

Al Qaeda Terra Marique: a Geopolitical Interpretation.

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The growing number of terrorist attacks of the last few years puts the world in a state of confusion. People are shaken by bombings' violence and unpredictability and, even though international policies have blocked terrorists several times, it cannot be argued that the phenomenon has been contained or that a solution is seen on the horizon, neither in the short, nor in the long term.

Understanding the way terrorist organizations act, among which stands out Al Qaeda, is not easy. Moreover, trying to study the methodology of action of such groups is not possible if one does not have the elements of analysis and data owned by well equipped intelligence groups. Media constantly provide an amount of information concerning terrorism in general, but a complete picture of the situation cannot be drawn. In fact, when the news is reported, in several regions of the world a new attack is already being planned, and incapacity of linking the events keeps people perceive terror as an invisible and unstoppable phenomenon.

One might think that there is not any logic, and attacks are conducted in different places, at random and in accordance with the opportunities provided by the moment.

On the opposite, in this dossier some elements concerning terror in the Middle East will be interpreted. By collecting data on the attacks' number and by researching some other geographic and political elements, a geopolitical path leading to a upper logic of terror will be described.

Al Qaeda's action might, in fact, have logic and might be lead by an intelligence financing, organizing and directing an ordered series of attacks, coordinating several terrorist groups in the Middle East.

How can geopolitics help in detecting the main lines of action of terror ? A geopolitical approach might show the terrorists' most beaten tracks and clear up the reasons why attacks take place in certain regions rather than in others.

The whole picture at the moment is in the fog, and as a consequence, we like to link terrorists' unpredictability to single militants' madness. Isolating certain phenomena within a specific geographic area such as the Middle East can contribute to detect the main lines of a strategic plan. Al Qaeda is applying pressure on the Middle East, and its action has its roots in the Afghan - Pakistani border and it is spreading in the whole Middle East following precise trajectories. Understanding acting ways and beaten tracks can help to know the enemy. It is not possible to foresee its moves, even if possessing the most recent and accurate data, but it is possible to get closer to its logic.

Start to Have a General View

Media got world population used to think that terrorism can hit anywhere. We are used to believe that among the terror's main characteristics there are swiftness, invisibility and unpredictability of action. This is certainly true, as is true that for all of us it is not too difficult to label terrorists' action as mad and indiscriminate. This approach, however, excludes the possibility of thinking to the existence of logic behind attacks' geometrics.

Means of which terrorism avails itself are not highly technological. Attacks are leaded by using simple tactics and explosive devices are generally rudimentary, albeit extremely efficient. The image of terrorism is amplified by swiftness of action, mainly. Terror is a self fulfilling prophecy. Terrorized enemy is perturbed, is panicked, no longer sees any exit way during the attack and is overcome by fear. In a state of fear, ghosts generated by terror can multiply.

What is not emerging immediately is the general view of the phenomenon of terrorism. Suddenly in 2001 Western countries have fallen in a state of blindness, being involved on a conflict against an invisible enemy, Al Qaeda. The confusion created by it might hide a careful, albeit subtle logic.

A research on the attacks in the last decades will be carried out by trying to isolate some phenomena and collect a series of elements by which trace reasons why terrorists prefer hitting certain regions. The major difficulty is due to the fact that, even if one was endowed with all necessary data, and even if these data were accurately analyzed, the inexistence of a rigid line of conduct would emerge. Al Qaeda uses links in different countries and with several terrorist organizations. Not only are these links little known, but also one shall pay attention to the contexts, to the moment in history, to the political circumstances of which, case by case, Al Qaeda takes advantage in order to inflame already tense situations.

Geopolitics teaches that behind some facts, actions, behaviours and choices there are some constants. Of course the globalized world offers new scenarios to geopoliticians, and new weapons, medias and international connections have outlined and shuffled world balances. At the same time, however, one cannot do without precedent theories that, if used through a specific perspective, can be used as a lens to interpret more clearly facts of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

This analysis has the purpose of discussing the existence of logic in Al Qaeda's geopolitics. Such logic will be seen through a reconstruction of attacks in Middle East on the basis of their frequency. Once that targets hit more frequently will be tracked, (targets, as to say, preferred by terrorists), an action plan in the Middle East will be defined, in order to demarcate a field of analysis.

Al Qaeda hits all over the world, and the easiest strike to remember is the one on the United States on September 11, 2001. From a geopolitical point of view, if a line of conduct must be inquired, the analysis must stay close to the basin from which the organization's intelligence unravels, which is the Afghan - Pakistani border. From there one can imagine a push towards west, as to spread terror as far as useful and possible. In this dossier we will not study Al Qaeda action in the world, but we will limit the analysis to the way Al Qaeda moves in relation to Middle Eastern sensible areas in the last few years. These areas include Iran, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, the Horn of Africa and Suez.

Once that the lines of Al Qaeda's push will be linked to the preferred striking points in the selected area of study, a geopolitical theory on Al Qaeda action in the Middle East will be illustrated.

Lastly, on the basis of data obtained and conclusions that will follow, the analysis will discuss as to whether a Heartland in Middle East exists, meant as an area of particular geopolitical meaning allowing the who controls it to contain Al Qaeda's push in bordering regions.

Hard Core: the Afghan-Pakistani Border

The starting point of the analysis is the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the so called Durand line. It can be argued that the Taliban's operational basis, the region where the movement was born and from which Al Qaeda's action and thought spread is this mountainous territory. (Figure 1).

The particular nature of the ground allows Taliban to carry out their activities, among which to lie hidden, convert new members and train young people in madrassas. Since 1988, and, however, since the soviet troops' withdrawal in 1989, the Bin Laden's starting point was Afghanistan. It is also true that Al Qaeda members have shown in the course of time their excellent mobility between Afghanistan and bordering countries. They often make investigators lose their tracks and, when in the past they could not go to some other Arabian lands, leaders felt themselves safe in Afghanistan.

1 Hard Core: the Afghan-Pakistani Border



Frequency of Attacks in the Last Ten Years

It is important to make clear that when one faces a study on a terrorist group like Al Qaeda, that strikes under several shapes and that can be supported by other terrorist regional groups, it is not easy to distinguish exactly among attacks which belong to its action and which do not. Currently Al Qaeda coordinates several organizations that label themselves as linked to it. Therefore the movement's identity itself, with its different actions and different faces, is difficult to understand. Investigations carried out time after time allow intelligences of each involved country (Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia etc...) to recognize the "style" of a group and detect the action of specific terrorists. Sometimes attacks are claimed by terrorists themselves, but it is not a necessary consequence that the link leading to Al Qaeda's mark exists.

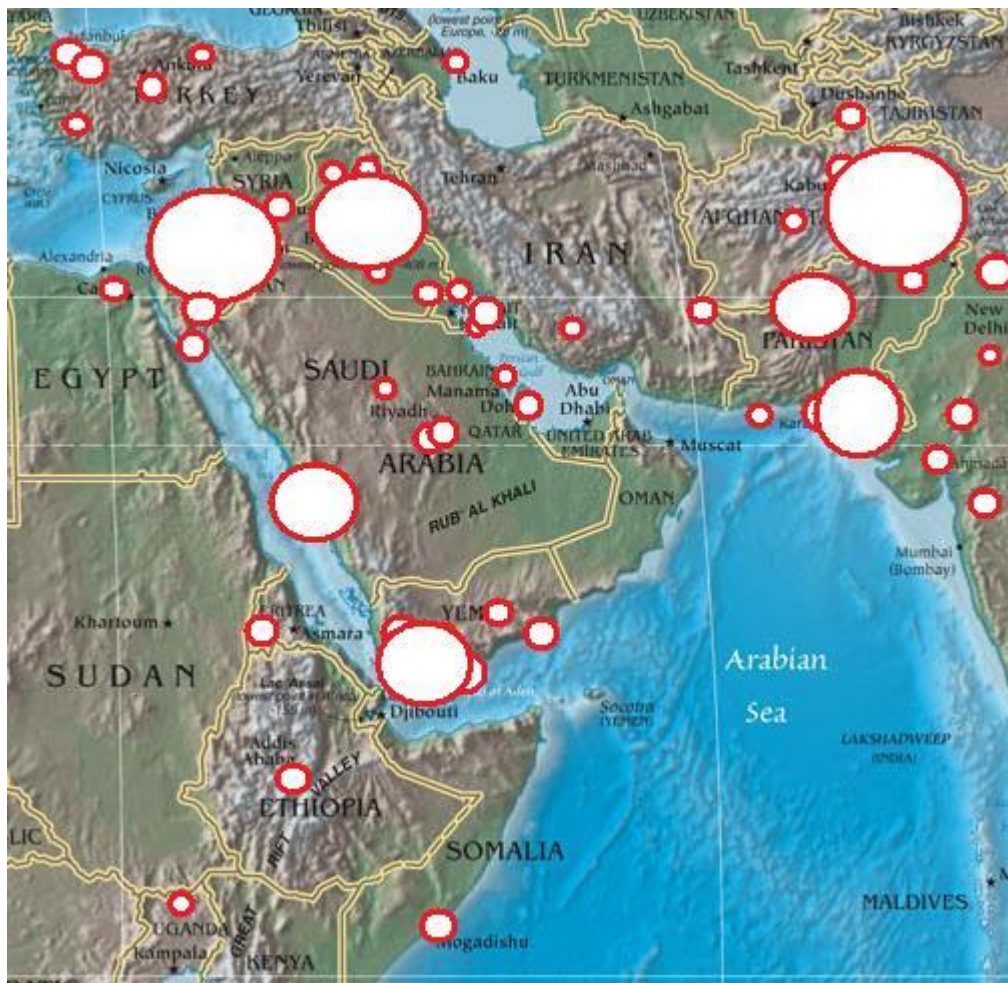
Essentially, it is not possible to avail oneself of the same devices used by governmental research centres, so this analysis will be based on approximate data resulting from timelines available on the web. Timelines are obtained by the gathering work of international preeminent websites and terror observation groups. As far as the first phase of the research is concerned, which is carried out on attacks' frequency, if one wants to investigate the logic behind Al Qaeda's action in the Middle East, any attack can be counted to locate the most important targets.

