

Security in the Sinai: Present and Future

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Since the 2011 uprising against the Mubarak regime in Egypt, the Sinai Peninsula has become increasingly unstable with hard-line militant Muslims launching attacks against Israel, the Egyptian state and, most recently, a tourist target. In this ICCT Research Paper, Zack Gold analyses the current threat emanating from the Sinai by mapping the various violent actors and their international connections. He looks at the policies of the current and past regimes in Egypt towards the peninsula, and the responses by regional and international actors. In the concluding section, Gold offers four possible scenarios for the trend of terrorism in the Sinai peninsula and Egypt, advocating a focused response by both the Egyptian government and the international community.

About the Author

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1. Introduction

Since the 2011 uprising against the Mubarak regime in Egypt, there has been increasing instability in the Sinai Peninsula. From early 2011, Sinai's population retaliated against the security state, but the cause of violence in the peninsula soon transitioned from Bedouin grievances to salafi jihadism. Hard-line militant Muslims used Sinai as a launch-point for attacks against Israel and turned on the Egyptian state for its treatment of fellow Muslims. After the July 2013 coup against President Mohamed Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood leader, attacks in and from Sinai increased exponentially.

Even as the Egyptian military launched large, sustained operations to counter the threat, Sinai's salafi jihadists expanded their fight: by attacking Egypt's "mainland" with car-bombs, carrying out an assassination campaign against Egyptian security officials and using advanced weaponry to take down a military helicopter. Until recently, Sinai's salafi jihadist groups' primary targets were Israel and Egypt's security establishment. The growing concern that their targets would continue to shift, however, became more justified with a February 2014 attack on tourists. Such a trend puts western interests, including tourists, foreign embassies and perhaps even ships in the Suez Canal into their sights.

This Research Paper provides a brief background on the security situation in Sinai prior to Egypt's 2011 uprising. It then outlines post-uprising salafi jihadist attacks on Egypt's security establishment, the Sinai's gas pipeline and civilians. It also considers attacks from Sinai against Israel and against Egyptian targets outside the peninsula. The Paper then maps political and violent actors in Sinai, as well as the connections of Sinai's violent groups to international salafi jihadist networks, including al Qaeda (AQ). It then describes past policy responses by successive Egyptian governments, the governments of Israel, United States (US) and European nations to the security problems of Sinai.

The final two sections provide four future scenarios for the Sinai Peninsula before offering policy recommendations for Egypt and the international community to direct Sinai toward more sustainable and desired outcomes. The current trajectory of salafi jihadist violence and Egyptian efforts to counter it could result in the following scenarios:

- Scenario A: *Draining the swamp*. The Egyptian armed forces and police succeed in clearing Sinai of salafi jihadist actors. The government then works with the local population to address legitimate grievances, therefore minimising support for anti-state violence.
- Scenario B: *Return of the security state*. The Egyptian armed forces and police achieve stability in Sinai through brute force and intimidation. This solves the immediate security problem, but perpetuates tensions between Sinai and the state.
- Scenario C: *Sinai insurgency*. Egypt's armed forces redeploy from Sinai. Salafi jihadists continue to threaten in the peninsula, but Egypt isolates Sinai from the mainland – disrupting external attacks and any flow of foreign fighters.
- Scenario D: *Global jihadist safe-haven*. Egypt's armed forces redeploy from Sinai but cannot localise the insurgency, so Sinai-based groups regularly attack mainland Egypt. The peninsula becomes a safe-haven for salafi jihadists and a training hub for foreign fighters.

The best possible outcome for Egypt, the region and the international community is scenario A; the more likely scenario B is not sustainable, but could also manage in the short- to medium-term to quiet anti-state violence. Therefore, Egyptian and international policies should steer current trends towards outcome A.

Egypt should:

1. Continue its military and law enforcement campaign in Sinai, working with the local population to address mutual security threats and rebuild trust;
2. Ensure to as great an extent as possible the protection of Sinai's civilian population during pursuit of suspected salafi jihadists, and promptly investigate and release those falsely arrested in security raids;
3. Provide promised financial aid to Sinai residents affected by military operations;
4. Strengthen border security through increased technology and better trained patrols; and
5. Work with tribal leaders, the Sinai population and development specialists to address sources of economic and other frustrations among the peninsula's residents.

Meanwhile, the *international community*, through security cooperation and training, can increase the likelihood that Egypt will succeed in its operations against Sinai-based terrorists. Through targeted aid and investment, the international community could possibly increase the likelihood that the Egyptian government will address local grievances after a successful security approach (scenario A).

