

SOCIAL ACTOR REPRESENTATION IN JOE BIDEN'S SPEECH ABOUT THE END OF AFGHAN WAR (A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS)

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Abstract

On August 31, 2021, Joe Biden announced officially the drawdown of the United States military forces from Afghanistan war indicating the end of the longest war in American history for 20 years. This study posits that Biden's speech serves as a means of political engagement not only as the announcement of a decision but also as the cultivation of a shared perspective and consciousness on the role and position of the United States and its allies in the Afghanistan war. This study aims at examining the representation of social actors in his speech using van Leeuwen's approach of critical discourse analysis (van Leeuwen, 2008). This study investigates the ways how the social actors are depicted in the speech and uncovers the underlying ideology behind their portrayal. According to the result, the dominance of inclusion strategies (84.1%) indicates various ways of portrayal the social actors either. The recontextualization of the Afghanistan war in the speech is constructed significantly by beliefs and attitudes of social actors within US sides. The speech expresses the role of the current president, US forces and government aiming at the shape of public opinion positively for the future of Americans and the latest national interest of United States. Furthermore, this speech emphasizes the American foreign policy during Biden's administration about the multilateralism. Its implementation is proposing the diplomacy, specifically using non-military means to protect the human rights and build strong international collaboration. Biden's decision to end the Afghan war is a deliberate attempt to promote peace and stability in the United States by focusing on its future rather than dwelling on the past.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2021, the United States and the rest of the world commemorated the 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks. The terrorists were affiliated with Islamic extremist group named Al Qaeda. They brutally hijacked four commercial airplanes, carried out suicide attacks and targeted some symbol of U.S's prosperity, economic and military power, such as the World Trade Center (WTC) building in New York and the Department of Security at the Pentagon. One of hijacked airplanes crashed into the ground in the Shanksville (Krisnawati, 2021; Yulianingsih, 2021).

The declaration of military campaign against the terrorism named 'The Global War on Terror' was first made by George W. Bush by speech. The main aggression of the US and coalition partners began with crushing Al-Qaeda group and overthrow the Taliban regime in Afghanistan as immediate response to 9/11 attacks (Chossudovsky, 2005). Through the lens of critical discourse analysis (CDA), the discourse concerning the war on terrorism were framed and controlled by Bush to disseminate the value and belief of the United States in interpreting the 9/11 attacks (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; van Dijk, 1997).

The discourse constructs the binary identities between ‘the innocent victim’ for the United States and ‘the cruel perpetrators’ for the terrorists. Meanwhile, the United States and its allies (‘who are with us’ are presented as ‘honorable people’, ‘defender of freedom and democracy’. In contrast, those allied with the perpetrators (‘who are with the terrorists’) are presented as enemies who harbor hatred and commit violence and murder (Hatem, 2003; Hodges & Nilep, 2007; Jamil, 2014). Therefore, the emergence of ‘the war on terrorism’ has become a global discourse that was acceptable for the Americans and it was internalized by many countries. It has built collective understanding about the act of terrorism as fight against the evil, crime against humanity and threat for the stability and security of the country needed to be eradicated (Kedang, 2017).

After nearly 20 years, President Joe Biden as the 46th president of the United States, ended the Afghanistan war and withdrew the last of its troops by the August 31 deadline. The analysis of discourse for Biden's announcement regarding the United States military exit from Afghanistan is the aim of this study. This research believes that Biden's speech is not only to announce the decision, but also to legitimize the role of the social actors and reason why this longest war in American history must be ended.

Several studies have examined the implications of politicians'/state leaders' speeches through linguistic strategies (Adjei et al., 2015; Agbo et al., 2019; Balog, 2019; Guswita & Suhardi, 2020; Hussein, 2016; Liao & Han, 2019; Matu, 2008). In order to critically evaluate Biden's speech, this study focuses on analyzing the concept of representation of the social actors presented in the speech and how they are represented. The concept of representation in critical discourse analysis is used to uncover how a group, individual or idea is positioned in a discourse - portrayed positively or negatively. Language is used to construct and interpret reality in line with the perspective (goals, beliefs and ideology) of the producer of the text.

