

**Tri-Border Terror:  
A New Playground for Al Qaeda in Latin America?**

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**INTL 504: Analytics I**

**January-February 2011**

*“In 2001, American troops entered Kandahar, and the international press followed close on their heels. Reporting from a house in Kandahar used by Al-Qaeda, CNN correspondent Christiane Amanpour displayed a picture poster of the Iguazu Falls: ‘While we were scouring this now-abandoned house, we came across this picture on the wall. These are the falls of Iguazu in Brazil, and this is where US intelligence officials say they’ve identified terrorist cells that they say are linked to Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda network.’ Not only had Al-Qaeda become a known global actor, but so too had the Tri-border area.”*

*- Thomaz Guedes da Costa*

## **Introduction**

Before 9/11 happened, few people gave much thought to the idea of a terrorist act happening on American soil. Terrorism happened somewhere else in the world, in violent, unstable countries, that were considered more volatile in nature. That changed after a horrific Tuesday morning in September 2001. After the Twin Towers fell, the scales fell from American’s eyes and we realized that we may not be as safe as we thought we were. Seeking justice for the enemy, we took the fight to the country that the organization we now know as Al Qaeda, originated in- Afghanistan. In the past ten years since the Global War on Terror began, we have seen that Al Qaeda, and other organizations that are encompassed and defined under the umbrella of Islamic extremism, may have been recognized too late. It’s becoming more evident that the tentacles of radical Islam have been growing for quite some time now, expanding at a frightening rate- and may have been doing so right under our noses.

U.S. visibility on Latin America has historically been low, especially in the past nine years since our involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan has all but forced us to ignore the rest of the world except to maintain the relationships that we had already developed. This could prove to be a mistake of enormous proportions should a group such as Al Qaeda find a place to call home in Latin America. Through this research, I would like to uncover how likely it would be that the “Tri-Border Area” (TBA, see appendix 1) in Latin America will be the next breeding ground for radical extremist Islam groups, specifically Al Qaeda.

The TBA is the name given to the area surrounding the shared border between Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil. It is a no-man's land where all three countries are sovereign, yet no one rules. In particular, three cities bear the load of illegal activity: Puerto Iguazu (Argentina), Ciudad del Este (Paraguay), and Foz de Iguazu (Brazil). In these off the beaten path towns, laws are not enforced, money is laundered, weapons, drugs, and people are trafficked on a daily basis, with very little being done to bring it to a halt. Crime and dealers in the black market have been able to thrive here due to the lack of consistent law enforcement, from any of the three nations of the shared border.

This is a relevant topic to spend some time investigating due to the fact that Latin America is the United States' neighbor to the south, which incidentally presents an ideal staging ground for terrorist attacks against American citizens. Borders between countries in Latin America tend to be very permeable, allowing for freedom of movement of not only for legitimate travelers and businessmen, but also for would-be terrorists. Terrorism is nothing new to Latin America as this continent has long been plagued by narco-terrorists, government coups, kidnap and ransom assaults, and other forms of violent acts by terrorist groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), and Shining Path in Peru. The war in Iraq is slowly starting to draw to a close, and the war in Afghanistan will eventually start to wind down, as well. Fighting wars on two fronts, as well as managing the financial crisis facing the country, have both been distractions for U.S. foreign policy towards countries not directly involved with the War on Terror. As a result there has been room for other neglect in pursuing the elimination of terrorism in other areas of the world, namely Latin America. Only recently has there been any light shed on this closed off corner of the world, and unfortunately it has brought much concern to the intelligence community. As a result, there has

been significant progress between the U.S. and the TBA countries, so much so that an alliance called the “3+1” (3 signifying the countries of the TBA, and 1 signifying the U.S.) has been created to deal with potential threats. To begin with, we will take a look at some of the research, analysis and journalistic coverage that has been done in regards to Al Qaeda working out of Latin America.

## **Literature Review**

The majority of literature written on the TBA is qualitative in nature and one would be hard-pressed to find a resource that assesses the probability or likelihood that Al Qaeda will set up camp in the TBA. It is qualitative in nature in that most of it contains speculation of the potential for Al Qaeda being active in the TBA based on past occurrences of other terrorist groups activities in the area (specifically Hamas and Hezbollah). Additionally, the majority of resources focus on drug trafficking, money laundering and crime in the TBA, since this constitutes the majority of activity observed in the TBA. These speculations are largely based on the 1992 and 1994 bombings of the Israeli Embassy and the Argentina-Israel Mutual Association building, respectively, both in Buenos Aires. Hezbollah is assessed to be the culprits of these bombings. Since these two events, the TBA has been under a microscope for being a potential terrorist breeding ground. Literature seems to be divided in nature- not all the authors reviewed are convinced that Al Qaeda is active in the TBA, much less a legitimate threat. Generally speaking, it is agreed across the board that terrorism does exist in TBA- based on the attacks in early 90s in Argentina. Interestingly enough, the State Department still holds firm in their assessment that Al Qaeda is not operational in the TBA, much less any other terrorist group, per their 2008 Terrorism Report (which will be discussed in more detail in the “Perceptions” portion of the research). Literature used for this research is fairly evenly distributed between

Congressional Research Service (CRS) Reports for Senate and House of Representatives (focusing on history of U.S. interaction with the country and current policy), news media articles, State Department reports and scholarly journals. CRS reports provide the bulk of the information available of the “actor perception” portion of this research. As for the reason why there is limited coverage, my assessment is that even though this hot spot has been cause for concern, it has been on the back burner in terms of research and visibility due to the events set in motion since 9/11. Of the available literature addressing the TBA and Al Qaeda there are some informative ones.

Ed Blanche echoes the State Department claims in his article “Al Qaeda: The Latin American Connection” in Middle East magazine. Blanche takes a look at the state of the TBA and makes a strong case for the existence of Muslim extremists living, working and operating out of this area. He uses extensive qualitative data from the U.S. State Department, various U.S. investigative agencies and U.S. military officials to show the growing trend of money laundering, drug running, black market arms dealings, and the explosion of Islam that is happening there. He states that the center of all these dealings is Ciudad del Este in Paraguay, which so happened to be the same place that Nazi war criminals fled to in order to escape the trials they were being put on for war crimes against the Jews during WWII due to its “off-the-beaten-path” nature. He also cites the weak governments of all three countries as being another reason that radical Islam, and terrorism in general, is spreading like wildfire in this area.