2. Security Situation in Sinai Prior to the 2011 Uprising

Recent focus on the security deterioration in the Sinai Peninsula since the downfall of the Mubarak regime in February 2011 tends to overlook the longstanding security problems there. The return of this border region following the 1973 war and 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty was viewed as a nationalist victory for Egypt. However, the government in Cairo, the security sector and their supporters in the media treated Sinai differently from the “mainland”, and its inhabitants were stereotypically viewed as criminals and terrorists.¹

Criminal smuggling, of course, did thrive in Sinai. As is often the case in border regions, members of Sinai tribes took advantage of relations in neighbouring states and territories to smuggle people, drugs, goods and weapons into Israel and Gaza.² Israel’s blockade of Gaza, which began in 2006 and was achieved with cooperation from Egypt, exacerbated the smuggling enterprise to the Palestinian enclave.

The structure of Egyptian security oversight of Sinai fostered hostility between the population and the security forces, which resulted in the occasional violent harassment of Egyptian police.³ However, the pace and lethality was in no way comparable to what security forces have faced in Sinai in the current period.

The Sinai Peninsula’s isolation, rugged terrain and limited security presence also provided a haven for violent Egyptian salafi jihadists. From 2004–2006, Sinai also witnessed AQ-style bombings in the resort towns of Taba, Sharm al Shaykh and Dahab.⁴



Source: WikiCommons

¹ S. Topol, “Sinai and the Bedouins in Post-Revolutionary Egypt”, *Vice*, 1 October 2012, http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/sinai-and-the-bedouins-in-post-revolutionary-egypt.

² J. Gleis, “Trafficking and the Role of the Sinai Bedouin”, *Terrorism Monitor* 5, no. 12, The Jamestown Foundation (21 June 2007), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=4246#.ujx5JSek_pe](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=4246#.ujx5JSek_pe).

³ A. Hauslohner, “The Trouble with Sinai: Egypt’s ‘Mexico’ Problem”, *Time*, 21 March 2010, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1973918,00.html>.

⁴ “Triple blasts rock Egypt resort”, *BBC*, 25 April 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4940506.stm.

3. Overview Of Terrorist Activity In Sinai Since 2011

3.1 Attacks on Egypt's security establishment

The early successes of Egyptian protestors to hold Cairo's Tahrir Square in January 2011 resulted in the mysterious melting away of police and security forces nationwide.⁵ One hypothesis at the time was that this was a planned attempt to sow chaos, exemplifying to Egyptians how much they needed the regime.⁶ Planned or not, chaos ensued in the Sinai Peninsula. The disappearance of the security state gave Sinai's population the opportunity to avenge its suffering by sacking abandoned checkpoints, police stations and intelligence offices throughout the peninsula. The police forces – with military backing – continue efforts to regain their footing in Sinai.⁷

The security situation deteriorated in Sinai for a year and a half before the militant threat re-emerged in the national spotlight. On 5 August 2012, a brazen, coordinated attack on military barracks in Rafah resulted in the death of sixteen Egyptian soldiers. The attackers then stormed the Israeli border. One of the Egyptian military vehicles they had stolen exploded breaching the border fence, while the other was obliterated in Israeli territory.⁸ The attack caused a public uproar. Both Egypt and Israel blamed Gaza-based groups, but no claims of responsibility were made. To this day, the Egyptian government has not publicly identified the group behind the attack and it was more than a year before it named any alleged participants.⁹

The pace of attacks on Egyptian security forces in Sinai increased exponentially with the army's removal of Mohamed Morsi, who had been president for just a year.¹⁰ At least one leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, from which Morsi hailed, suggested these attacks were in retaliation for the coup; and the interim Egyptian government blamed the Brotherhood directly for the uptick in violence.¹¹ More likely, however, the increase in salafi jihadist attacks came from an opportunism on the part of the militants – who were not supporters of the Brotherhood while it was in power – and a response to a newly activist military in the peninsula: an increase in Egyptian military forces provided an increase in salafi jihadist targets. Security forces in Sinai came under near-daily attack in July and August 2013, including roadside improvised explosive devices (IEDs), suicide bombings and gangland-style executions.¹² By the autumn and winter, the situation had “stabilised” to two or three attacks a week.¹³

3.2 Attacks on the Sinai pipeline

Another opportune target in Sinai is the natural gas pipeline which crosses the peninsula and feeds Egyptian industrial zones, Jordan and, until recently, Israel. The first attack on the pipeline occurred while Hosni Mubarak was still in power; and during the first eighteen months following Egypt's uprising it was attacked around fifteen times.¹⁴ The pipeline's symbolism is twofold: for the Bedouin, it is a stolen resource by which Cairo profits at their expense; for the salafi jihadists, it is an Islamic resource being sold to “the Zionist occupier”.

⁵ “Cairo: Security Vacuum as Police Vanish”, *CBS News and Associated Press*, 29 January 2011, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/cairo-security-vacuum-as-police-vanish/>.