Frequency of attacks, therefore, is the most important element. The period 1999 – 2009 is chosen as meaningful. From the frequency obtained between 1999 and 2009 some constancy can be found. (Figure 2). Red and white circles locate cities and towns that were attacked. Larger circles gather more attacks and give the idea of a higher frequency in the decade. Data are obtained by a broader reconstruction of attacks in the Middle East in the last 30 years (1979 – 2009). Here, in the graphs in the end of the analysis the sole 2005 – 2009 data are reported because the quantitative data for the previous years were not meaningful. To these same data years between 1999 and 2005 were added, and, with the help of the satellite, exact points of attacks were located on the map, town by town, as shown by the circles in Figure 2.

The following clarification is key: there are many different standards on which estimate the importance of an attack. For example, damage could be counted, so that a single attack in a little Saudi town's market might be more important than a foiled attack in Baghdad, a high frequency explosions big city. Another parameter might be the importance of the target, therefore a governmental building, a politician or an embassy would have a different meaning compared to more common targets. In this dossier, however, the standard of evaluation is the frequency, which is the interest of terrorists linked to Al Qaeda or not, in spreading terror in specific areas. In Figure 2 seven regions of particular importance appear. These regions will be analyzed briefly.

1. Afghan – Pakistani border. Western and north-eastern Afghanistan: Kabul area and the border to Pakistan. Northern Pakistan: Islamabad and Peshawar, and the Punjab region (Rawalpindi, Faisalabad).
2. Mid - western Pakistan: Balochistan, in particular the city of Quetta.
3. Southern Pakistan: Karachi, dock city.
4. South - western Yemen: Sana'a, the capital city, but above all Aden, on the Bab el Mandeb Strait.
5. Mid - western Saudi Arabia: Jiddah, dock city. The closest to Port Sudan.
6. Sinai, Jordan, Israel, Palestinian territories, Lebanon.
7. Iraq: Baghdad, Diyala region.

2 Frequency of Attacks between 1999 and 2009. Approximate Data.



What is Left if Saudi Desert and Iranian Mountains are Excluded.

The Hard Core, which is the area included in the circle in Figure 1, is a highland, surely the most suitable for Al Qaeda activities, at least in an organizational - defensive phase. Mountains have clearly visible advantages. They are often an insurmountable obstacle, allowing the single combatant in a defensive position to observe without being sighted; they offer a unique shelter to local people and to whom has already reached the peak, and through the passes even small groups of Taliban can control whole areas below; mobility of who is defending is maintained and its level of protection is improved, whilst attackers are highly exposed either when resting or moving. Moreover, highlands allow sighting the enemy providing locals with a significant advantage in planning a strategy of anticipation. Ambush is the most probable tactic, whilst who ventures in the conquer of the mountain must run the risk of being constantly under enemy fire, and being target of illusory tactics that have the only scope of confounding the enemy.

Once that Al Qaeda moves from the Hard Core and proceeds toward its targets in the Middle East or in the rest of the world, defending elements lose their importance, whilst the existence of a populated urban centre with meaningful targets, such as embassies, military basis and governmental buildings becomes crucial. When attackers enter the town and join the crowd, they become practically invisible. In that moment only the governmental intelligence can stop them with an already late manoeuvre. Capability of police in any country is not questioned, especially in western countries, in particular after the 11 September. As far as interception and arrest of terrorists is concerned, security measures put into being in docks, airports and sensitive transit points have gradually given good results. Not always, however, can or wants any country to guarantee such safety standards. Especially in the Middle East there are countries like Yemen where controls are not efficient and infiltrations are normal.

What is argued here is that terrorists have a defensive advantage offered by their place of living and an offensive advantage provided by the dimension of the city where they strike. In these cities they can be almost invisible and have the time and the means to set up attacks.

When one looks at main targets' position, ordered, we want to renew it, on the basis of their frequency, an imaginary line circumscribing deserts of Saudi Arabia and mountains of Iran can be drawn. In these two countries the number of attacks is on average lower, substantially because these territories are not particularly attractive to terrorists, except for Jeddah, on the red Sea.

Therefore these mountains and deserts in, respectively, Iran and Saudi Arabia have to be excluded. A grey zone remains, divided in two parts by the Persian Gulf and bounded by Arabian Sea and Red Sea to south, and not having, apparently, any geopolitical significance. Apparently, because once these lands are detected, their importance in this analysis must be found.

Deserts and mountains, in fact, have a geopolitical role of the utmost importance.

Mountains often mark a natural and political border, they have a particular tactic importance, as abovementioned, and their control is decisive to possess the land downstream. In the event that one is not interested in possessing or controlling the territory, however, and if one is simply in transit, mountains become an obstacle, maybe the obstacle par excellence. A mountain is difficult to overstep, it is dangerous for travellers, and the environment is hostile and unsafe.

Iranian highlands, from the Al Qaeda viewpoint, represent a continuity line with the Afghani mountains, and they further protect the Hard Core. Moreover, politically speaking, in this moment Iran has not a strong interest in fighting Al Qaeda, unless it stipulates partnership agreements with the United States on this issue. This option is not to be excluded, but at the moment Iran, both geographically and politically, is a further barrier offering protection and refuge.

Talibans who want to move from Afghanistan can dispose of several ways, among which, though not quick, the course through the Iranian border.

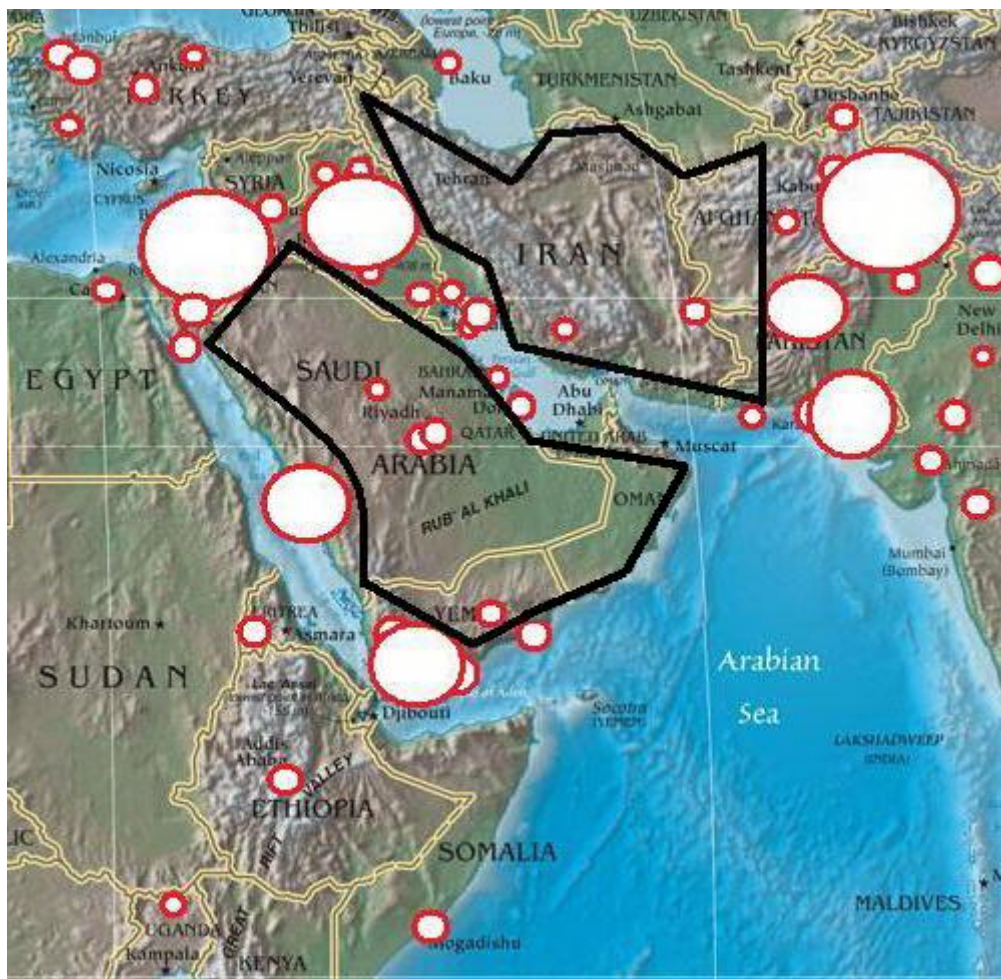
As far as the desert is concerned, from a geopolitical point of view it can be considered as a sort of moving sea overlapping borders, moving forward and receding depending on the winds, and where only who is equipped with necessary tools can be protected. It is not excessively difficult to cross, if