In his piece “The Tri-Border Terrorism Nexus” in Global Crime magazine, Rensselear Lee provides a differing opinion of the trend of terrorism in the Tri-Border Area. He writes his report as an investigation as to whether or not all the allegations of radical Muslims operating in the area are true or not, focusing the majority of his research on unraveling the money trail in the

TBA. He speculates that the source of funding in that area is not rampant money laundering from illegal drug sales and arms deals by Arab radicals in order to facilitate terrorism, but rather the funding being led mainly by donors, by people whose beliefs fall in line with that of radical followers. He discusses specific numbers to back up his theory and extensively uses sources in Latin America, giving examples of how money is traced from Paraguay all the way back to Lebanon and ultimately to Hezbollah. He also says the majority of the activity there is occurring to facilitate Hezbollah and HAMAS. Lee also gives a voice to how the governments of the three countries in the TBA are working to combat the growing threat in the region. He ends on a less than encouraging note in saying he foresees the money flow in the TBA to support terrorism as being a grave situation, one that will not be able to be brought under control.

One source that uses qualitative and quantitative research is Mark Steinitz's "Middle East Terrorist Activity in Latin America," Policy Papers on the Americas from 2003. He examines the emerging trend of radical Islam groups operating in Latin America in an effort to begin tracking what groups are utilizing this area. He uses a wide variety of both qualitative and quantitative sources to provide a framework for how other radical Muslim groups have found Latin America a place to call home, specifically Hezbollah and HAMAS. He found that as of the date of his published writing, there was no solid evidence of Al Qaeda operating in Latin America, but due to the indisputable evidence left behind by Hezbollah and HAMAS, and Iran facilitating these organizations, it is impossible to ignore the opportunity Al Qaeda has to flourish in the Tri-Border Area due to the large Arab population living there providing support, governments that are weak, drug and arms trade that is constantly flowing, and corruption, which is no stranger to Latin America.

In her article “The Protean Enemy” in Foreign Affairs magazine, Jessica Stern brilliantly articulates the threat Al Qaeda poses to U.S. should they become active in the TBA. Stern brings to our attention the terrorist threat that exists in the TBA through many cited examples of U.S. Congressional reports and Latin American sources who validate the findings cited by the U.S. She says that the area is “the new Libya” and that “it’s a place where terrorists meet to swap tradecraft.” She also brings up an interesting perspective regarding how U.S. policy towards terrorism may affect recruits of these terrorist organizations, or how more importantly how recruits will be immediately affected by it (i.e.: Iraq and Afghanistan joining the failed states club means that the U.S. has just handed Al Qaeda its’ newest recruits on a silver platter). She maintains that only by beating terrorists at their own game, as in thinking as “radically” and outside the box as they do, will the U.S. ever hope to gain a foothold against terrorism. In an interesting twist, her article was greeted with a response by the Brazilian Ambassador to the U.S., Rubens Barbosa. He claimed her accusations were false and not grounded in any evidence whatsoever, based on Brazils’ efforts to curb terrorism.

Resident Latin American expert for the Congressional Research Service, Mark Sullivan, utilizes congressional reports for the majority of his report “Latin America: Terrorism Issue.” He highlights the Tri-Border Area, as well as Cuba, Venezuela and Colombia as being on Congress’ radar for terrorism threats. He specifically sites Hezbollah and HAMAS as being active in the TBA but also states that “State Department terrorism reports maintain that the United States remains concerned that Hezbollah and Hamas sympathizers are raising funds among the sizable Muslim communities in the region, but stated that there was no corroborated information that these or other Islamic extremist groups had an operational presence in the area,” (Sullivan, p6). His citing of various terrorist acts near the TBA line up with that of other

reports- this provides great qualitative evidence to show how the TBA is ripe for the picking should Al Qaeda choose to use it as a foundation for operations in the western hemisphere. At the conclusion of the article, he also discusses in great detail U.S. foreign policy in the area, and efforts we have taken to tame the TBA in coordination with the governments of the three countries sharing the border.

Finally, Chris Zambelis in his 2005 piece “Radical Islam in Latin America” for the Terrorism Monitor offers a variant of the same perspective of radical Islam in Latin America. He concludes that based on evidence, that Hezbollah is the main player in the Latin America with support coming from primarily Iran. He cites numerous incidents of terrorist attacks that have happened in Latin America that strongly point to Hezbollah, and therefore Iran, being the culprit. Going a step further, he also explores the possibility that the Tri-Border Area is not the only location of these groups, but includes Margarita Island, off the coast of Venezuela, as another location of known terrorists. The relationship he explores between Hugo Chavez and Iran further strengthens his case for Latin America becoming a serious threat for the U.S. in terms of it being a terrorist safe haven. Islam is also reported to be the fastest growing religion in Latin America in this article, potentially surpassing Catholicism which is the continent’s predominant religion.

### **The Perceptions of the National Actors and Courses of Action**

When determining the actors to be considered for this research, five entities must be considered: the three countries comprising the TBA (Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil), the US and Al Qaeda. Rather than consider each country of the TBA individually, they will be grouped together as one actor, due to the likelihood that each would react similarly (for the purposes of the pairwise

comparison only). However, for this portion, we will examine each country on its own in order to grasp the existing situation in each.