⁶ R. Abouzeid, “Did Prison Breakout Reveal a Plan to Sow Chaos in Egypt?”, *Time*, 16 March 2011, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2059301,00.html>.

⁷ Author interview with Egyptian military officials, 6 February 2013.

⁸ A. Issacharoff, G. Cohen, and Y. Yagna, “Armed militants attack Egyptian army outpost, try to infiltrate Israel border”, *Haaretz*, 5 August 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/armed-militants-attack-egyptian-army-outpost-try-to-infiltrate-israelborder-1.456159>.

⁹ “Egypt army spokesman: leading Jihadist killed in Sinai's Rafah”, *Ahram Online*, 17 December 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/89342.aspx>.

¹⁰ “15 dead, 134 injured in Egypt's Mansoura explosion”, *Ahram Online*, 24 December 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/89902.aspx>.

¹¹ “Egyptian army exercises self-restraint in Sinai: Spokesman”, *Ahram Online*, 6 August 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/78404.aspx>.

¹² “Egyptian police killed in Sinai ambush at Rafah”, *BBC*, 19 August 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23751954>.

¹³ “North Sinai security director: security conditions improved”, *Egypt Independent*, 5 January 2014, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/north-sinai-security-director-security-conditions-improved>.

¹⁴ “Ansar Jerusalem Releases Video of Bombing Arish-Ashkelon Pipeline”, *SITE Intelligence Group*, 24 July 2012, http://ent.siteintelgroup.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10421.

The pipeline attacks subsided during Morsi's rule but returned again after his ouster. Following a contract dispute in 2012, gas no longer flows to Israel.¹⁵ In these post-coup incidents, attackers are purposefully disrupting the flow to military-controlled industrial plants in the Sinai.¹⁶

3.3 Attacks against civilians

Although the vast majority of attacks in Sinai target the military and police, a suicide bomber belonging to a Sinai-based Islamist militant group attacked a bus of South Korean tourists – killing three, and the bus driver – in Taba on 16 February 2014. As with attacks on the pipeline, salafi jihadists framed this shift in targeting part of their “economic war” on the Egyptian state.¹⁷ The tourism sector accounts for approximately eleven percent of Egypt's gross domestic product, and it is likely attacks on tourists will continue.¹⁸

While that was the first terrorist attack on foreign tourists since Mubarak's ouster, Egyptian civilians have also been the target of salafi jihadist violence and intimidation. For example, in September 2012, leaflets warned Coptic Christians in Rafah to leave the city within 48 hours. When the time expired, masked men fired on a Christian shop.¹⁹

Most Christian families left Rafah after the 2011 uprising, when the city's only church, the Holy Family Church, was looted and destroyed.²⁰ One of al Arish's two churches was sacked following Morsi's July 2013 ouster.²¹

In addition, North Sinai's residents – and especially tribal leaders – risk the militants' wrath if they are perceived as supporting the Egyptian military's campaign against terrorism. For example, in December 2013, eight Sinai Bedouin were killed in a 48 hour period, “after being accused of collaborating with the Egyptian army”.²² In February 2014, men in Rafah handed out leaflets naming nine individuals, with the following text: “To Muslims who are fighting with the army, we caution you not to take us on our mercy”.²³

Additionally, even when the salafi jihadist groups operating in Sinai made a point of only targeting security forces and their “collaborators”, occasionally there have been other civilian casualties among the victims of IED, shootings and rocket attacks.²⁴

3.4 Attacks against Israel

One of the international community's concerns of an AQ-inspired (if not -linked) haven in Sinai is the security threat this presence would impose on Israel. There have been two major cross-border attacks against Israel. In addition to the August 2012 incident mentioned above, in which no Israelis were harmed, was an August 2011 attack on an Israeli bus heading along the border to the southern resort city of Eilat. Eight Israelis were killed in that hours-long, multi-pronged attack. Militants targeted first the bus and then responding Israeli forces, which

¹⁵ A. Fisher-Ilan, “Israel says Egypt gas cutoff a business dispute”, *Reuters*, 23 April 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/23/us-israel-egypt-gas-iduSBre83M08V20120423>.

¹⁶ Ansar Bayt al Maqdis, “Statement of taking responsibility for targeting the gas pipeline which leads to the armed forces cement factory in central Sinai”, *Jihadology*, 19 January 2014, <http://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/jamc481at-ane1b9a3c481r-bayt-al-maqdis-22announcement-of-our-responsibility-for-targeting-the-gas-line-leading-to-a-cement-factory-of-the-armed-forces-in-central-sinai22-en.pdf>.

¹⁷ Z. Gold, “The Sinai War Escalates”, *Foreign Policy*, 19 February 2014, http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/02/19/the_sinai_war_escalates.