one must cover short distances, but it is also a nullifier of borders and a creator of that territorial continuity useful to whom must avoid controls. When the border between two countries is almost entirely covered by the desert, it will be difficult for border police to check it at full length. Passages, therefore, are always opened. In this particular case the Saudi desert is taken in consideration.

It does not seem that Talibans have any particular interest in venturing there, considering also that there are many ways far safer and convenient to cross a border without being intercepted, not last navigation. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia is a United States ally in Middle East and for this reason, speaking of transit, it represents an unsafe territory in general.

The only point of a certain importance, as access to the sea, is Jeddah, whose coast is slightly less desert than the rest of the country. Jeddah in the last few years has become a target for terror. The dock has great momentum, not only economically, but also religiously. From there, in fact, the Mecca is accessible. Jeddah was the diplomatic centre of the country before that, in the mid 80s, all embassies and governmental offices, including the Foreign Office, were moved to Riyadh.

3 Saudi Desert and Iranian Mountains



Demarcate an Area of Interest: the Middle Eastern Trapezium.

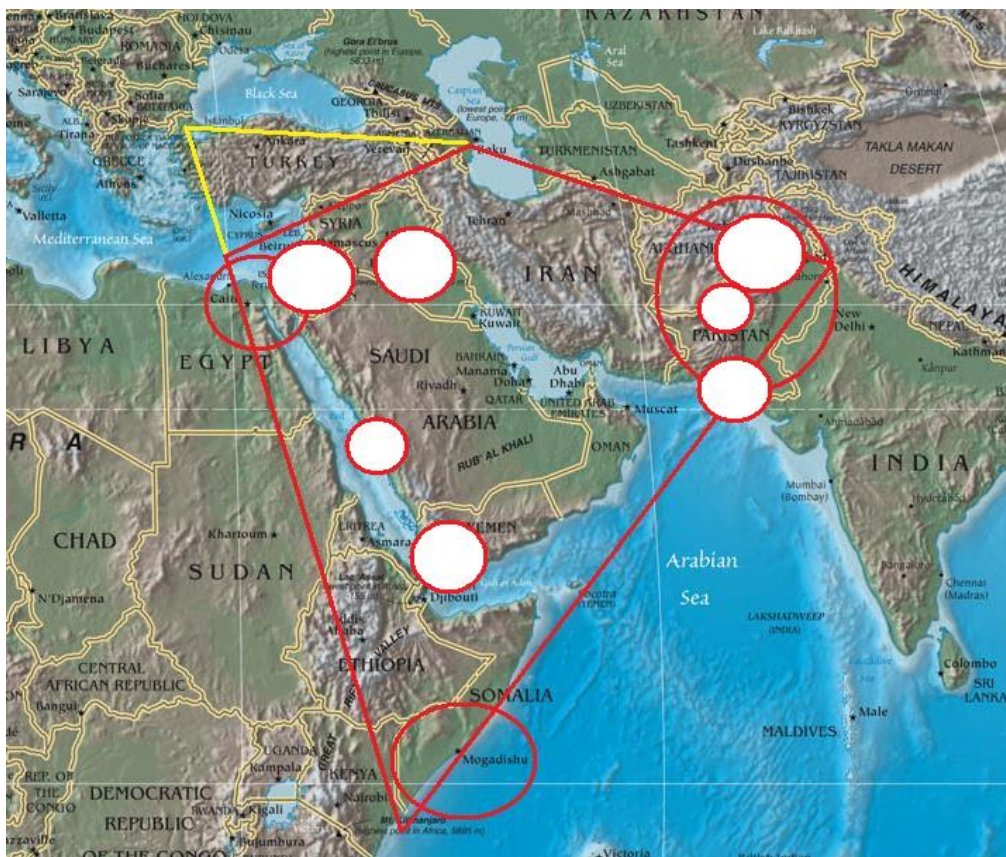
In order to limit the analysis, geographic points having a geopolitical meaning will be found in the sole Middle Eastern region. Beyond these points the discourse on Al Qaeda might be managed, of course, but one should necessarily change or extend the topic. Following coherence with the topic, therefore, the following points can be located:

- Islamabad, as the centre of an area of action that includes Afghanistan and Pakistan
- Mogadishu, as a point of arrival of a straight line passing through Karachi and conducting to the Horn of Africa's south point
- Cairo, through a line dividing Egypt in an eastern part and a western part plus the rest of Africa where desert is preminent and geopolitical importance is lower
- Baku, Azerbaijan, through a line including Syria and Iraq and excluding Turkey, and a second line passing through Kabul and including the Iranian border up to Islamabad again.

The outcome is an area comparable to an almost regular trapezium, inclusive of all the areas most frequently struck by attacks in the last few years. On this trapezium we will locate internal subareas having a specific meaning.

If one wanted to work on a larger figure, a farther vertex might be found in Istanbul. In this way one obtains, instead of the trapezium, an almost equilateral triangle including Ankara and delimiting a broader and perhaps more complete Middle East. It is not excluded that one can take into consideration this option as well, but in this dossier we believe that a discourse on the sole trapezium will be sufficient. This figure offers, as to say, an Oceanic Middle East, more than a Mediterranean Middle East. If one wanted, however, to study Al Qaeda outlet to Mediterranean countries, Turkey shall not be excluded. Actually, after defining the dynamics unravelling from the Afghan-Pakistani Hard Core and ending in Palestine, one could extend the analysis to the Turkish territory, and to Balkans and Europe. However, before talking of the terrorist action in Turkey, we will analyze the Al Qaeda's starting push and its destination and we will remain in the original border given by the Middle Eastern trapezium.

4 The Middle Eastern Trapezium



Two Lines of Pressure: By Land and By Sea

The purpose of the trapezium is to provide a field of analysis able to limit the study, in order to label it as "Middle Eastern".

The purpose of indicators of attacks' frequency, instead, is to insert an action inside the trapezium and to get a continuity in the attacks, a ratio or a logic of Al Qaeda in the Middle East as to understand the way this organization acts, whether through peripheral or central lanes, whether secretly or visibly and whether this logic really exist.

It is possible to find two main lines of strength, two channels through which the Taliban potential can unravel. These two pressure lines are obtained by following the two courses, as to say, compulsory of Al Qaeda's energy and intelligence compressed in the Hard Core. This energy starts between the mountains and comes down in the Middle East coherently following the points of major frequency.

It must be argued, to avoid any misunderstanding, that lines of action or pressure, as they are called hereinafter, do not have the scope of pointing out Taliban's or terrorists' physical routes towards their targets. It is impossible to affirm that terrorists move mainly through the two lines drawn in this analysis, especially in a world where single terrorist organization are already present in the Middle Eastern territory, where each group is linked to a specific area and is eventually connected in the Al Qaeda's network.