### *Argentina*

Generally speaking, Argentina and the U.S. have enjoyed a friendly relationship since the early 1990s. This would have been impossible to predict based on Argentina's history of violence, specifically the time during which Pinochet was president and he fought his "Dirty War" against anyone who dared to speak against him. Thousands of people simply disappeared while he ruled Argentina with an iron fist- it was a dark time in the country's history. Fortunately, once Carlos Menem was made president and democracy restored to the country, the government of Argentina took a turn for the better and began to establish the strong relationship we share today. "Although U.S.-Argentine relations are close, at times there have been tensions in the bilateral relationship. The tough U.S. approach toward Argentina during its political and financial crisis in 2001-2002 caused friction in the relationship. This turned around to some extent in 2003 when the United States supported Argentina in its negotiations with the IMF," (Sullivan, p10). Even through this hiccup in the relationship, both countries got back on track with each other and have been mutually supportive. This includes Argentina supporting the U.S. in the War on Terror. Argentina has taken steps to improve their security posture by taking part in programs such as the Container Security Initiative (CSI) and the Trade Transparency Unit Program facilitating the exchange of information to combat money laundering, both of which are operated by the Department of Homeland Security (Sullivan, p9).

One interesting factor to bring to light in the discussion is the Argentina perception of the U.S. Since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have stagnated in the eyes of the world, and are generally viewed as a lost cause, many countries began showing a lower opinion of the U.S.

This trend holds true in Argentina. “According to a 2007 Pew Research Center study that surveyed seven major countries in the region, Argentina by far had the lowest favorable view of the United States, just 16% in 2007, down from a favorable view of 50% in 2000,” (Sullivan, p10-11). This is critical to note due to the impact that could potentially have on the general public’s willingness to work with counter-terrorism initiatives introduced by the U.S. into Argentina.

The TBA has been on the U.S.’s radar since the early 90’s. Brought to the attention of the intelligence community in 1992 with the bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires that killed 30 people, and again in 1994 with the bombing on the Argentina-Israel Mutual Association building in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people, all signs pointed to Hezbollah as the group responsible for the bloodshed (Sullivan, p13). In fact they are not the only group that has benefited from the obscurity of the TBA. Evidence exists showing that both Hezbollah and Hamas have been active in the TBA since the 90s. In fact, there is a rather large Muslim population in the TBA, approximated to be at around 700,000 people (Sullivan, p13). We know that a large amount of money laundering, drug trafficking, smuggling and other illegal activities run rampant in the TBA, and that is what fuels the U.S. to stay involved in this area. “According to the State Department’s April 2008 Country Reports on Terrorism, the United States remains concerned that Hezbollah and Hamas are raising funds among the sizable Muslim communities in the region,” (Sullivan, p13). Instituting the “3+1” initiative, the U.S. has been able to form a strong partnership with the TBA countries (hence the name 3 for the TBA and plus 1 for the U.S.). “Established in 2002 to serve as a forum for counterterrorism cooperation and prevention among all four countries...Argentina hosted the fifth plenary session of the 3+1 mechanism in December 2006 that focused on such issues as early warning among states, information exchange

in order to prevent illegal activity, and the denial of refuge to those who finance, plan, or commit acts of terrorism,” (Sullivan, p14). Argentina has also shown significant cooperation with anti-terrorism initiatives in the form of legislation against terrorism and measures to combat financial crimes (i.e.: in order to eliminate Hezbollah’s financial network).

This is all well and good until actions being to not line up with words. As recently as February 15th, the Associate Press released an article detailing the accusation of the U.S. by Argentina of illegally shipping weapons, ammunition, drugs and spy equipment into their country. The purpose of the cargo was to provide “material for a training course that a U.S. Special Forces team had been invited to provide to Argentina's federal police,” (AP, 2011). The U.S. argues all the cargo was correctly declared, while Argentina claims it was not. This shows that the relationship between the two countries is still somewhat fragile, despite the agreed-upon need to combat terrorism.

### *Paraguay*

Paraguay and the U.S are of the same mind when it comes to eliminating drug trafficking, corruption and terrorism. “The United States has supported anti-corruption and democratization programs in Paraguay including providing more than \$60 million in funding from the Millennium Challenge Corporation,” (Beittel, p7). This funding was a result of two agreements enacted under this corporation that would be designated to combating terrorism and enforcing the rule of law. Paraguay’s president, Fernando Lugo, has put forth much effort to work with the U.S. to achieve their shared goals and shown that he is committed to seeing those through. Likewise, “President George W. Bush said he “stood with” Lugo in pursuing a “social justice agenda” and supported his efforts to fight corruption,” (Beittel, p12). One of his biggest concerns is the Paraguayan city of Ciudad del Este that sits immediately on the border, due to the

fact that much of the issues at hand occur here. Due to the loose enforcement of law in this area, the U.S. has provided assistance in the form of sending Immigration and Customs Enforcement teams to investigate trade-based money laundering, holding workshops led by U.S. Treasury officials encouraging the banking sector to get involved, and utilizing the skills of U.S. embassy legal advisors to conduct training for local investigators to follow up possible terrorist threats (Beittel, p12).

Almost identical to Argentina, the U.S. also has concern about the evidence that Hezbollah and Hamas are active in Paraguay. However we find a piece of information worth noting here: “according to the State Department’s annual terrorism report for 2008 (issued in April 2009), there is no corroborated information that these or other Islamic extremist groups have an operational presence in the TBA,” (Beittel, p12). As for why that discrepancy exists, that remains to be seen. But it is important to highlight that assessment here in order to present all the information in an unbiased manner. Another State Department finding in the same terrorism report, was that even though Paraguay was in general cooperative on counterterrorism efforts, “ its judicial system is weak and politicized, the police force is widely viewed as ineffective and corrupt, and the country lacks strong anti-money laundering and terrorist financing legislation,” (Beittel, p12). This same issue seems to come up time and again with all three countries in the TBA. Repeatedly legislation has been submitted to try and change this, but it is delayed, tabled or completely ignored within the judicial and legislative branches of the Paraguayan government. Another finding of the terrorism report was that “Paraguay did not exercise effective immigration or customs control on its borders and that efforts to address illicit activity in the TBA were uneven because of a lack of resources, and corruption within customs, police, and the judiciary,” (Beittel, p13). Again, legislation is started, stagnates and seems to be

ultimately ignored by those who are able to sign it into law. The office of the President had even authored legislation criminalizing any offence associated with terrorism that was put to Congress once in 2007 and twice in 2009. “In December 2009, President Lugo withdrew the counterterrorism legislation that would modify some aspects of the criminal code over objections raised by human rights organizations who argued that the new legislation threatened the international protection of human rights and may undermine freedom of assembly and freedom of speech,” (Beittel, p13). This begs the question about how devoted the government of Paraguay really is to clearing the TBA of crime once and for all. Despite some of the moves to give the perception of Paraguay jumping on the anti-terrorism band wagon, the U.S. is still concerned about the international impact this unique piece of real estate will ultimately have.