¹⁸ D. Farouk, “Egypt renews efforts to attract foreign tourists to its shores”, *Ahram Online*, 3 March 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/95775.aspx>.

¹⁹ “Christians flee Rafah after militant threats”, *Associated Press*, 28 September 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/54123.aspx>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ M. Sabry, “Coptic Christmas in North Sinai marred by security concerns”, *al Monitor*, 7 January 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/01/north-sinai-christmas-marred.html>.

²² “Egyptian forces ‘kill two gunmen’ in northern Sinai”, *Ma'an News Agency*, 21 December 2013, <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=658311>.

²³ A. Abu Deraa, “Unidentified [people] handing out leaflets in North Sinai threatening ‘collaborators with the army’”, *al Masry al Youm*, 1 February 2014, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/News/Details/386781>.

²⁴ “Car bomb wounds 3 civilians in Egypt's Sinai: security”, *Agence France-Presse*, 2 February 2014, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/02/02/car-bomb-wounds-3-civilians-egypts-sinai-security>.

chased the attackers back over the border and killed Egyptian border guards in the process.²⁵ Israeli patrols and labourers working on the border have on occasion been targeted by sniper fire from Sinai as well.²⁶

More concerning to Israel, because of the effect on its tourist industry, are the handful of rockets that have been fired at Eilat from Sinai. In April 2012, Eilat was targeted from Sinai by rocket-fire for the first time after the 2011 uprising. In total, there were seven rocket attacks (eight total rockets) against Israel in 2012 – most fired toward Eilat.²⁷ In 2013, five rockets were launched towards Eilat in three incidents: two of those attacks (and three rockets) took place after the 3 July coup.²⁸ In just the first month of 2014, there were two separate rocket attacks on Eilat.²⁹ To date, these have caused no casualties and minimal damage.

In addition to the worry that a rocket could land in Eilat's hotel or shopping district, the biggest concern of Israeli security officials is that Sinai-based salafi jihadists would target civilian planes arriving at or departing from the Eilat airport with anti-aircraft missiles. Israeli intelligence analysts believe groups in Sinai and Gaza control such weaponry and their use is a matter of "when" not "if".

3.5 Attacks on Egypt's "mainland"

Sinai's salafi jihadists announced their presence west of the Suez Canal with a bang: the failed assassination attempt on Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim near his Cairo home on 5 September 2013.³⁰ It was the first car-bombing outside Sinai (the second in Egypt) since the 2011 uprising.

To date, the most deadly attack on Egypt's mainland to come out of Sinai took place in Mansoura on 24 December 2013. The blast killed at least fifteen and injured more than 130, the majority of whom, including at least nine of the dead, were police officers inside the building when the bomb exploded shortly after one o'clock in the morning.³¹ The Mansoura bombing was followed soon after by another outside a military intelligence building in Anshas, Sharqiya.³² Then, on 24 January 2014, a strike in the heart of Cairo: shaking the capital with a massive car-bomb outside the Cairo Security Directorate.³³ Additionally, Sinai's salafi jihadists have been involved in an assassination campaign of national security and interior ministry officials.³⁴

In addition to attacks by Sinai-based groups, smaller, mainland-based groups have also claimed responsibility for attacks on police, state infrastructure and even ships in the Suez Canal.³⁵

²⁵ B. Ravid and *Reuters*, "Israel, Egypt to open joint probe into events surrounding Eilat terror attacks", *Haaretz*, 25 August 2011, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/israel-egypt-to-open-joint-probe-into-events-surrounding-eilat-terror-attacks-1.380672>.

²⁶ J. Greenberg, "Gunmen from Egypt's Sinai Peninsula attack Israeli workers, killing one", *The Washington Post*, 18 June 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/gunmen-in-egypts-sinai-peninsula-fire-at-israel-border-killing-at-least-2/2012/06/18/gJQANbBkkV_story.html.

²⁷ Israel Security Agency, "2012 Annual Summary - Terrorism and CT Activity Data and Trends", p. 11 <http://www.shabak.gov.il/SiteCollectionImages/english/terrorInfo/2012AnnualSummary-en.pdf>.

²⁸ Israel Security Agency, "2013 Annual Summary", <http://www.shabak.gov.il/English/EnTerrorData/Reports/Pages/2013AnnualSummary.aspx>.

²⁹ G. Cohen and S. Seidler, "Iron Dome intercepts rocket fired at Eilat", *Haaretz*, 31 January 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.571804>.

³⁰ "Egypt's Minister Mohammed Ibrahim survives bomb attack", *BBC*, 5 September 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23971239>.

³¹ "15 dead, 134 injured in Egypt's Mansoura explosion" (2013), <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/89902.aspx>; M. Michael, "Strong explosion rocks police station", *Associated Press*, 23 December 2013, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/militant-group-egypts-sinai-warns-military>.