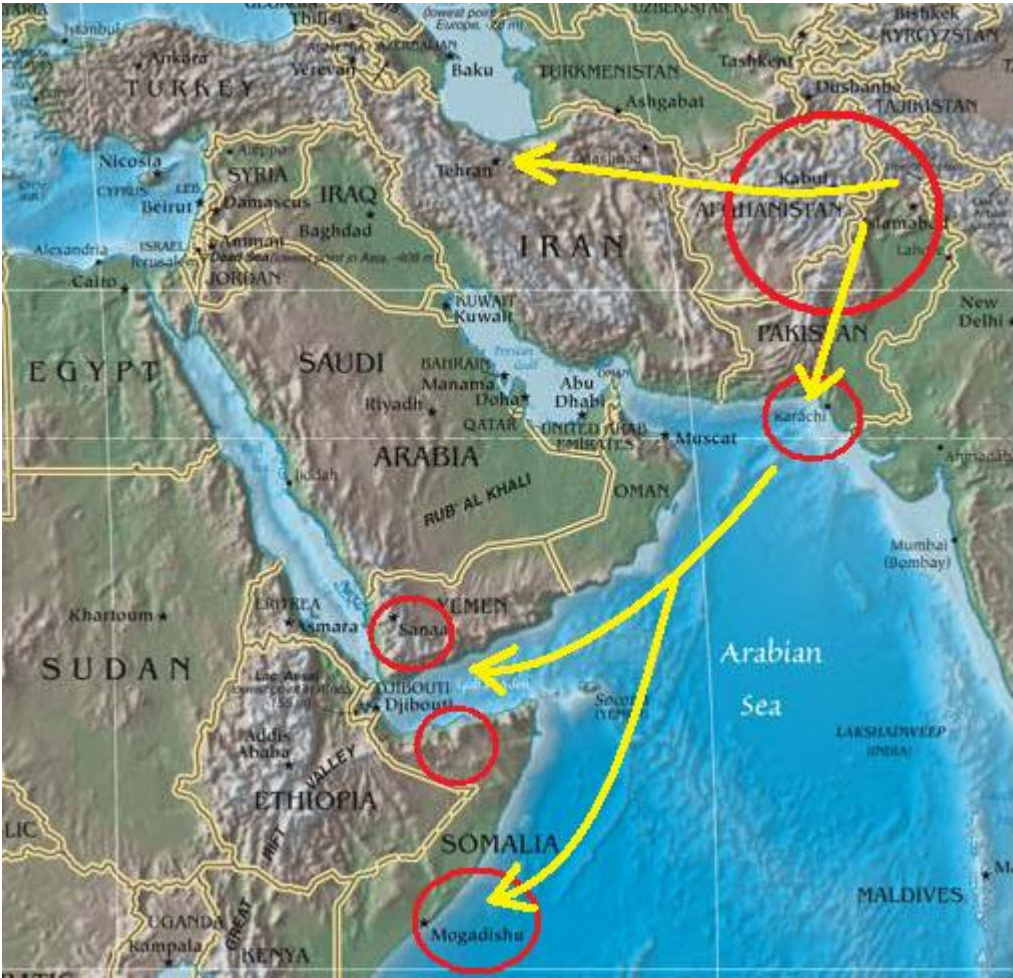
The lines, instead, drawn on the attacks' frequency, indicate two strength flows, two pressures of different nature, two ideal pushes from the power tight on the Mountains spreading in the trapezium.

Let us look at these two lines of pressure linking the major points of attack. Going down from the highlands and spreading in the bordering areas, the path that could be followed in an expansion toward west might be double: on one side a path enters western Iran. On the other, the push reaches out central Pakistan and from there, through a way that ideally would cross the sea, it goes up to Yemen and Somalia. Ideally, because Al Qaeda does not dispose, at the moment, of such a navy to cover similar displacements. But sea control, as Anglo-Saxons and Romans intended it for ages, depends on the control on points of access. The fact that there are beaten courses is different. Therefore, the fact that Al Qaeda reached the Gulf of Aden in order to control the strait does not necessarily mean that it does or did that by sea, but simply that it could manage the points of access to and the way out from the Red Sea.

Historically speaking, it seems that the first two places where Al Qaeda tried to find some useful hideaways to be protected, but still with a chance of projection to the West, were these two coastal countries.

To sum up, from the point of birth of the action, intended as a pressure, the Afghan-Pakistani border, or Hard Core, two ways start. The first one leads by land to Iran, a highly mountainous country offering protection in movements, whilst the other one is more linked to the sea and leads to two key areas in the Middle East: Southern Pakistan and the Gulf of Aden. (Figure 5).

5 The Two Lines of Pressure from the Hard Core

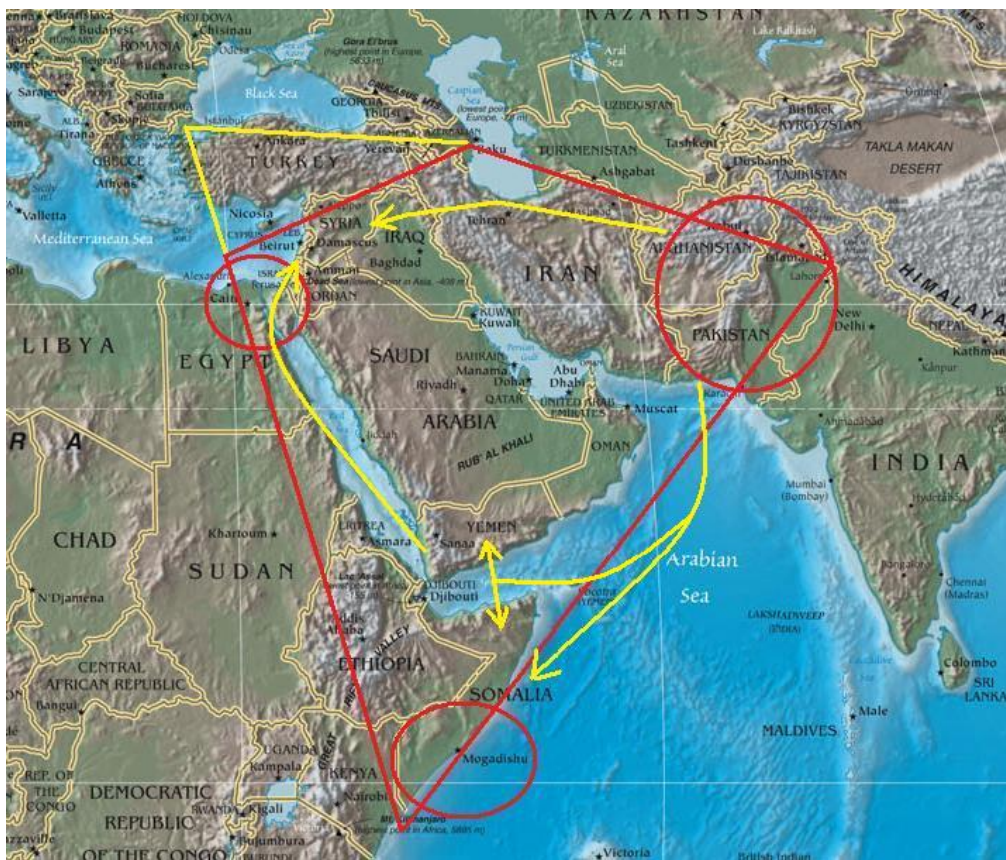


Confluence of the Lines of Action: Israel and Baghdad

As abovementioned, two lines of pressure, two natural outlets from the Hard Core have been detected. These two flows are different in nature and scope. The two lines will be coherently inserted in the Middle Eastern trapezium, stating whether the two pushes are peripheral or central.

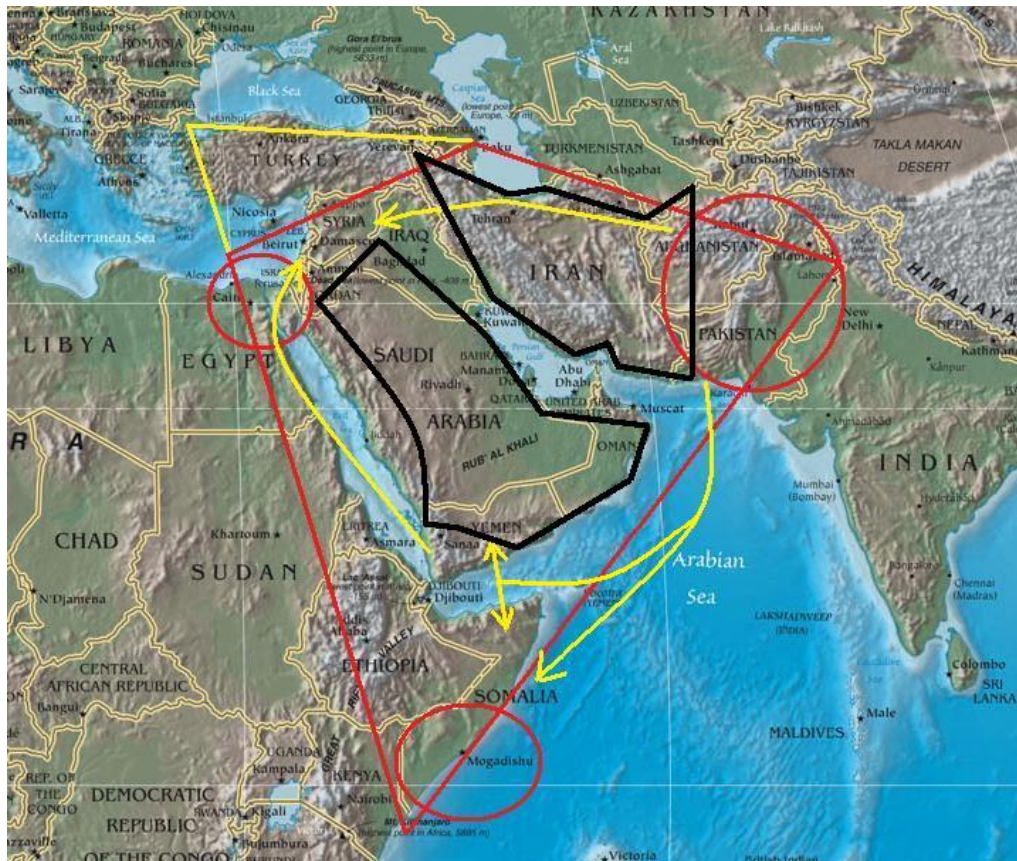
If one looks at the area within the trapezium, he will clearly notice the well centred Arabian Peninsula, surrounded by the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. If we leave out the importance that Saudi Arabia might have, and we focus on peripheral paths of this ideal trapezium, it will clearly emerge the way the two lines of pressure encircle the whole Middle East from north and south – southwest. The two lines find a confluence in Israel. Action from south, passing by the Red Sea and Egypt would flow into the Sinai Peninsula, and therefore in Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. Action from east, instead, would transit by Iran and would reach Iraq, mainly Baghdad, and, through Damascus, Israel again. (Figure 6).