### *Brazil*

Of the three countries in the TBA, Brazil appears to have given the U.S. the most pushback in regards to foreign policy, trade matters and efforts to combat terrorism in the TBA. The relationship between the U.S. and Brazil is in general good, but several significant developments have created tension between the two countries. While both Presidents welcome cooperation, Brazil has been vocal about the U.S. war in Iraq and trade embargos in Cuba (Meyer, p12), which creates a sense of unrest. The most recent disagreement was over U.S. policy in regards to Iran. As a result of President Obama declining to pursue a nuclear swap deal with Iran recommended by Brazilian President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva mirroring that which the International Atomic Energy Agency proposed, Brazil voted against the U.N. Security Council resolution to impose sanctions, saying the council had “lost a historic opportunity to peacefully negotiate the Iranian nuclear program,” (Meyer, 13).

The concern is again brought up that Hezbollah and Hamas are active on the Brazilian portion of the border in the TBA. The most telling report included allegations that “al Qaeda’s former operations chief, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, lived in the Brazilian TBA city of Foz de Iguazu in 1995 and that Brazilian authorities arrested Ali al-Mahdi Ibrahim—who was wanted by Egypt for his alleged role in the 1997 massacre of tourists at Luxor—in the TBA in 2003,” (Meyer, p14). It is important to note, that for a second time, in this report on Brazil, it references the State Department’s 2008 terrorism report, repeating that “there have been no corroborated reports that any Islamic groups have an operational presence in the area,” (Meyer, p13).

As part of the “3+1” initiative, Brazil was able to put into place several anti-terrorism measures. “In 2002 the group built a Joint Intelligence Center to combat trans-border criminal organizations in the TBA in 2007...and implementing the Container Security Initiative (CSI) at the port of Santos,” (Meyer, p14). Unfortunately, Brazil suffers from the same issues that Argentina and Paraguay suffer from- an inability or unwillingness to enforce existing laws and putting off the passage of critical anti-terrorism legislation. “Brazil, like many Latin American nations, has been reluctant to adopt specific antiterrorism legislation as a result of the difficulty of defining terrorism in a way that does not include the actions of social movements and other groups whose actions of political dissent were condemned as terrorism by repressive military regimes in the past,” (Meyer, p14). This has proved to be a major hang up, but on an interesting note, it becoming more of a high visibility item with the selection of Brazil to host the 2016 Olympics as well as the 2014 World Cup. The government wants to provide a safe, secure place for not only athletes, but spectators as well- their entire country will be in the spotlight for these two events, and inevitably will make for a perfect target for terrorists.

## *United States*

On the night of September 20<sup>th</sup>, President George W. Bush addressed Congress, the nation, and the entire world, conveying how he would be handle the terrorist acts against the U.S.

Among some of his strongest words were:

*“Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done. Tonight the United States of America makes the following demands on the Taliban. Deliver to United States authorities all of the leaders of Al Qaeda who hide in your land. Release all foreign nationals, including American citizens you have unjustly imprisoned. Close immediately and permanently every terrorist training camp in Afghanistan. And hand over every terrorist and every person and their support structure to appropriate authorities. Give the United States full access to terrorist training camps, so we can make sure they are no longer operating. These demands are not open to negotiation or discussion. The Taliban must act and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorists or they will share in their fate. 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. Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.”*

-President George W. Bush, September 20, 2001

This speech clearly states the U.S.’s stand on terrorism, not just in the TBA, but around the world. We will do whatever it takes to keep American citizens safe, at home and abroad. Looking specifically at Latin America, we have seen how the U.S. has provided support in the forms of money, personnel to conduct training, military support, counterdrug support and diplomatic support. The list of countries with U.S. intervention, action and support (both negative and positive) include Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela, Cuba, Honduras, Ecuador, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. Virtually every country in Latin America has been touched by the U.S. in some way shape or form. “Through the Department of State (Diplomatic Security Office, Office of Antiterrorism Assistance), the United States provides Anti-Terrorism

Assistance (ATA) training and equipment to Latin American countries to help improve their capabilities in such areas as airport security management, hostage negotiations, bomb detection and deactivation, and countering terrorism financing,” (Sullivan, p4). This includes a specific focus on the TBA, as well, as covered above in each country overview. To put the U.S. provisions in monetary terms, “in recent years, ATA for Western Hemisphere countries amounted to \$8.9 million in FY2006, \$7.3 million in FY2007, and an estimated \$8 million in FY2008. For FY2009, the Administration requested \$9.3 million in ATA for Latin America, with \$2.8 million for Colombia and \$3 million for Mexico, and the balance for other countries,” (Sullivan, p5). This should leave no doubt in the reader’s mind 1) how committed the U.S. government is to eliminating terrorism, and 2) how important the partnership is between the U.S. and Latin America for success in this endeavor.

### *Al Qaeda*

There is very little to be examined in assessing Al Qaeda’s perspective on the TBA. Al Qaeda will use whatever means necessary and/or available to further their cause. Their cause is simply this: to bring Jihad to the Western world and to not stop until they have accomplished their goal of establishing the Islamic Caliphate. This means world-wide rule by radical Muslims. The TBA would provide an excellent location to fade into the background and build up their membership, train its’ followers, and obtain money for their cause. They will stop at nothing to gain this- the ends, most definitely, justifies the means in their eyes.

### **Potential Courses of Action for Actors**

In order to keep the number of alternate futures from getting too large, the countries in the TBA will be grouped together into one single actor, rather than as three single players. These

is due to the fact that all three countries share relatively friendly relationships with the U.S. and are assessed to react similarly should one of these alternate futures actually pan out. Our three “actors” will be 1) TBA countries, 2) the U.S. and 3) Al Qaeda.