Moreover, research adopting a critical discourse analysis examines language use in speech is commonly seen in the literature. First, Chu & Huang (2021) analyzed President Tsai's apology by van Dijk approach. Second, the research carried out by Khan et al (2020) examined Donald Trump's AIPAC Policy speech with a CDS approach assisted by the NVivo 12 Plus application. Third, Sengul (2019) examined political communication research by doing an empirical case study on the rhetoric of right-wing populism in Australia, using a critical discourse analysis (CDA) technique. Finally, research conducted by Ayalew Nigatu & Tadesse Admassu (2023) focused on the linguistic choices made in Abiy Ahmed's second inaugural speech by van Dijk's theory.

Thus, this study aims to identify how Joe Biden's strategy in representing the social actors contained in the speech on August 31, 2021 related to Afghanistan war. As the main actors from the United States side, Biden has a great opportunity to recontextualize the reality from his perspective. van Leeuwen's critical discourse analysis approach (2008, 2009) is employed to (1) to find how the social actors are represented in the discourse of Joe Biden's speech and (2) to interpret the ideology emerging from the speech.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study implements qualitative method through the approach of content analysis. The aim of qualitative research is to describe and interpret data holistically and present in-depth review (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, the content analysis approach of Fraenkel, Walllen and Hyun (2012) are used to observe a human behavior from the indirect communication process, namely through written documents to reveal the attitudes, ideologies, values, and ideas of the author in these texts.

The video of Biden's speech was broadcasted in the You Tube official account of CNBC Television on September 1, 2021. The data source is obtained from the following

link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unBscCtq9xA>. The duration of the video is about 26 minutes and 23 seconds. However, the official transcription of this state speech is provided by the White House online site in the following link: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/08/31/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-end-of-the-war-in-afghanistan/>.

A series of analysis process is carried out. First, this study confirms the validity of the speech transcription with the speech video aforementioned. Next, this study formulates the understanding of what Biden conveys in speech. Then, this study investigates the social actors and classify them based on van Leeuwen’s (2008) theory. After that, this study describes and interprets the result in regards to how the withdrawal of United States troops in the Afghan war is recontextualized in the speech and how the social actors involved are represented. In addition, this study attempts to uncover the United States attitudes and negotiations for Afghan war from the lens of critical discourse analysis in relation to the foreign policy in Biden’s administration.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results in Table 1, this study discovers that there are 359 occurrences of social actors in the speech. They are significantly depicted by the inclusion strategies (84,1%) rather than exclusion strategies (15,9%). In-depth explanation of each strategy along with its interpretation is provided in the following section.

Table 1
Distribution of Exclusion and Inclusion Strategies

No	Strategies	Total	Percentage
1	Exclusion	57	15.9 %
2	Inclusion	302	84.1 %
	Total	359	100%

Exclusion Strategy in Joe Biden's Speech

In Table 2, the exclusion strategies are employed only 57 times (15,9%). Comparing to the whole occurrences (359 times), it can be implied that this speech depicts significantly the presence of the social actors. The dominance of backgrounding strategies, especially in the form of infinitival clause, can further emphasize that this speech has little intention to hide purposely the social actors. The readers can trace the presence of the social actor in the text, even though they are not explicitly depicted.

Table 2
Distribution of the use of exclusion strategies

No	Exclusion Strategies	Total
1	Suppression	
	a. Passive Agent Deletion	1
	b. Nominalization	3
	Total 1	4
2	Backgrounding	
	a. Passive Agent Deletion	9
	b. Simple ellipsis: Non-finite clauses with -ing	13
	c. Simple ellipsis: infinitival clauses	31
	Total 2	53
	Overall Total	57

In the example [1] and [2], the use of suppression strategy removes the existence of the social actors at the text. It cannot be traced the actors who will manipulate Afghanistan to attack the US in the example [1] by using passive agent deletion. Meanwhile, example [2] excludes the social actor who assumes that the capability of Afghan government to face Taliban attacks during military drawdown by using nominalisation strategy.