6 Peripheral Actions Converging on Israel and Baghdad



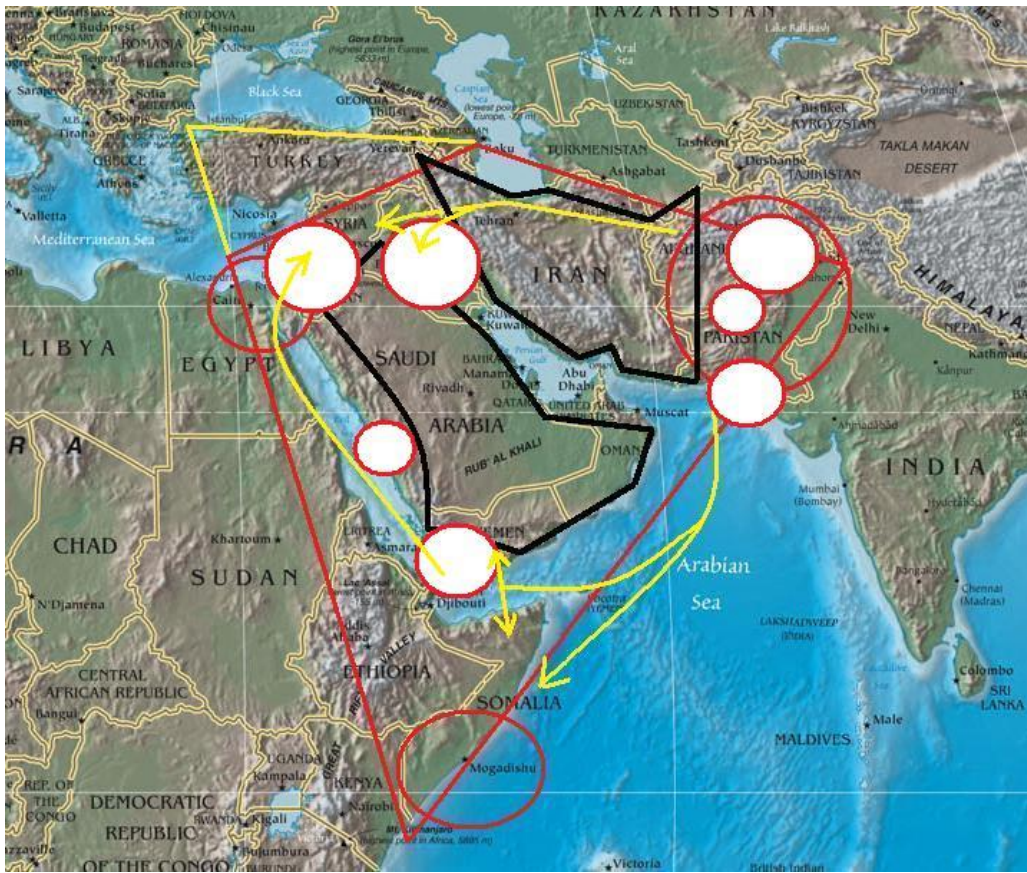
From this viewpoint, remaining in the trapezium, it seems that Al Qaeda's action is mostly peripheral. This does not mean, and we want to restate it, that Taliban physically move using peripheral routes. It is likely, instead, that they prefer internal shifts, instead of coastal movements. This analysis does not want to define the dynamics in physical displacements, but continuity or a trait d'union between the preferred targets and the geopolitical meaning of these territories.

7 Peripheral Actions Converging on Israel and Baghdad by Moving Around Central Areas



Now maps 4 and 7 can be compared, as to confirm the possibility of drawing, by following the attacks' frequency, two peripheral lanes moving around central obstacles and pointing at Israel and Baghdad. The outcome is map 8, which resumes the methodology explained so far and overlaps all the precedent figures.

8 Peripheral Pushes and Targets



Therefore, the two pushes, by land and by sea, have two different logics and two different souls. If one looks at the action by sea, from Somalia to the Red Sea and to the Sinai, one can clearly see the existence of a manoeuvre of outflanking the Saudi desert. Action by land is different. We want to state that Iranian territory offers Al Qaeda a sort of multiplier of its energy towards west. By moving through Iran or by using Iran as a point of support before entering Iraq, Talibans benefit from a grey area providing invisibility and protection. Attacks on Baghdad would be directly linked to attackers who came out from the Iranian border and this proximity to the target would provide Al Qaeda with far stronger a force of impact.

In conclusion: in the Arabian Peninsula the sole Yemen, for its civil disorder and its position, would be useful to Al Qaeda as a launch pad to north. As far as access by land, instead, Iran would be a huge grey zone where transit would not be hindered and that would allow Talibans to flow directly to Iraq, where the United States are working to stabilize the country.

Introducing the Political Element: Areas of Crisis

The political element will be now introduced. Any country in the Middle Eastern trapezium is characterized by a particular domestic situation conferring specificity within the Middle Eastern mosaic. Often these situations are difficult to manage for local governments and it is on the basis of this factor that Al Qaeda action can take. In the political element, to be linked to the geographic one, it can be found the element that allows affirming that targets are not casual but have a specific meaning within a broader plan drawn by a central intelligence coordinating the groups that are operational in the Middle East, and that strike to destabilize.

Practically in any Middle Eastern country there is an antigovernment action lead by rebels, groups of opposers, armed Islamic alliances, groups of subversives, terrorist of various kinds, all of them claiming more or less the same things: recognition of their action at the international level, success of Islam according to their fundamentalist religious view as a power rejecting western soft and hard power, and a strong position of local governments (of which they try to be members, when they do not want to overthrow it) against the west.

We have seen that there are seven areas of particular importance that deserve to be examined from a political point of view. Starting with these seven areas, we will follow the Al Qaeda's targets in the two lines, by land and by sea, and then we will see them converging to Israel and Baghdad, detecting, along the way, single terrorists groups and their action in crisis areas.

The first important point, as abovementioned, is the Hard Core, the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, in particular the highlands from which the Taliban's action unravels. Here the leaders of Al Qaeda have their hiding places and there is the most part of the madrassas, the Koranic schools, where Taliban are trained. From here the pressure exerted comes down to the bordering areas.

Here is the route by land:

Northern Pakistan: Kashmir, Islamabad and Peshawar, and Punjab region (Rawalpindi, Faisalabad). In this area several groups are operational in order to annex Kashmir to Pakistan. Here some of them are listed.

Harakat ul-Mujahidin (HUM), formerly known as Harakat al - Ansar, has the scope of annexing Kashmir to Pakistan. It is a Sunni militant group based in Muzaffarabad, Pakistan, training its men in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Also have the same purpose Al-Badr Mujahidin e Harakat ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI), or Islamic Struggle Movement, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM), or the Army of Mohammed, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LT), or Army of the Good, and many more.

As far as the rest of the Pakistani region is concerned, a clean line of action of single groups cannot be drawn.

In Midwestern Pakistan stand out the Balochistan region, in particular the city of Quetta, and southern Pakistan, in particular Karachi, a dock city where Lashkar-e-Omar hits in order to beat the United States off Pakistan. Harkat-ul-Mujahedin and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi also attack in the same area with the same aim.