### *TBA Countries*

The TBA countries have essentially three possible courses of action:

1. The governments of all three countries can choose to throw diplomacy (not to mention national and international security) to the wayside and freely permit Al Qaeda to operate in the TBA openly. This is the absolute worst course of action because it would imply that the governments of the TBA countries and the U.S. are no longer allies, but in fact enemies. The letters “FP” will be used to indicate this course of action (for “freely permit”).
2. The governments of the TBA countries can passively allow Al Qaeda to operate in the TBA by turning a blind eye to the issue of terrorism that lurks within the TBA. In some ways this is already happening with the legislatures of each country delaying important counterterrorism, money fraud and drug trafficking legislation, yet continuing to use diplomacy with the U.S and accept financial/training support. The letters “BE” will be used to indicate this course of action (for “blind eye”).
3. The governments of all three countries can deny Al Qaeda from operating in the TBA through the use of military and/or police force. This course of action would be the most aggressive and volatile no doubt, but may get the best results. The letters “DA” will be used to indicate this course of action (for “deny Al Qaeda”).

### *United States*

The U.S. has essentially two courses of action:

1. Treat the area much like we have treated Iraq and Afghanistan, by using military intervention. Although it would be a much different situation in that 1) the countries of the TBA all have legitimate, internationally recognized and respected democratic governments. It's not an issue of no one being there to take action to defend their country, rather, the officials that are there are not taking action to stop the situation from getting out of control. It would mean that we'd probably have to use special forces or establish a base in the vicinity of the TBA to stage operations out of. Neither of which will be well received by any of those governments. The letters "MI" will be used to indicate this course of action (for "military intervention").

2. The U.S. can continue to work the problem with diplomatic means and by providing support in the way of financial assistance, training, and supplying equipment to military and police forces in the TBA countries. The letters "SQ" will be used to indicate this course of action (for "status quo").

### *Al Qaeda*

Al Qaeda has essentially two courses of action:

1. They are able to establish a foothold in the TBA and utilize it to conduct financial transactions, recruiting, training for members, and planning for terrorist attacks. The letters "UA" will be used to indicate this course of action (for "utilize TBA area").

2. They are not about to establish a foothold in the TBA and do not utilize it to conduct financial transactions, recruiting, training for members, and planning for terrorist attacks, but find another location. The letters "DU" will be used to indicate this course of action (for "don't utilize TBA").

## Research Design

The analytical approach that will be used for this paper is the Lockwood Analytical Method for Prediction (LAMP). “LAMP differs in kind from other analytical techniques in that it is based on determining the relative probability of a series of alternate futures, rather than attempting to determine the quantitative probability of their occurrence,” (Lockwood & Lockwood, p27). In other words, out of all the possibilities that exist between multiple actors (which verges on being infinite due to the existence of free will), how probable would it be for each individual one to happen? In order to take what seems like an impossible task and whittle it down into bite-size chunks, there are twelve steps to this process to make it manageable and practical for producing a good product.

*12 Steps of LAMP* (as seen on the LAMP website <http://www.lamp-method.org/2.html>; for more detailed explanation please visit the website)

1. Define the issue for which you are trying to determine the most likely future- the issue should be fairly specific in nature, not too broad
2. Specify the national “actors” involved- this is a list of who will be involved in your issue and should be limited to 5 or 6 so as not to have an infinite number of futures
3. Perform an in-depth study of how each actor perceives the issue in question- this will allow you to determine from what standpoint each “actor” will view your issue
4. Specify all possible courses of action for each actor- once you determine each “actors” standpoint, these should come naturally
5. Determine the major scenarios within which you compare the alternate futures- these are assumptions that influence the “actors” involved

6. Calculate the total number of permutations of possible “alternate futures” for each scenario- the formula for determining this is  $X^Y=Z$ , where X equals the number of courses of action open to each actor, and y equals the number of national actors involved (assuming each actor has the same number of courses of action open to it), Z equals the total number of alternate futures to be compared
7. Perform a “pairwise comparison” of all alternate futures within the scenario to determine their relative probability- this step analyzes the alternate futures two at a time, always assuming the two futures being compared at the moment are the only ones that exist; the equation for this is  $X = n(n-1)/2$ , where n equals the total number of alternate futures to be analyzed, and X equals the total number of pairwise comparisons
8. Rank the alternate futures for each scenario from highest relative probability to the lowest based on the number of “votes” received- represents most likely to least likely to occur
9. Assuming each future occurs, analyze each alternate future in terms of its consequences for the issue in question- analyst uses imagination to predict/analyze alternate futures based on courses of action
10. Determine the “focal events” that must occur in our present in order to bring about a given alternate future- a "focal event" is an occurrence of sufficient magnitude that it changes the relative probability of alternate futures
11. Develop indicators for the focal events- what could cause a “focal event” to occur?  
Under what conditions?

12. State the potential of a given alternate future to “transpose” into another alternate future- how probable is it that one of your futures could morph into another future?

### **Scenarios**

Two separate and widely differing scenarios will be explored within the confines of each course of action for the three “actors.”

*Scenario #1:* HAMAS and Hezbollah are found to not only be operating in the TBA but are more than willing to allow Al Qaeda in on the action. Iran and Venezuela also jump on the bandwagon and decide to support these terrorist groups financially and with equipment as a way of increasing the capability of these groups without actually interfering with the U.S. directly.

*Scenario #2:* Traditional drug traffickers, money launderers and other criminals who “own” the territory in the TBA decide they do not want terrorist groups working out of their area because it would bring too much attention to this off-the-beaten-path piece of real estate. They launch an all out war against terrorism in an effort to keep the rights and ownership of the TBA to themselves.

### **Permutations of Possible “Alternate Futures” for Scenarios**

When determining the permutations of possible “alternate futures,” we will use the equation:

$$X^y=Z$$

$$3^1 \times 2^2 = 12$$

X equals the number of courses of action available to each actor, which is 3 for the TBA and 2 for the US and Al Qaeda for our study.

Y equals the number of actors involved, which are 3 for our study.