³² S. El Deeb, "Bombing Wounds 4 Soldiers in Northeast Egypt", *Associated Press*, 29 December 2013, <http://news.yahoo.com/bombing-wounds-4-soldiers-northeast-egypt-193606683.html>.

³³ A. Al Sharif and M. Fick, "Bombing wave hits Egypt amid fear of more violence", *Reuters*, 24 January 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/24/us-egypt-blast-idUSBREA0N09320140124>.

³⁴ D. Barnett, "Ansar Jerusalem claims responsibility for attack on Egyptian security official in Cairo", *The Long War Journal*, 20 November 2013, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/11/ansar_jerusalem_clai_3.php; S. Nasralla and S. Bardissi, "Gunmen kill Egyptian general; ousted Mursi defiant at trial", *Reuters*, 28 January 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/28/us-egypt-assassination-idUSBREA0R0BO20140128>.

³⁵ "New Egypt militant group claims killing policemen", *Associated Press*, 18 March 2014, <http://www.bigstory.ap.org/article/new-egypt-militant-group-claims-killing-policemen>; "New militant group 'Ajnad Misr' claims Cairo bombings", *al Arabiya News*, 8 February 2014, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle->

4. Mapping Political and Violent Actors in Sinai

4.1 Bedouin tribal leaders

The Bedouin population is thought to be between 80,000 and 200,000 out of 554,000 official residents of Sinai.³⁶ Tribes are spread across the peninsula and some, most prominently the Tarabin, are also found in Israel and the Palestinian territories.³⁷ Tribal leaders do not encourage violent extremism and, indeed, the current Islamist insurgency challenges the Bedouin tribal structure and wellbeing.³⁸

Bedouin law, known as *'urf* law, has historically served the tribes of Sinai well, given the lack of strong authority centralised states have had over the peninsula.³⁹ On the one hand, Sinai tribes have an adversarial relationship with the Egyptian state, and they have been viewed as collaborators with Israel, which ruled the peninsula from 1967 to 1982.⁴⁰ On the other hand, the tribal structure allowed Cairo to control Sinai's population by building relationships with tribal leaders, or *shaykhs*, who would then oversee their people.⁴¹

Bedouin leaders, in return, are ambivalent about working with Egypt's government. The distant politicians in Cairo have failed to deliver promised services and employment to Sinai.⁴² As noted above, the poor public perception of Sinai residents, and especially the Bedouin population, left the peninsula isolated from and underdeveloped by the state. North Sinai residents have long lamented that "the government had failed them".⁴³ Lack of employment opportunities and state-sponsored development programmes created a perception among the Sinai population of unfair treatment, made worse by other unequal treatment, including the prohibition for most Bedouin to serve in the military or police.⁴⁴

The problem was compounded by unjust treatment and collective punishment following the South Sinai bombings of the 2000s. In January 2011, when state security abandoned Sinai, armed Bedouin exacted their revenge on the infrastructure of the security services. At the same time, however, tribal vigilantes maintained order and protected their kinsmen and the wider population of the region.⁴⁵

The Sinai population's perception of "being treated like second-class citizens" provides a useful recruitment tool for violent actors: offering youth a chance for revenge against the state that has kept them down.⁴⁶

The tribes want the state to take on the risks of solving the current security problem.⁴⁷ However, the security sector – the police under the Mubarak regime and the army today – uses a heavy hand to deal with

[east/2014/02/08/Militants-claim-responsibility-for-Giza-bombing.html](http://www.ahramonline.com/News/83550.aspx); "Furqan Brigades claims responsibility for Cairo satellite RPG attack", *Ahram Online*, 8 October 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/83550.aspx>.

³⁶ Y. Balanga, "Sinai: A Territory Without a Master", *al Monitor*, 23 June 2012, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/01/06/trouble-from-the-south.html>; "Beduines", *Sinai*, 2004, <http://www.allsinai.info/sites/beduines.htm>; Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, "Estimated Population & Their Percentage Distribution by Sex & Governorate. In 1/1/2012", 1 January 2012, <http://www.capmas.gov.eg/pdf/pdf%20population/2-1.pdf>.

³⁷ Gleis, "Trafficking and the Role of the Sinai Bedouin" (2007), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=4246#.ujx5JSek_pe](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=4246#.ujx5JSek_pe).

³⁸ "Sabry on Sinai", *CairoScene*, 18 September 2013, <http://www.cairoscene.com/ViewArticle.aspx?Aid=1645>.

³⁹ See: C. Bailey, *Bedouin Law from Sinai and the Negev: Justice Without Government* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁴⁰ Topol, "Sinai and the Bedouins in Post-Revolutionary Egypt" (2012), http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/sinai-and-the-bedouins-in-post-revolutionary-egypt.

