning of international law.

Goff reiterated military ‘necessity’ because of the impossibility of negotiating ‘with terrorists who live in areas outside of the law’ (2001b). A non-state actor cannot be negotiated with and nor can it ‘be brought to account before a court of law, because it does not operate within a justice system’ (Goff 2001b). Goff again raised the spectre of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in the hands of these ‘new’ terrorists, inviting New Zealanders to imagine what might follow if the international coalition failed to act ‘appropriately’?

The debated ended with Parliament supporting, by a majority of 105, the

offer of Special Air Services troops and other assistance as part of the response of the United States and the international coalition to the terrorist attacks ... on 11 September 2001 ... and totally supports the approach taken by the United States of America, and further declares its support for United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1368 and 1373. (Speaker 2001)

Conclusion

For the New Zealand government to commit the necessary resources and risk the lives of New Zealand women and men, the public must at least acquiesce to the idea that war is necessary, desirable and winnable, and such an agreement is only possible in language (Jackson 2005, p. 1; Hansen 2006, p. 19). By exploring the discursive strategies, metaphors and tropes, a discourse analytic approach illustrates the constructed, and hence

contingent, nature of the 'existential threat to humanity' that demanded New Zealand participation in an international coalition of the 'good' in a campaign against 'evil' terrorists and their supporters. In 'reality', that military part of that campaign targeted a network that was unable to garner the resources of even the smallest state (Jackson 2005, pp. 37–38) and included the use of military force against one of the poorest, war-torn countries on the planet with a government that one pundit quipped might be more accurately characterised as an instance of a 'terrorist sponsored state' than 'state sponsored terrorism'.

New Zealand support for the United States-led intervention in Afghanistan implied support for the use of military force, which in turn depended on widespread public acceptance of the United States' claim that it was acting in self-defence as allowed for under Article 51 of the UN Charter. The UN's silence on the United States and United Kingdom's military intervention in Afghanistan was interpreted by some states as positive endorsement of the response, whereas others argued that 'overwhelming sympathy for the United States' precluded the Security Council or any other country or organisation questioning it (Williamson 2016, p. 186). Whatever the reason, that silence, coupled with a widespread commitment to multilateralism amongst New Zealanders, provided an opportunity for the texturing together (Fairclough 2005, p. 50) of themes of terrorism and war, national interest and democracy, rule of law and human rights, thereby creating an ambiguity that allowed for picking and choosing the most convenient position on different matters (Zehfuss 2003, p. 520). What were previously considered incompatible strategies of national interest and international cooperation—unilateral action by the United States and collective action mandated by the UN Security Council—were produced as an international campaign against terrorism that New Zealand would be remiss not to support.

To argue the terrorist attacks of 11 September were attacks on humanity and not just the US or the 'West' is, as Hansen (2006, p. 50) argues, a powerful discursive move that shifts an issue from 'strategic necessity and selfishly national interest' to the higher ground of the morally good (see also Zolo 2002). Ethics, it is argued, demands that where positive law is inadequate and international institutions prove powerless, the 'international community' has a duty to intervene to protect 'innocent civilians', by force of arms if necessary, 'even against explicit provisions of law.' (Zolo 2002, p. 67) However, the binary structure of language means that invoking humanity also invokes the inhuman, evil, irrational (non-Western) Other the 'West' has determined as the enemy from which it must protect itself and others it deems innocent. Moreover, because the purpose is good and the threat existential, all and any means are permitted, a discursive move that makes possible torture and other inhuman and degrading practices and normalises actions that would otherwise be considered morally repugnant (Jackson 2005, p. 90–91).

To question the intervention is not to exonerate the Taleban for the pain and suffering visited on ordinary Afghans. It is to ask who benefited from a pre-emptive military strike against a terrorist organisation and the overthrow of the Taleban government that produced a spiralling armed conflict in Afghanistan and the region now nearly two decades long. New Zealand's reputation, and hence guarantee of a 'seat at the table' in international trade and security negotiations, depended on its participation in the campaign and that in turn depended on convincing a sufficient portion of New Zealand

publics that the United States-led coalition of Western states was a force for good—that it had a moral responsibility and legal right to use military force against ‘evil’ terrorists and spearhead liberal democratic reforms. And that New Zealand was part of a coalition acting with the UN Security Council’s blessing. To challenge any aspect of this narrative was to risk membership in so-called international community of Western liberal states.

In the end, then, it seems that rather than defend humanity New Zealand was limited to protecting its freedom of ‘accessibility to American influence and willingness to fall in with the wishes of the United States’ (Howard 1978, p. 128 cited in Dillon and Reid 2009, p. 5). Whilst New Zealand certainly accrued benefits from participation, the same can hardly be said for Afghanistan given the parlous state of the country today. A wide-ranging discussion is needed amongst New Zealanders on who benefits and how from military interventions in the name of humanity before any future commitments are made in our name.

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