On the other hand, backgrounding strategy obscures the perpetrator of the action. Although the technique used is similar to example [2], the example [3] shows that the perpetrator of the Al-Qaeda invasion about a decade ago was the US. Then, another backgrounding strategy is the simplification of the structure into gerund form in the example [4] and to-infinitive clause in the example [5]. Although both exclude the social actors, the readers can infer them by themselves or look for them in other parts of the text.

- [1] In my view, we only have one: to make sure Afghanistan **can never be used** again to launch an attack on our homeland (*suppression: passive agent deletion*)
- [2] **That assumption** was that the Afghan government would be able to hold on for a period of time beyond military drawdown, turned out not to be accurate (*suppression: nominalisation*)
- [3] Over a decade ago. Al Qaeda **was decimated** (*passive agent deletion*)
- [4] Our State Department was working 24/7, **contacting and talking** and, in some cases, **walking Americans into the airport** (*Simple ellipsis: Non-finite clauses with -ing*)
- [5] We will continue **to work** to help more people (*infinitival clauses*)

Inclusion Strategy in Joe Biden's Speech

Based on the result in the Table 3, Biden’s speech provides many oppurtinites for the social actors to appear in the speech till 84,1%. They are depicted in a variety of available ways that belong to the inclusion strategies, either in a positive or negative image, in line with the values and goals of the speaker. It is divided into three sides based on the involvement of the social actors. Although this is understandable given that this speech is an official response from the United States side, the social actors from the Afghan side (groups that are directly opposed to the U.S.) are only presented by 6.6%. In contrast, the social actors who are not directly related to both side to be shown as much as 14.5%.

Table 3
Distribution of Social Actors in the Inclusion Strategy

No	Social Actors	Total
1	US side	
	a. U.S. Government and President	94
	b. President Joe Biden	38
	c. U.S. officials	5
	d. Joe Biden's son	1
	e. President Trump	2
	f. Enemy of the US	29
	g. Officers/Parties involved in Evacuation	14
	h. U.S. Army	10
	i. U.S. Country	11
	j. U.S. Residents	11
	k. U.S. and its Allies	3
	l. U.S. Expectations	2
	m. Casualties of War	9
n. Evacuation Victims	9	
Total 1		238 (78,9%)

2 Afghan side	a. Government of Afghanistan	3
	b. Afghan population	4
	c. President of Afghanistan	1
	d. Afghan Army	2
	e. Residents of Afghanistan	4
	f. Prisoners of War	2
	g. Victims of war	1
	h. Evacuation victims	3
Total 2		20 (6,6%)
3 Other Parties	a. God	2
	b. The party hosting the evacuation victim	2
	c. International organizations	2
	d. Combined evacuees (US & Afghanistan)	10
	e. Unknown	28
Total 3		44 (14,5%)

Most of the social actors in the speech come from the United States groups, reaching 78,9% or 238 of 359 occurrences. It is understandable since the speech is the United States official remarks on ending the Afghan war. As a result, this speech significantly delivers the agreement, consideration and value from the United States sides. For example, it is the joint of two social actors between the United States government and the president about 94 occurrences by the collectivization strategy - pronoun 'we' is used in the speech - as in the example [6] and [7]. In addition, the United States official in the example [8] is depicted in the form of functionalization by showing the name and his occupation. Meanwhile, the president himself appears frequently about 38 occurrences by the individualization strategy - pronoun 'I' is used - as in the example [9], [10], [11] to highlight his power and attitudes for making decisions. Therefore, both are the most active actors to reconstruct the reality in the speech, control the Afghan war discourse and portray the other actors in line with their intention.

[6] **we** had trained over the past two decades and equipped

[7] **we** have to shore up American competitiveness

[8] **Secretary of State [Antony J.] Blinken** is leading

[9] **I'm** the 4th president that must face the issue of whether and when to end this war.

[10] **I am** not prolonging this war

[11] **I** refuse to send future generations of Americans to war

In contrast, Biden decides an implicit way by two strategies - functionalization and relational identification - to refer Donald Trump as in the example [12].