⁴¹ L. Attalah, "In Sinai, the tribe comes before the state, the state before Islamists", *Egypt Independent*, 11 June 2012, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/sinai-tribe-comes-state-state-islamists>.

⁴² M. Sabry, "Bedouins Deny Harboring Militants as Sinai Attacks Escalate", *al Monitor*, 21 August 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/08/bedouin-egypt-militant-attacks-sinai.html>.

⁴³ Hauslohner, "The Trouble with Sinai: Egypt's 'Mexico' Problem" (2010), <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1973918,00.html>.

⁴⁴ "EGYPT: Bedouins begin to demand equal citizenship rights", *IRIN*, 16 June 2011, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/92998/egypt-bedouins-begin-to-demand-equal-citizenship-rights>.

⁴⁵ "Sabry on Sinai" (2013), <http://www.cairoscene.com/ViewArticle.aspx?Aid=1645>.

⁴⁶ "Egypt's Sinai: caught in the middle", *al Jazeera English*, 16 Mar 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/03/egypt-sinai-caught-middle-201431664729435518.html>.

Sinai's instability. Military and law enforcement operations that cast too wide a net foster the kind of resentment that could create another generation of militants.

4.2 Bedouin smugglers

Smuggling through Sinai is both lucrative and destructive for Sinai's tribes. The trade in drugs, weapons, persons and commodities provides one of the only avenues of employment in the region, but it also enriches non-traditional tribal elites, whose wealth, power and weaponry can challenge tribal leaders. Smuggling of this scale, therefore, erodes centuries of tribal structure. The power of the smuggler kingpins also checks the willingness of tribal elites to work with the state on counter-smuggling efforts.

4.3 Islamic courts

As tribal law demonstrates, the Sinai Peninsula has long been home to alternative rule out of state reach. However, as Mara Revkin has documented, there has been a growing trend of Islamic courts replacing traditional 'urf courts in the maintenance of law and order.⁴⁸ This trend, though, is not necessarily driven by a growth in religious zeal. Instead, the sharia judges are often viewed as less corrupt than tribal judges, especially those perceived to be linked to the intelligence services. Further – often with funding from mainland-based organisations – Islamic courts are free for complainants, unlike tribal courts.

Some of Sinai's sharia judges would be viewed as extreme by any standard, and the anti-Islamist tension in Cairo has taken a toll on the state's tolerance for these informal extra-state structures. Islamist judges have been arrested, their courts closed for inflammatory statements and anti-military incitement following the ouster of Mohamed Morsi.⁴⁹ Though sharia courts are likely to continue underground, the trend towards an increased acceptance has probably peaked for the foreseeable future.

4.4 Salafiya Jihadiya

The direction taken by Salafiya Jihadiya, perhaps the largest organised "activist" Salafi group operating throughout Egypt, will heavily influence how far Sinai – and Egypt as a whole – descends into anti-state violence. Salafiya Jihadiya has organised massive protests and its statements call for jihad against the Egyptian military.⁵⁰ However, Salafiya Jihadiya has never itself claimed responsibility for any attacks. As such, its estimated five thousand followers may serve as a force multiplier for the smaller, but openly more violent, salafi jihadist groups in Sinai.⁵¹ The group is led by Mohamed al Zawahiri – the younger brother of AQ's leader, Ayman al Zawahiri – but there is no proof of contact between the siblings. Some sources claim the younger al Zawahiri had been training Salafiya Jihadiya fighters in Sinai, but he was re-arrested in Cairo in August 2013.⁵²

4.5 Ansar Bayt al Maqdis

Ansar Bayt al Maqdis ("Supporters of Jerusalem", ABM) is the most active, effective and vocal terrorist group in Sinai – and, increasingly, in mainland Egypt. ABM reportedly has fewer than a thousand members.⁵³ However, it has taken credit for attacks from rocket strikes against Israel, to bombings in North and South Sinai, an assassination attempt on the Egyptian interior minister and attacks on security headquarters and police in Cairo,

⁴⁷ A. Eleiba, "Bedouins might form army to secure Sinai: Tribal leader", *Ahram Online*, 13 May 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/71311.aspx>.

⁴⁸ M. Revkin, "Sharia courts of the Sinai", *Foreign Policy*, 20 September 2013, http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/09/20/sharia_courts_of_the_sinai.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ T. Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia Egypt in the Sinai", *The Long War Journal*, 6 July 2013, http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2013/07/a_new_ansar_al_sharia_in_the_s.php.

⁵¹ S. Nasralla, "Egyptian troops kill Sinai militant leader in gunbattle–army", *Reuters*, 9 December 2013, <http://www.trust.org/item/20131209154709-nfesi/>.