Z equals the total number of alternate futures to be compared, which is 12 for our study.

There will be 12 possible futures to compare for both scenarios 1 and 2.

### Pairwise Comparisons

When determining the number of pairwise comparisons for this study, we will use the equation:

$$X = (n-1) + (n-2) \dots + (n-n)$$

$$1 = (2-1) + (2-2)$$

Therefore, there will be one pairwise comparison for each scenario.

The top four alternate futures for each scenario will be discussed in depth, as well as the lowest ranking future.

#### Scenario #1

Pairwise results for scenario #1- HAMAS, Hezbollah and Iran all allow/support AQ to use TBA

Alt Future	TBA	US	AQ	Votes	Rank
1	FP	MI	UA	0	10
2	FP	MI	DU	3	8
3	FP	SQ	UA	6	6
4	FP	SQ	DU	6	6
5	BE	MI	UA	1	9
6	BE	MI	DU	1	9
7	BE	SQ	UA	12	1
8	BE	SQ	DU	7	5
9	DA	MI	UA	5	7
10	DA	MI	DU	8	4
11	DA	SQ	UA	9	3
12	DA	SQ	DU	10	2

FP= Freely permit AQ to use TBA

BE= Turn a blind eye

DA= Deny AQ use of TBA

MI= Military intervention

SQ= Status Quo

UA= Utilize TBA

DU= Don't use TBA

*Pairwise results for scenario #1 in order of rank*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>Alt Future</b>	<b>TBA</b>	<b>US</b>	<b>AQ</b>
1	12	7	BE	SQ	UA
2	10	12	DA	SQ	DU
3	9	11	DA	SQ	UA
4	8	10	DA	MI	DU
5	7	8	BE	SQ	DU
6	6	3	FP	SQ	UA
6	6	4	FP	SQ	DU
7	5	9	DA	MI	UA
8	3	2	FP	MI	DU
9	1	5	BE	MI	UA
9	1	6	BE	MI	DU
10	0	1	FP	MI	UA

FP= Freely permit AQ to use TBA  
 BE= Turn a blind eye  
 DA= Deny AQ use of TBA  
 MI= Military intervention  
 SQ= Status Quo  
 UA= Utilize TBA  
 DU= Don't use TBA

To begin with some general thoughts on the votes each future received, this scenario had interesting results in that there were two-way ties for the rank of sixth and ninth places. The votes seemed to have a bit of a gap in a couple of spots, which will show to be very different from the next scenario we will analyze.

*Alternate Future #7:* Receiving the most number of votes at 12, this future has the most probability of happening. In this future, the TBA governments have turned a blind eye to the issues going on in the TBA, not outright stopping legislation but not passing it either, they let the area fall by the wayside. The U.S. continues its current actions of diplomacy and support in the form of financial aid and equipment, and Al Qaeda sets up shop in the TBA because no one is

taking a hard line in this area. This future also would suggest that the TBA countries are knowingly and willingly aligning themselves with the likes of President Chavez of Venezuela and President Ahmadinejad of Iran, but not doing in it in an outright manner. This lines up with what is currently going on in the actions and dialogue between the TBA countries and the U.S.

*Alternate Future #12:* Receiving the second highest number of votes at 10, this future also has a relatively high probability of happening. In this future, the TBA governments deny Al Qaeda the ability to operate in the TBA by using military and/or police forces. Since they are a democracy, the U.S. respects their ability to govern and manage with confidence, thereby maintaining their status quo relationship by continuing diplomacy and providing support in the way of financial aid, training and equipment. They are actively taking a stand and forgoing alliances with Iran and Venezuela. Since there is increased focus on the area, it is entirely possible that Al Qaeda would choose not to use this area to operate out of since the group does not like to be in the “spotlight.”

*Alternate Future #11:* Receiving the third highest number of votes at 9, this future has a decently high probability of happening. In this future, the TBA governments deny Al Qaeda the ability to operate in the TBA by using military and/or police forces. Since they are a democracy, the U.S. respects their ability to govern and manage with confidence, thereby maintaining their status quo relationship by continuing diplomacy and providing support in the way of financial aid, equipment and training. Here’s where this future diverges from the last one: Al Qaeda is still able to utilize the TBA due to the ineffectiveness the TBA governments have on enforcing the law. Crime, drug trafficking and money laundering have continuously occurred in this area, even when the police and military do try to bring it under control. There are simply more criminals than there are law enforcement personnel to deal with them, so in the end they wind up

being able to establish a presence in the area and maintain operations. Iran and Venezuela are actively contributing to this, most likely in a clandestine manner while paying lip service to their failed attempts at convincing the U.S. they want to work via diplomacy. This lines up with what we have seen in Afghanistan and Iraq with the insurgency and also in Latin America with drug lords being able to essentially run a country with their power and financial means.

*Alternate Future #10:* Receiving the fourth highest number of votes at 8, this future also has a decent probability of happening. In this future, the TBA governments deny Al Qaeda the ability to operate in the TBA by using military and/or police forces. To present a united front with the U.S., they request the U.S. bring down troops (possibly special operations forces of some kind or a small Army presence) and possibly FBI, CIA, DEA, ATF personnel and conduct counterterrorism operations in the TBA as a coalition. As a result of the increased support in the form of numbers of people, Al Qaeda is not able to conduct operations out of the TBA. This will probably only serve to infuriate Iran and Venezuela and fan the flame of their desire to assist Al Qaeda in any way they can, most likely via clandestine means. This might be compared to the “surge” in Afghanistan in an effort to eliminate terror cells, defeating them by sheer numbers.

*Alternate Future #1:* Taking a look at the last future, this one received the fewest votes at zero. In this future, the TBA country governments freely permit Al Qaeda to operate out of the TBA, thus inciting the U.S. to send Air Force, Army, Marine and Navy component to the TBA to clear it out, rendering Al Qaeda unable to use the area. If this future were to happen, it would mean several things. First, it would mean that Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil would be on the verge of being failed states with terrorists ruling rather than governments (i.e.: they would no longer be democracies). Second, it would mean that the U.S. would have severed all diplomatic ties with these countries as the U.S. does not distinguish between terrorists and the countries that harbor

and/or support them. And third, it would mean that both Iran and Venezuela would have become allies with these countries. This would be the absolute worst case future for this scenario.