[12] **My predecessor, the former president,** signed an agreement with the Taliban

In the example [13], Biden also praises the large success of evacuation effort achieved only in his administration by impersonalizing the social actor, referring to the United States country itself, in the form of differentiation that no country as great as the U.S. can do it. Furthermore, Biden delivers high appreciation to several actors involving in the evacuation effort. They are depicted as a group (collectivization) by emphasizing its occupation (functionalization) as in the example [14], its gender (classification) in the example [15] and implicit association as the United States evacuators in the example [16].

- [13] **No nation, no nation** has ever done anything like it in all of history.
- [14] **Our Operation Allied Rescue** ended up getting more than 5,500 Americans out.
- [15] **The women and men of the United States military** ... did their job
- [16] **The women and men of the United States military, our diplomatic corps and intelligence professionals** did their job

Next, the speech shows the total number of victims evacuated and form a reality to the public about the greatness of the US by using aggregation or statistical data. They are realized as beneficilazed participants from the United States administration in the example [17] and [18]. On the other side, Biden also shows his deep emphaty and respect toward the dead victims from the United States side by using appraisalment startegy – labelling them as heroes and veteran - in the example [19], [20] and illustrates long-term effects after 20 years of Afghan war for the troops and their families in the example [20].

- [17] Again, **more than 5,500 Americans** were airlifted out.
- [18] We got out locally **employed staff at the United States Embassy and their families, totalling roughly 2,500 people**
- [19] **Thirteen heroes** gave their lives
- [20] **A lot of our veterans and their families** have gone through hell.

In the other oppurtinity, Biden also shows a group of social actors who are the enemy and threat of United States They all are collectivized and depicted differently. In the example [23], negative appraisalment is attached to the ISIS group which refers obviously the terrorist. Meanwhile, the Talliban, China and Russia are merely presented as active and collective participants without the presence of negative attributes in the example [21] and [22]. At the same time, Biden highlights United States as beneficialized participants that undergo the threat from Al-Shabab in the example [24] and as active participant in the activity of surveillance over the Talliban in the example [25] and executing Bin Laden in the example [26].

- [21] **the Taliban** was in its strongest military position since 2001
- [22] **China or Russia** would rather have, would want more in this competition
- [23] **ISIS-K terrorists**, sworn enemies of the Taliban, were lurking...
- [24] We face threats from **Al Shabab** in Somalia
- [25] We're joined by over 100 countries that are determined to make sure **the Taliban** upholds those commitments.
- [26] We delivered justice to **Bin laden** on May 2, 2011

Next, Biden also involves the Americans in the speech as his consideration to end the Afghan war. In the example [27], the Americans are depicted in the form of collectivization by using pronoun 'you', 'our' inviting them directly to image United States as the nation at war for the nearly 20 years of war. In the example [28], Biden defends his decision to end the war by proposing the touching statement by relational identification 'son' and 'daughter' referring to the young generations.

- [27] If **you're** 20 years old today, **you've** never known an America at peace
- [28] I refuse to send **another generation of America's sons and daughters**

In addition, Biden also shows the goal of United States under his administration after the end of Afghan war. The use of possessivation form 'our' is to show the current national

interest – the safety and security of the Americans - and foreign policy – human rights - supported by the government and the Americans. On the other word, the use of a possessive pronoun ‘our’ is to activate the Americans to encourage those plans in the example [29] and [30]. At the same time, the use of pronoun ‘we’ in the example [31] is to show the similar interest from both side that the Afghan war was started due the 9/11 attack and the United States succeeded to execute Bin Landen over a decade ago.

[29] That’s what is in **our national interest**.

[30] I’ve been clear that human rights will be the center of **our foreign policy**.

[31] **we** had no vital interest in Afghanistan other than to prevent an attack on America’s homeland and our friends.

In discussing the Afghanistan side, Biden’s speech highlights the need for active participation from the Afghanistan government to do the collective arrangement with the Talliban after the United States military exit by spatialization.

[31] **The Afghan government** would be able to hold on

[32] It included no requirement that Taliban work out a cooperative governing arrangement with **the Afghan government**

Biden comments the decision of the Afghan president at that time, Ashraf Ghani, to flee Afghanistan when Talliban millitants enters Kabul by individualization and functionalization.