The route by land continues in Iran, a grey zone where tracks of Taliban's action are lost. This is a significant advantage for terrorists because, coming out from Iran, they can enter Iraq unobserved and easily strike in Diyala region and Baghdad. Therefore, Iran represents an accelerator of Taliban's force of impact, striking again cross-border.

In Iraq the main anti-American groups attack Baghdad and the Diyala region, in particular the group of Al Zarkawi, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), that fights for the withdrawal of the United States, the Shiite's defeat and the establishment of a pure Islamic state.

The same flow of transit from Iran striking in Iraq finds a further amplification place in Syria. Syria, if one looks carefully, is a gathering point, perfect for hiding and planning new attacks on Israel. Hezbollah, operational in Lebanon, gets its energy resources from the same channels through which Al Qaeda's strength unravels, which are Syria and, previously, Iran.

In Lebanon the most important presence is Hezbollah, fuelled by Iran. Hezbollah acts with a destabilizing manoeuvre, but wants to get into the Lebanese Government. Other Groups are Fatah Al Islam and Asbat al - Ansar, or the Partisans' League.

In Occupied Territories Al-Aqsa Martyrs act with the same aim of pushing Israeli out of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem in order to establish a Palestinian State. Moreover, active groups are the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Hamas, the Palestine Islamic Jihad, (PIJ), all of them having the same scope. There are also the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) the Abu Nidal organization (ANO), also known as Fatah Revolutionary Council, the Revolutionary Arab Brigades, Black September and the Revolutionary Organization of Socialist Muslims.

In Syria the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) fights for the failure of negotiation between Arabs and Israeli and aims at strengthening the PLO.

In the end, if confluence of pressure lines is on Israel and Baghdad, it can be argued, by retracing the path towards the starting point, that preparation of the attacks is made as closer as possible to these two targets, i.e. in Syria. Weapons and funding, before, come from Iran, and in Iran Al Qaeda's tracks are lost. When transiting from Iran to Syria, Taliban cannot avoid striking Iraq that remains squeezed in a very delicate phase of reconstruction and democratization by two countries having forces opposing to the United States.

Let us take a look at the line by sea. In theory, starting in Karachi, if Al Qaeda could dispose of efficient shipping, Somalia would be the first stage. It is a strategic stop to access to the Middle East and Africa and allows hitting easy targets, considering the situation of the government facing a civil war and the central power's weakening.

The following step is Yemen. Sana'a, the capital city, but especially Aden, at the Bab el Mandeb Strait, are theatre of clashes. In the north, in Sada'a province the Zaydi sect is operational, and, as far as Saleh Government reported, an Iranian support would not miss.

The main terrorist group is Al Qaeda in Yemen also known as the Islamic Jihad in Yemen, opposing the Saud monarchy and aiming at overthrowing the government.

Once the access to the Red Sea is gained, as far as Midwestern Saudi Arabia is concerned, Jeddah's position is key. It is a dock city, the closest to Port Sudan, perfect for striking a United States' friendly country.

Afterwards, terrorists can flow to the Sinai peninsula because from the Sinai, access to Cairo and Gaza Strip is practically immediate. We recall the April 2009 episode, about a ship having its origin in Yemen and carrying weapons from Yemen, Sudan and Somalia and finally intercepted by Egyptian controls. It was probably direct to the Palestinian territories and its aim was to equip Hezbollah.

In Egypt the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and Al-Gama' at al-Islamiyya are operational. They aim at overthrowing the Egyptian government and establishing a fundamentalist Islamic State. Moreover, they point at attacking Israel.

Finally there are other groups that, considering their leaders' mobility, are operational all over the world, like the Abu Hafs-al-Masri Brigades (Baghdad, Madrid, Jakarta, London, Canada).

It can be seen how there is a political coherence in the two peripheral lines of strength converging in Israel and Iraq and gradually but constantly multiplying their power by crossing several Middle

Eastern areas of crisis. This is true even if not every group can be labelled as linked to Al Qaeda and if not all are supplied with information, instructions and funding by Al Qaeda.

Therefore, thinking of facing terrorism applying specific actions in single crisis areas is impossible. The only way, if a central intelligence exists, is to strike the centre of Al Qaeda, obtaining the control on a pivot area from which impeding the Al Qaeda's action to unravel. Does this area exist ? Or it will be necessary to keep stemming terrorism time by time ?

Conclusion: Does a Middle Eastern Heartland Exist ?

How Far is Al Qaeda From There?

Possible Western Strategies.

Heartland theory was forged by Mackinder in 1904 and it is still one of the pillars of geopolitics. Mackinder's theories will not be explained in this analysis because the roots of his discourse are far more complex and his premises are very different from those included in this dossier. We simply want to look at Mackinder's Heartland theory as a source of inspiration in order to conclude the analysis started with the definition of Hard Core and stretched to the neuralgic points of the Middle East as included in the drawn trapezium.

Mackinder, when searching for a "Pivot Area", concluded his theory with the following statement: "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland: who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island: who rules the World-Island commands the World".

Therefore, according to Mackinder, there is a geographic region, called Heartland, that would assure the control of other bordering regions, and that allows to expand one's power on the whole world. Mackinder placed this area in Eastern Europe, as seen in the quotation, but he did not exclude, in a further phase of its studies, the possibility of the existence of other Pivot Areas at a global level.

As far as this analysis is concerned, if one accepts the chance of the existence of a Pivot Area in any geographic scheme, then the Middle East, as intended in this dossier, the trapezium, will have a Pivot Area, or a Heartland.

The question now is the following: "does it exist, coherently with Mackinder's tenet and applying its principles to this analysis, an area within the trapezium that, if possessed, will assure the control of the whole Middle East ?"

Apparently a Heartland can always exist, in the sense that there's always an area endowed with a major geopolitical weight that, if controlled, would give access to bordering areas.

In the Middle Eastern trapezium, however, it does not seem that a particular area allowing to control the whole Middle East can be chosen.

Actually, if one wants to allow this hypothesis, a Heartland might be included within the arc linking the points Kuwait - Central Iran - Kabul - Afghan Pakistani Border - Karachi - Djibouti, in Map 9.

It is not a single area, but a route, an arc's trajectory, including also some strategic regions with particular importance.

This arc, clearly, also includes the Hard Core from which Al Qaeda acts. In particular is important the area of the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, inclusive of Kabul and Islamabad, continuing south to the Pakistani coast, as shown in Map 10. Mountains in the Afghan - Pakistani border are the only real points of pressure from which Talibans can hide and defend themselves, and from which it is possible to exert a push in Iran and India.

9 The Heartland in the Middle Eastern Trapezium



10 The Heartland of Al Qaeda in the Middle Eastern Trapezium



Let us take a look at the western strategy against Taliban. Extend the control of the Afghan – Iranian border toward east would be the best solution, because it will allow to enter the Al Qaeda's Hard Core and to attack Taliban in their territory dislocating them and interrupting their activities.

It must be considered, however, that control on Afghanistan is one of the most difficult targets ever. Victory is possible only after prolonged and exhausting efforts, and thinking to a real control over these areas is a sort of utopia. If the enemy cannot be defeated, the best that can be done is to contain the Taliban's advance, also by depriving them of the access to the sea.

The second best, if the Hard Core was inaccessible, is Iran. Controlling movements in Iran allows, despite the length of Afghan – Iran border, to interpose a significant obstacle on the way of Al Qaeda's pressure line by land toward west. This way, the situation would be overturned because an advantage for terrorists would become a filter applied to the land push toward west.

This idea at the moment is utopian as well, if one considers that Iran and the United States have not had formal diplomatic relationship for 30 years, from 1979 to 2009. Only recently have the two parties recovered a dialogue on the nuclear issue and on the Taliban's threat, but the meetings were unfruitful.

We will now try to conclude by defining a strategy of containment that can be efficient for western troops. This strategy, coherently with the dynamics obtained in the geopolitical analysis, shall allow controlling the Taliban and their pressure.

The division followed so far between the northern pressure land line and western pressure sea line is maintained.

As far as the first one is concerned, the only worthy solution for western forces engaged against Al Qaeda seems the control of Pakistan in the southern coast of Karachi. Southern Pakistan should be controlled, however, not as an access to the sea, but as a point of arrival, as the result of a successful operation on Pakistan heights, flowing to the coast.

Any other option would be nonsense because it would require an extremely high effort for the conquer and would face the impossibility of maintaining control afterwards. It is excluded, in fact, that the conquer of Karachi by sea, the easier action for the US Navy, can open an advance to north. Karachi would be exposed to continuous attacks and, after a while, there would be a stalemate leading to heavy losses in the western contingent.