*Scenario #2*

*Pairwise results for scenario #2- Drug traffickers, money launderers, criminals wage war on terrorist groups trying to gain a foothold in TBA*

<b>Alt Future</b>	<b>TBA</b>	<b>US</b>	<b>AQ</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>Rank</b>
1	FP	MI	UA	1	11
2	FP	MI	DU	3	9
3	FP	SQ	UA	5	7
4	FP	SQ	DU	4	8
5	BE	MI	UA	2	10
6	BE	MI	DU	0	12
7	BE	SQ	UA	11	1
8	BE	SQ	DU	10	2
9	DA	MI	UA	7	5
10	DA	MI	DU	9	3
11	DA	SQ	UA	8	4
12	DA	SQ	DU	6	6

FP= Freely permit AQ to use TBA

BE= Turn a blind eye

DA= Deny AQ use of TBA

MI= Military intervention

SQ= Status Quo

UA= Utilize TBA

DU= Don't use TBA

*Pairwise results for scenario #2 in order of rank*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>Alt Future</b>	<b>TBA</b>	<b>US</b>	<b>AQ</b>
1	11	7	BE	SQ	UA
2	10	8	BE	SQ	DU
3	9	10	DA	MI	DU
4	8	11	DA	SQ	UA
5	7	9	DA	MI	UA
6	6	12	DA	SQ	DU
7	5	3	FP	SQ	UA
8	4	4	FP	SQ	DU
9	3	2	FP	MI	DU
10	2	5	BE	MI	UA
11	1	1	FP	MI	UA
12	0	6	BE	MI	DU

FP= Freely permit AQ to use TBA  
 BE= Turn a blind eye  
 DA= Deny AQ use of TBA  
 MI= Military intervention  
 SQ= Status Quo  
 UA= Utilize TBA  
 DU= Don't use TBA

As mentioned in the introductory thoughts of the analysis portion of the previous scenario, the pairwise comparison of the alternate futures in scenario two offered differing results. The votes began with eleven being the highest, trickling down through each rank with one fewer votes. In other words, the votes went 11, 10, 9, 8, 7.....2, 1, and 0. All the votes were evenly spaced out throughout the alternate futures. Also, alternate futures 7, 10 and 11 were also three of the top scoring alternate futures in scenario number one.

*Alternate Future #7:* Receiving the highest number of votes was alternate future seven, scoring eleven votes. This future is the most likely one to occur should a scenario like number two occur. In this future, criminals, money launderers and drug traffickers wage war on Al Qaeda,

not wanting to share the wealth of being able to operate virtually unseen in the TBA. The TBA countries would turn a blind eye as they believe that the two groups will eventually get rid of each other. The U.S. maintains their status quo relationship, respecting that the TBA countries are democracies and capable of handling their own internal issues. Meanwhile, Al Qaeda is able to utilize the TBA and is as capable of fighting back as the criminals that operate there. They see this as an opportunity to establish a new foothold in an area in the western hemisphere; they do not go down without a fight. This future would mean that the TBA countries are choosing to ignore the problem and hope that both groups wind up destroying each other in the process to gain power. Not a pretty picture is painted here.

*Alternate Future #8:* Receiving the second highest number of votes at 10 is alternate future eight. In this future, the TBA countries again turn a blind eye to the fact that two groups of dangerous people are at war within their three borders. They don't not address the problem, but they certainly don't address it aggressively. The U.S. maintains their status quo relationship in order to maintain diplomatic ties. But the end result for Al Qaeda is different in this future. The criminals who own the rights to the TBA fight tooth and nail to maintain control over their area of operations, and Al Qaeda potentially decides that it's not worth the trouble to establish a foothold in this specific location. There are plenty of other areas to plan terrorist attacks out of, they will move on to one that won't draw as much attention from the world. This future isn't necessarily ideal either in that: a) the criminals at work in the TBA are still at work, thus leaving the situation not improved, and b) Al Qaeda is now on the prowl for another place to call home in South America.

*Alternate Future #10:* Receiving nine votes, this alternate future is another possibility of how the instability of the TBA could be handled. In this future, the governments of the TBA decide

to actively deny Al Qaeda the use of the TBA by using military and police forces to weed out criminal and terrorist activities in the area. Upon invitation, the U.S. sends down special forces teams or small units of Army and Marine personnel to conduct ground operations in support of these countries. As a result, Al Qaeda is not able to use the TBA to stage operations out of. This future would most likely be the way forward for quickest results, but is not the most likely due to the fact that it's unlikely these any of these countries ask us to set up a military presence in the TBA or surrounding areas. It could be seen as a miniature version of Iraq or Afghanistan, both wars and situations that South American nations would rather not get involved in, especially Argentina who has been somewhat vocal about its disapproval of the war in the Middle East.

*Alternate Future #11:* Receiving eight votes, alternate future eleven also has a reasonable probability of panning out. In this future, the TBA countries actively deny Al Qaeda from using the TBA by using military and police forces to conduct counterterrorism operations. The U.S. would respect their authority in the area and maintain the status quo relationship with the three TBA countries by continuing to provide support in the way of financial assistance and sending equipment and personnel to train on an as-requested basis, using diplomacy as the primary means for working the situation. But, historically speaking, Latin American countries have not always been successful as weeding out criminals, drug traffickers and terrorist groups and as a result, Al Qaeda is still able to operate in the TBA, despite the efforts made there.

*Alternate Future #6:* Finally, alternate future six received zero votes most likely due to several reasons. In this future, the TBA country governments have turned a blind eye to the issues going on in the TBA, which means legislation is not being passed to criminalize the activities there, no law enforcement is being done and criminals are being allowed to conduct their business there. The U.S. has decided to forego diplomacy and send down military forces to eliminate the

problem. As a result, Al Qaeda decides to not use the TBA to stage operations out of since there are other places they can operate out of without drawing international attention. This future is extremely unlikely due to: a) it is highly unlikely that the U.S. would send troops into a free, democratic society that has leadership who was freely elected to govern the country- this would be seen as an enormous overstepping of boundaries, and b) if the TBA governments were turning a blind eye, Al Qaeda would most likely use the area rather than not use it, even if they still had to battle drug lords and money launderers who owned the area because it's so easy for them to blend in and disappear.