[33] **the president** flee amid the corruption and malfeasance,

Next, Biden presents the Afghan people in the helpless state in the speech. They are depicted as the recipient of the actions of supports through diplomacy, international influence and humanitarian aid from the United States government and other allies as in the example [34], [35] and [36]. It is carried out by in the form of objectivation and spatialization where the social actors are represented by means of reference to a place with which they are. Even though they are active participants in the example [37], they are still positioned in the unfavorable context to suffer under the Talliban regime.

[34] We’ll continue to support **the Afghan people** through diplomacy, international influence and humanitarian aid.

[35] ... allowing for continued departure to those who want to leave and deliver humanitarian assistance **to the people of Afghanistan**.

[36] As for **the Afghans**, we and our partners have airlifted **100,000 of them**

[37] ... **the people of Afghanistan** watched their own government collapse

Moreover, the speech also involves the unknown social actors whom cannot be tracked down in the text. In the form of indetermination, they are realized in the word ‘some’, ‘other’ and ‘everyone’ in the examples [38], [39] and [40] leading to unspecified groups or giving a sense of unseen groups. This type of social actors are frequently presented in the speech to anonymize them.

[38] But it did authorize the release of 5,000 prisoners last year, including **some of the Taliban’s top war commanders**, among those who just took control of Afghanistan

[39] We will maintain the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan **and other countries**.

[40] **everyone** who is now offering, or who will offer, to welcome Afghan allies

The speech also mentions the international organizations and communities who encourage the freedom of travel for any American, Afghan partner or foreign national who wants to leave Afghanistan to Taliban regime. These social actors are represented by collectivization in the example [41] and [42], but the social actor in the example [42] is still unspecified – who international community is.

[41] **the United Nations Security Council** passed a resolution...

[42] **the international community** expects the Taliban....

Based on the analysis, this speech recontextualizes the end of Afghan war discourse from the speaker's perspective and attitude by positioning the U.S side, both the government, the president and its related parties, as the most active actors. This speech is a means of political communication to build the collective consciousness that the act of Biden administration to complete two decades of war in Afghanistan and bring the United States troops back home is the right decision to save the future of young generations.

In line with Oktar (2001), the speaker tend to offer good and positive ideas and traits about the group to which they belong to. Meanwhile, the groups are opposite to them tend to be negatively stereotyped or marginalized in the conversation. This speech is a means of political communication to build collective consciousness.

Through the choice of how the social actors are represented, this speech credits the capability of Biden administration to handle the mass evacuation as the extraordinary success despite of the criticism for the chaotic departure in the last August 2021. Biden shares the commitment to provide safe evacuation for the journalists, Americans, Afghans allies and partners or Afghans who are targeted by Taliban due to their association with the United States. In line with their initial announcement to end the Afghan war in April 2021, the United States with its allies toppled Osama bin Laden to deliver the justice for 9/11 attacks over decade ago and continually supported Afghan government for two decades. It is also implied in the speech that Biden administration is victimized by former president for lack of clarity on the mission.

Furthermore, Biden shows his great appreciation and empathy toward the troops and veterans for their sacrifice and other effects faced by them and their families. In the speech, Biden highlights the new direction of foreign policy to concern with human rights through diplomacy and joints with international community. While still fighting terrorism, the United States prepares to face the new threat, challenges and competition with China, Russia and others in this era.

The ideas aforementioned reflects the new approach adopted in Biden administration. It is inseparable from the influence of the president's leadership style, the ideology of the party that accompanies him and the policies implemented during his administration. Since 2001 until now, three changes of political leaders have influenced the United States foreign policy due to the succession of presidents from parties with different ideologies - Bush from the Republican Party, followed by Barack Obama from the Democratic Party, followed by Donald Trump from the Republican Party, and now the incumbent from the Republican Party. It is known that the polarization between the two major parties in the US, namely the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, has led to two different views in society.