⁵² M. Michael, "Mohammed Al-Zawahiri Arrested: Brother Of Al-Qaeda Chief Ayman Al-Zawahiri Reportedly Detained In Egypt", *Associated Press*, 17 August 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/17/mohammed-al-zawahiri-arrested_n_3772315.html.

⁵³ Nasralla, "Egyptian troops kill Sinai militant leader in gunbattle–army" (2013), <http://www.trust.org/item/20131209154709-nfesi/>.

Dakahliya, Ismailiya and Sharqiya governorates. On 25 January 2014, ABM shot down an Egyptian army helicopter in Sinai.

ABM's short history is still unsettled, despite the group's own propaganda video announcing its origins.⁵⁴ Statements from ABM first appeared in 2011. By its own admission, the group was founded by Egyptians, some from the Nile Delta, who sought refuge in Sinai. However, Egyptian security sources and other Islamist leaders claim ABM is the Egyptian wing of a Gaza-based salafi jihadist group.⁵⁵

A likely bridge for these divergent histories is that some of ABM's founders and early fighters were Egyptians that trained in a Gazan salafi jihadist camp before setting up their operations in Sinai. This would also explain why the Gaza-based Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC), a salafi jihadist group that sometimes attacks Israel from Sinai, regularly commemorates ABM fighters and circulates ABM propaganda. In August 2013 MSC even fired a rocket at Eilat in retaliation for the alleged Israeli assassination of ABM fighters in Rafah.⁵⁶ Reciprocally, in October 2012 ABM threatened to retaliate for Israel's assassination of MSC leaders.⁵⁷

The name "Supporters of Jerusalem" paints a target on Israel. However, in fewer than three years ABM has morphed from targeting Israel and attempting to disrupt Egypt-Israel relations – such as the pipeline and cross-border attacks – to an almost exclusive focus on its war against the Egyptian army – especially since summer 2013.⁵⁸ The group addressed this discrepancy head-on in a January 2014 statement claiming credit for a rocket attack on Eilat: "[O]ur war with the enemy inside will not make us forget the prime enemy of the (Muslim) nation [Israel], who occupies the land and defiles the sacred places".⁵⁹ At the moment, ABM is caught in a fight for survival against the Egyptian military, but it still sets its sights on attacking Israel.

Meanwhile, ABM is continuously advancing its threat capabilities. Since December 2013 the group has shown a capability to regularly strike targets west of the Suez, primarily with massive car bombs. It is also involved in an assassination campaign. On 25 January 2014, ABM for the first time struck an Egyptian helicopter with an anti-aircraft missile in the Shaykh Zuweid area of Sinai: a worrying development – proving the group's capacity to down aircraft – but too soon to call a trend.

Because little is known about ABM, which has expanded its reach and deadliness since the July 2013 coup, efforts have been made by Egypt's current leaders and their supporters in the press to link the group to the Muslim Brotherhood. The closest link provided is a confession by the son of a supposed Brotherhood figure of his involvement in scouting out an ABM target, but the Egyptian government has yet to provide concrete evidence of a connection between the groups.⁶⁰ This has not stopped rampant speculation in the Egyptian press, however. One report in September 2013 claimed that ABM was funded by Khairat al Shater, the wealthy deputy leader of the Brotherhood.⁶¹

4.6 Tawhid wal Jihad

ABM is often referred to as "AQ-inspired", but the original AQ-inspired group in Sinai is Tawhid wal Jihad ("Monotheism and Holy War"), which carried out simultaneous bombings against tourist targets in the South Sinai resort towns of Taba (2004), Sharm al Shaykh (2005) and Dahab (2006).⁶² These events led to massive roundups

⁵⁴ D. Barnett, "Ansar Jerusalem: 'The light of victory has begun to shine'", *The Long War Journal*, 15 January 2013, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/01/ansar_jerusalem_the.php.

⁵⁵ S. Shay, "Egypt and the Threat of Islamic Terror", *BESA Center Perspectives Paper* 230, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 1 January 2014, p. 3, <http://besacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/perspectives230.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Israel Security Agency, "Monthly Summary – August 2013", <http://www.shabak.gov.il/English/EnTerrorData/Reports/Pages/Aug13report.aspx>.

⁵⁷ Barnett, "Ansar Jerusalem: 'The light of victory has begun to shine'" (2013), http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/01/ansar_jerusalem_the.php.

⁵⁸ B. Riedel, "Al-Qaeda now frontline threat to Israel", *al Monitor*, 31 January 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/01/al-qaeda-israel-threat.html>.

⁵⁹ N. al-Mughrabi and D. Williams, "Egyptian militants claim rocket attack on Israel's Eilat", *Reuters*, 21 January 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/21/us-israel-egypt-rockets-idUSBREA0K0ZX20140121>.