Once Middle and Southern – Coastal Pakistan are under control, there would be no way out to the sea for Al Qaeda. NATO troops already engaged in Afghanistan control and impede the Taliban's transit to Iran, first step of Al Qaeda's strategy by land. Once Taliban enter Iran, in fact, they make lose their tracks and exert their push on Iraq and Syria. Behalf of an efficient block on Iranian border is the possibility of containing the pressure from Afghanistan in its first phase.

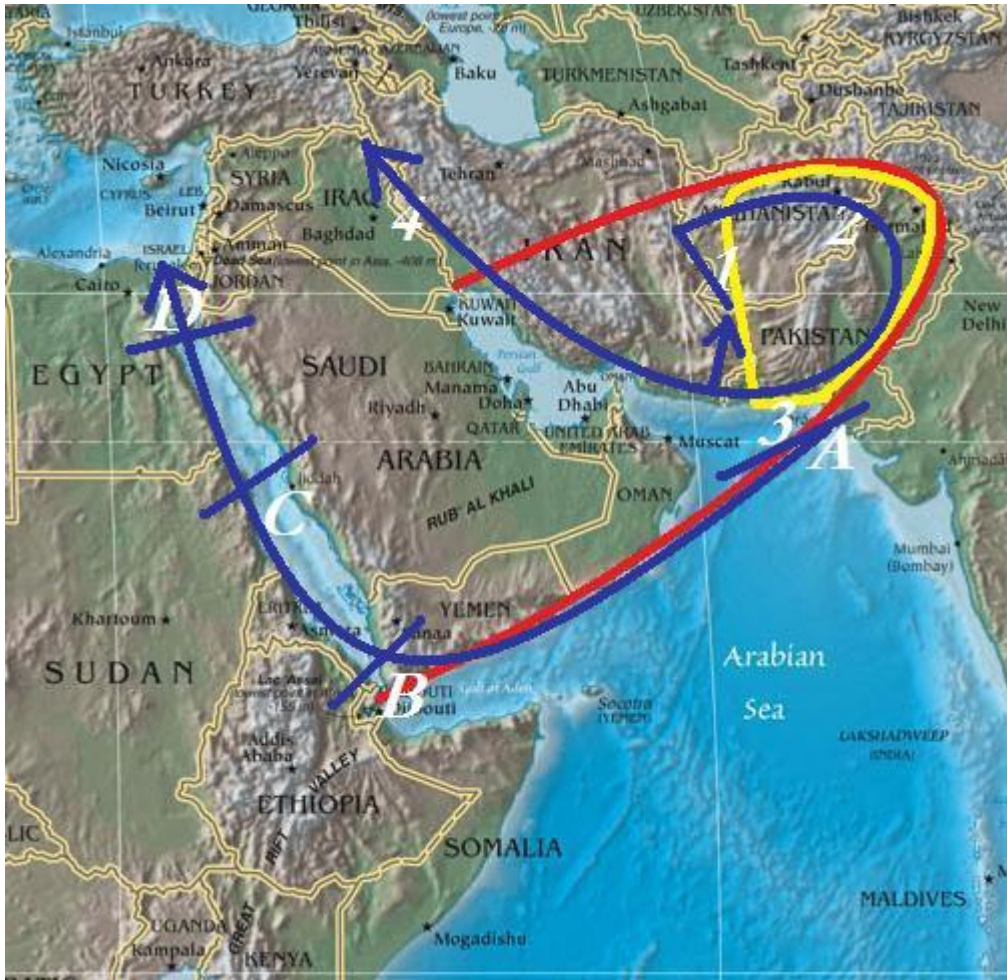
The second useful block on the line by land is the Iran – Iraq border, which should be patrolled by efficient troops. Monitoring should be constant and intelligence's capacity absolutely excellent. Any time that some Al Qaeda pressure from Iran scatters over the second checkpoint, the one in Iraq, it is practically certain that in Iraq or Syria a new attack is being planned.

As far as the western side of Al Qaeda's action is concerned, blocking access to the sea ways seems to be the easiest solution. Karachi shall be guarded, first of all. Then the Bab el Mandel Strait must be checked, in collaboration with Yemen and Somalia. A second block shall be established between Jeddah and Port Sudan, in collaboration with Saudi Arabia and Sudan. Lastly, with Egypt's help, it will be necessary implementing controls for the access to the Sinai Peninsula. When intelligence fails, it is certain that, in this case as well, a new attack that might strike in some days is being planned.

The two strategies are shown in Map 11, where blue lines indicate the western blocks against Talibans. Numbers indicate blocks by land, and letters indicate blocks by sea.

Essentially, therefore, the Al Qaeda's push shall be opposed in any phase of development, coherently with the two sequences examined in previous paragraphs. Enemies shall not be waited for, and objectives cannot be defended one by one. The only efficient solution seems a containment following the flux of pressure of Al Qaeda step by step and having, preferably, success as closest as possible to the Hard Core.

11 Western Strategies



In conclusion, Al Qaeda's flow cannot be stemmed. It shall be blocked. Al Qaeda levers on all disintegrative processes in the Middle East and in the world. As far as the Middle Eastern trapezium is concerned, situations of conflict and secession are so serious that it cannot be imagined a case by case solution. The alternative is a fight in the Heartland, which is on the mountains at the Afghani Pakistani border, called Hard Core. In that case war might be won. In any other case global terrorism, that moves unseen, and whose moves can be difficultly tracked, will act at liberty or semi liberty. The network used by Al Qaeda to connect several organizations in the Middle East, such as the ones listed above, does not allow, if not with some exceptions, police forces working in the trapezium protect their citizens' safety.

Substantially, then, there is a sort of Al Qaeda's plan that, while financing, coordinating and inspiring several groups in the world to spread chaos, moves through the two lines by land and by sea. The first line, the peripheral western, can be filtered easier than the second, thanks also to the collaboration of western friendly countries. The northern line, by land, taking advantage of the position of Iran and of

the weaknesses due to the transition in Iraq, allows a constant and efficient percussion. The only means that consent to stop Al Qaeda's pressure is the control of the Afghan - Pakistani border, that should be obtained by striking directly the central intelligence in that region.

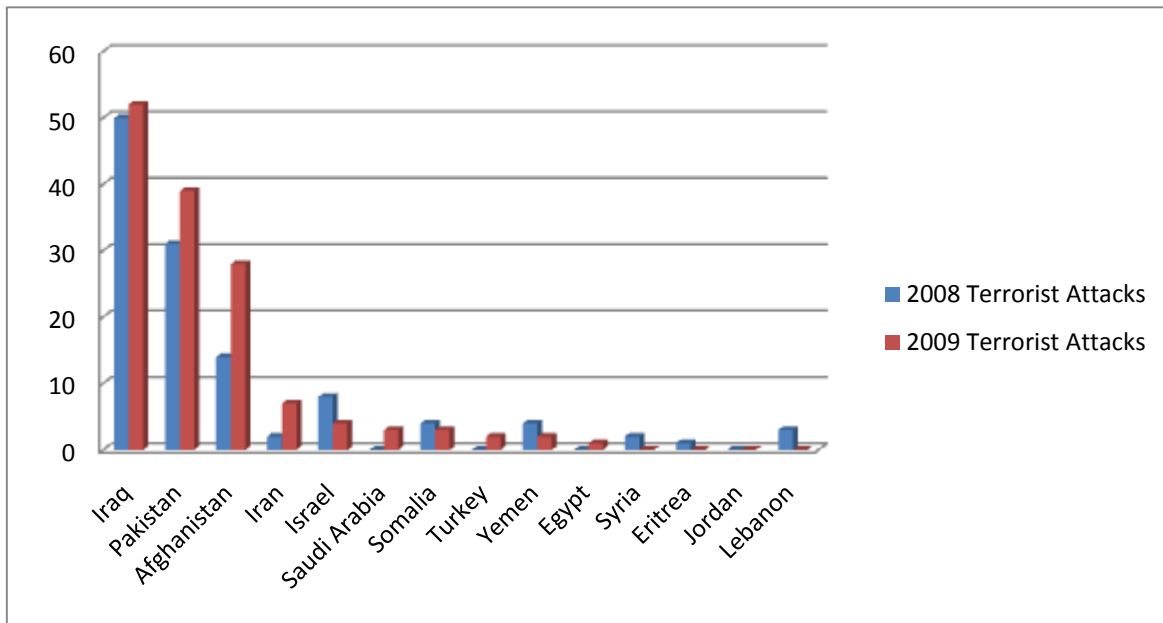
Why, then, make war on Pakistani mountains ? Because there is an intelligence hiding in that places and whose plan is structured on geopolitical lines that those mountains and surrounding territories naturally allow. Considering the geography of these places and the politics in the Middle East, the Al Qaeda's push cannot be stemmed. It shall be stopped by striking the Hard Core.

Al Qaeda, after all, has not retreated so far. It is in its Heartland, if a Heartland in a geopolitical sense exists.