According to Hendarto (2020), the Democratic party places itself in a left-wing position and supports the principles of modern liberalism. On the other hand, the Republican Party holds the principle of conservatism because it is in a right-wing political position. Both

Bush and Trump, who come from the Republican Party, consider that terrorism and the Islamic world are common enemies of the United States that can threaten the safety and security and need to be suppressed coercively with military force. They applied hard diplomacy by means of military and political aggression because they faced the essential issue of state security and stability due to the threat of terrorism - Bush by Al-Qaeda and Trump by ISIS. This can be seen in the policies chosen by both of them.

Bush's initiation of the war on terror with the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq generated a contentious atmosphere surrounding Islam, leading to a significant increase in negative attitudes against the religion. The principle of orientalism in Western societies at the time made it more difficult for Eastern societies, which are predominantly Muslim, to be represented in an unbalanced way (Featherstone et al., 2010). This notion encouraged the Islamophobia movement and demanded that all Muslims in the world, on the basis of religious similarity with the terrorists, should be held responsible and apologize for the 9/11 attacks or other incidents of attempted terrorism (Jamil, 2014). Donald Trump's policies are no less discriminatory, making it difficult for Muslims there. This is provoked by the existence of ISIS which is increasingly aggressively promoting the principle of Caliphate Islam which can disrupt US efforts to democratize the Eastern world (Agung, 2019).

On the other hand, a shift in policy patterns occurred during the leadership of Obama and Biden from the Democratic Party who tended to use soft diplomacy / soft power by diplomacy or persuasion. Both are not passionate in deciding matters of militarization. Obama tried to decrease the negative image of the United States in the Islamic world from the previous Bush administration by means of diplomacy and intensive state visits in Islamic countries. At that time, the issue of Islamophobia slowly faded due to his non-discriminatory policies - before peaking again in the Trump era. Consideration of domestic political dynamics and US citizens' hopes for peace encouraged the unity of the United States and the global Islamic community to fight terrorism (Agung, 2019).

In the Biden administration, he promised to change the direction of foreign policy from the 'America First' doctrine and unilateralism policies of the Trump era. Trump's policies were considered a setback as the US dropped out of several world political stages, such as the World Health Organization and the Paris Climate Agreement. Biden uses soft power through policies of multilateralism, internationalism and promoting diplomacy. This implies that the US will open many opportunities for cooperation (Lisbet, 2021; Pramadya & Rahmanhadi, 2021).

The implementation of this multilateralism policy is to be actively involved in maintaining regional and world peace and stability and to immediately end this war. Biden's main consideration in his speech is that there is no clarity on the main goal of the Afghan war considering that the real threats of the United States today are ISIS and Al-Shabab groups, China, Russia. However, the United States is not leaving Afghanistan. Once again, the United States is represented as the protector and supporter of the Afghan government by helping it through diplomacy, influence from the international community and humanitarian aid. The US will opt for regional diplomatic channels to prevent violence and government instability there.

In line with what Renaldo (2021), political discourse is a manifestation of ideology that can be realized through language practice. Political speeches are one of the most effective platforms for sharing ideologies. This speech not only reviews the termination of military operations in Afghanistan, but also the manifestation of the United States foreign policy, namely multilateralism.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis, the dominance of the inclusion strategy (84.1%) opens up enormous opportunities to present social actors in various ways from the inclusion strategy. They are optimally represented as active participants who make this speech more dynamic. Then, the recontextualization of the situation and war in Afghanistan to the public dominantly comes from the ideas and attitudes of social actors within the United States and its association (78.9%) with Biden and his administration as the most active actors. The Afghan side does not feature much in the speech and is represented as a passive party that mostly accepts actions from other parties and depends on the US. This speech also reflects the direction of foreign policy in the Biden era, namely multilateralism. This policy prioritizes diplomacy (soft power), focuses on human rights without military aggression and fosters solid international cooperation. The end of the military invasion in Afghanistan is also Biden's effort to support US peace and stability by not looking to the past. Future research can analyze this speech with other more complete elements from van Leeuwen's critical discourse studies, for example the representation of the actions of social actors and also complete analysis procedures for elements, time, location, sources, etc.

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