### **Potential for Alternate Futures to Transpose**

The potential for any of these alternate futures to “transpose,” or change drastically due to one actor changes perspectives, exists in some futures, but not necessarily others. The idea of transposition is essentially that “every act of free will has the potential to change the future” (Lockwood, p55). For example, let's say that instead of considering the TBA countries as one entity, let's break them up from their “3+1” status into three individual states completely independent of each other in the sense that they take on differing views of how to handle not only the TBA issue, but how to handle the relationship with the U.S. Let's imagine that Argentina goes from merely being vocal about its negative-leaning feelings about the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, to being outright aggressive in nature. In the first scenario, that could indicate that Argentina would align itself with Venezuela and Iran, taking an aggressive stance against the U.S. This would have an impact on just about every alternate future analyzed in this research. It would essentially be leaving Brazil and Paraguay as the U.S.' only allies in the TBA. Take that a step further and consider the possibility of Brazil and Paraguay going down the road

of Argentina. Now the U.S. has no allies in the TBA. The situation quickly goes from bad to worse in this case.

Here's another possible transposition for consideration. Let's imagine that instead of drug traffickers, money launderers and criminals calling for an all out war against Al Qaeda as in scenario two, Al Qaeda decides to funnel money into the bank accounts of these people. The situation has just turned into one where instead of fighting each other, you've got a terrorist organization funneling money into a third party, and using that as a means to gain a foothold in the TBA. The old saying "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" is what we see playing out here. This also has the potential to alter in some way, shape or form, all of the alternate futures in scenario two. Now you're dealing with two sets of "bad guys" who have joined as one, blurring the lines of who is who in this conflict.

### **Determining "Focal Events"**

There are a couple of possible focal events that could take place to bring about the above alternate futures (or transpositions). A focal event "is an occurrence of sufficient magnitude that it changes the relative probability of the universe of alternate futures," (Lockwood, p 55).

1. The governments of the TBA countries and the U.S. are no longer allies, and thus do not share the same vision for how the conflict in the TBA should be handled. Now that they are enemies, there is no reason for the "3+1" to exist and it is disbanded. Now the U.S. has to decide if it wants to go down the same road that led them to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.
2. Al Qaeda trains for, plans, and carries out a terrorist attack either in the U.S. or in Latin America that is determined to have been concocted in the TBA with 100%

confidence by intelligence officials. Since this fact has been established, there is no longer an issue of if the U.S. should send in troops and law enforcement personnel to assist the countries of the TBA, but when the troops would arrive. Also, if the terrorist act occurred in Latin America, it would no doubt throw the TBA countries into overdrive in an effort to weed out terrorism.

### **Developing Indicators for “Focal Events”**

There are several indicators that could be used to foreshadow one of the above “focal events.” This step in the LAMP method can be compared with the Indications and Warnings (I&W) portion of intelligence collection (Lockwood, p56). I&W information is a set of events that is pre-determined to warn intelligence officials that something is about to happen. Some of the indications that the above focal events could be about to happen are:

1. The TBA country governments begin to back away from diplomacy with the U.S. The relationship begins to cool off and they are not showing signs of a united front anymore.
2. There is no longer cooperation from the legislatures from any of the TBA countries in the form of anti-terrorism laws or procedures, either creation of new laws or the enforcement of those already in place.
3. There is “chatter” in the intelligence channels of an impending attack from Al Qaeda, either in the U.S. or in Latin America. If the chatter was about Latin America exclusively, it could be assessed that it’s coming out of the TBA, or another area that is anti-American (i.e.: Venezuela).

## Conclusion

“The 9/11 attacks show that Al Qaeda operatives can go undetected for significant periods of time and slip beneath the counterterrorist ‘radar.’ In addition, the group has, at the least, probed Latin America. Reports that bin Laden himself visited Brazil in the 1990s are unconfirmed, but senior planner Khalid Sheikh Mohammed traveled there in 1995, a fact that came to light following his capture in Pakistan in March 2003. U.S. forces in Afghanistan searching Al Qaeda facilities found travel advertisements for the so-called tri-border area of Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil, where several Middle Eastern terrorist groups have operated for over a decade.” (Steinitz, Mark S. *Middle East Middle East Terrorist Activity in Latin America*, Policy Papers on the Americas, Volume XIV, Study 7, July 2003)

To bring all the evidence together, it seems as if there is something brewing in the TBA. As far as what specifically is happening, especially in reference to Al Qaeda operating out of this area, it’s simply a matter of time before we see solid evidence in my assessment. In order to make a solid assessment of how probable this is, there is a requirement for more research to be done.

What I would like to do is attempt to answer the following questions:

1. How is the area being currently used and by what groups specifically?
2. How are these groups supported financially?
3. What law enforcement organizations or government agencies are monitoring the area?
4. How will Al Qaeda would be able to take advantage of this neglected part of Latin America?

This is not an all-inclusive list and will be added to and taken away from throughout the research process. It would be necessary, albeit dangerous, to do research in the TBA, asking locals their perspectives, talking with law enforcement professionals and military leaders getting their perspectives on the situation. There is still much to be learned about this area and the

opportunities to improve our understanding, both on the classified and unclassified level. It is entirely possible for Al Qaeda to establish a foothold in this overlooked region, with Latin America overlooking it as an issue they can't get under control (much like the drug problem), and the U.S. maintaining a status quo relationship with the countries in the TBA because it would be wrong to interfere in other democratic countries policies. With the evidence we have here at this point in time, it seems like the situation will continue on as it has for the time being, until another 9/11 type event occurs. It most definitely is not a matter of if another terrorist act of that magnitude happens, but when it will happen.

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Appendix

Image of the Tri-Border Area



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