If it does not exist, however, Al Qaeda is the Heartland.

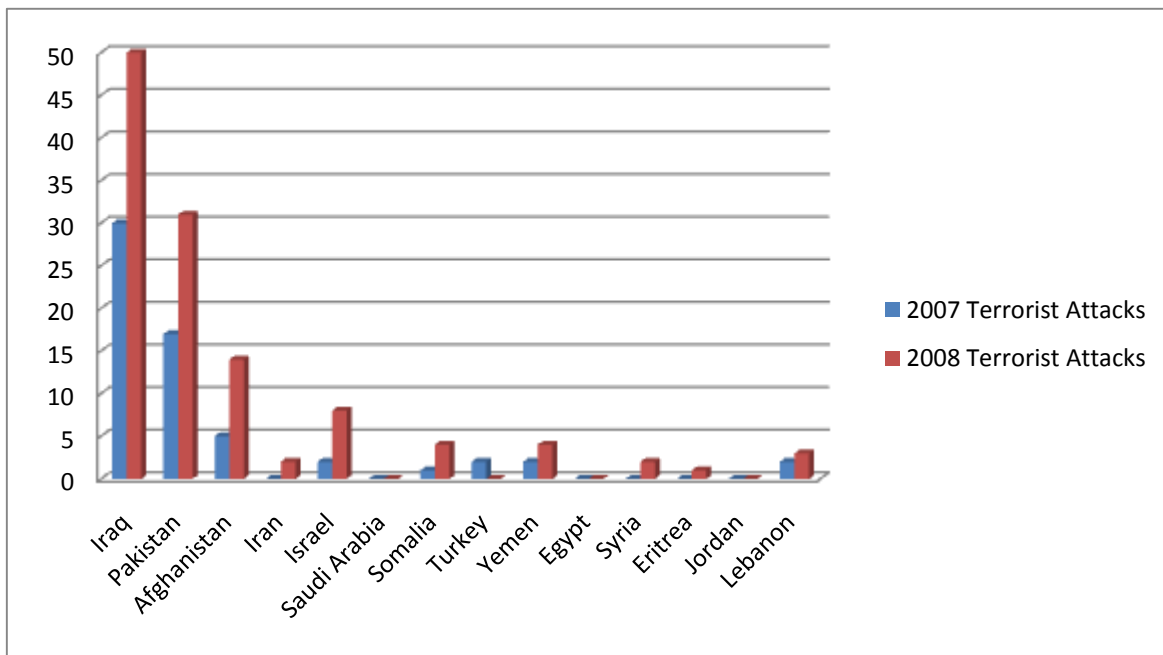
2008- 2009, Terrorist Attacks. Approximate Data.

Iraq	50	52
Pakistan	31	39
Afghanistan	14	28
Iran	2	7
Israel	8	4
Saudi Arabia	0	3
Somalia	4	3
Turkey	0	2
Yemen	4	2
Egypt	0	1
Syria	2	0
Eritrea	1	0
Jordan	0	0
Lebanon	3	0



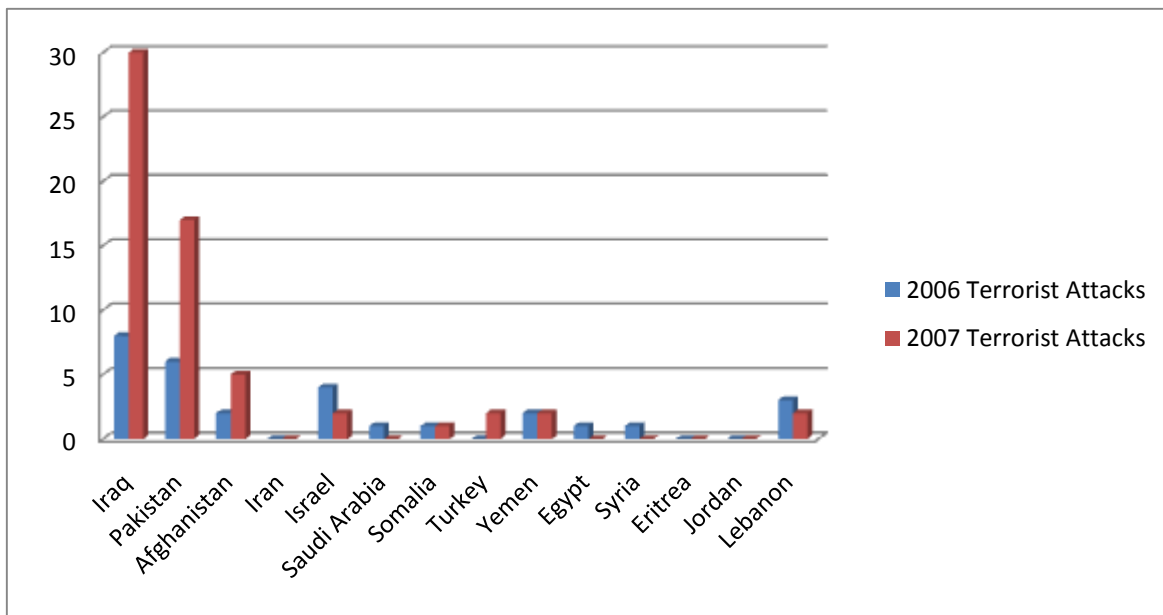
2007-2008, Terrorist Attacks. Approximate Data.

Iraq	30	50
Pakistan	17	31
Afghanistan	5	14
Iran	0	2
Israel	2	8
Saudi Arabia	0	0
Somalia	1	4
Turkey	2	0
Yemen	2	4
Egypt	0	0
Syria	0	2
Eritrea	0	1
Jordan	0	0
Lebanon	2	3



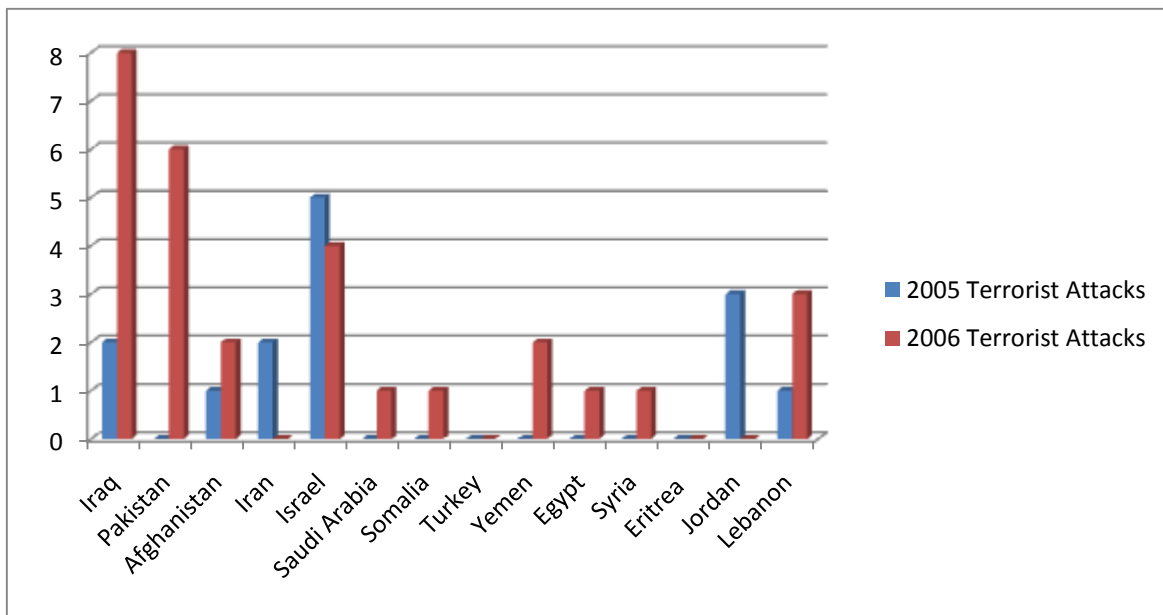
2006-2007, Terrorist Attacks. Approximate Data.

Iraq	8	30
Pakistan	6	17
Afghanistan	2	5
Iran	0	0
Israel	4	2
Saudi Arabia	1	0
Somalia	1	1
Turkey	0	2
Yemen	2	2
Egypt	1	0
Syria	1	0
Eritrea	0	0
Jordan	0	0
Lebanon	3	2



2005-2006, Terrorist Attacks. Approximate Data.

Iraq	2	8
Pakistan	0	6
Afghanistan	1	2
Iran	2	0
Israel	5	4
Saudi Arabia	0	1
Somalia	0	1
Turkey	0	0
Yemen	0	2
Egypt	0	1
Syria	0	1
Eritrea	0	0
Jordan	3	0
Lebanon	1	3



2005-2009 Terrorist Attacks. Approximate Data.