⁶⁰ Official Page of the Ministry of Interior, "Press conference of Mr. Mohammed Ibrahim Interior Minister reveals the names of those involved", Facebook, 2 January 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.652096988167301.1073743048.181662475210757&type=1>.

⁶¹ "Islamic Jihad Founder: Brotherhood has been funding Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis", *Egypt Independent*, 9 September 2013, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/islamic-jihad-founder-brotherhood-has-been-funding-ansar-bayt-al-maqdis>.

⁶² "Triple blasts rock Egypt resort" (2006), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4940506.stm.

of suspects in Sinai by the Egyptian police and intelligence services; and the attacks on Egypt's economic drivers did not gain the organisation any sympathy.

By the end of the Mubarak regime, Tawhid wal Jihad had been crushed by the security services and was no longer considered a threat to the state. However, some suspected members either continued to operate in Sinai or returned there following jailbreaks that coincided with the 2011 uprising and prison releases thereafter. In summer 2011, members of Tawhid wal Jihad attacked a police station and a bank in al Arish in North Sinai, killing five policemen and a civilian.⁶³

The Egyptian army claims that Tawhid wal Jihad still maintains a military wing; and on 18 January 2014, the armed forces spokesman announced the army and police had killed its commander.⁶⁴ According to some reports, Tawhid wal Jihad integrated into the ranks of ABM fighters.⁶⁵ Indeed, in eulogising one of its founding members, ABM noted his previous association with two Tawhid wal Jihad leaders, who were killed by Egyptian security forces in 2005 and 2006.⁶⁶ While not corroborated, such a merger could explain why the older group, if still active in militancy, has not claimed responsibility for recent attacks.

4.7 Muhammad Jamal Network

Muhammad Jamal Abd al Rahim Ahmad al Kashif (frequently referred to as just Muhammad Jamal) is a veteran of Ayman al Zawahiri's al Jihad group. Imprisoned by the Mubarak regime, he was released in 2011 by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which ruled Egypt at the time.⁶⁷ Jamal lived a double life for more than a year. He lived in the open, even attending graduate studies.⁶⁸ At the same time, however, he established terrorist training camps in Sinai, western Egypt and Libya.⁶⁹ Jamal was rearrested by the Egyptians in November 2012, following suspicions that his group, the Muhammad Jamal Network (MJN), was involved in the 11 September 2012 attack on the US mission in Benghazi, Libya.⁷⁰

Upon his arrest, a letter to al Zawahiri was found on Jamal's computer, asking for assistance and reporting that MJN had established terrorist groups in Sinai.⁷¹ Early and intense focus by Egypt and the international community significantly degraded the network's capabilities.⁷² Although the group's specific activities in Sinai are unknown, there is speculation that Jamal had a relationship with ABM.⁷³ As reported by *The Long War Journal*, sources told an Egyptian newspaper in October 2013 that Jamal confessed to interrogators that he had trained Walid Badr, the former military officer who attempted to kill the Egyptian interior minister with a suicide car-bomb – an attack claimed by ABM.⁷⁴

⁶³ M. Shmulovich, "Egypt sentences 14 to death over 2011 Sinai terror attacks", *The Times of Israel*, 14 August 2012, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/egypt-sentences-14-islamists-to-death-over-2011-sinai-terror-attacks/>.

⁶⁴ Official Page of the Military Spokesman of the Armed Forces, "Death of the commander of the military wing of the Tawhid wal Jihad group in Sinai", Facebook, 18 January 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/Egy.Army.Spox/posts/425400267590961>.

⁶⁵ A. Sharkawy, "Investigations of the prosecution: Leader of Ansar Bayt al Maqdis exited [prison] by pardon of Morsi ... The group was established on the instructions of 'al Qaeda'", *al Shorouk*, 22 December 2013, <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/print.aspx?cdate=22122013&id=84d10683-9c61-44fc-a97a-08d4b8c3f954>; A. Hatita, "Security sources talk about the alliance between 'the Brotherhood' and 'Ansar Bayt al Maqdis' and 'al Furqan Brigades'", *Asharq al Aawsat*, 25 December 2013, <http://beta.aawsat.com/home/article/14825>.

⁶⁶ D. Barnett, "Ansar Jerusalem confirms deaths of 2 members, including founder", *The Long War Journal*, 16 March 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/03/sinai-based_ansar_je.php.

⁶⁷ M. Fahmy, T. Lister, and P. Cruickshank, "Militants at large since Arab Spring complicate anti-terrorism efforts", *CNN*, 4 October 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/10/04/world/meast/egypt-freed-militants/>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Interview with State Department advisors on counterterrorism assistance programs, 12 March 2014.

⁷⁰ Office of the Spokesperson, "Terrorist Designations of the Muhammad Jamal Network and Muhammad Jamal", US Department of State, 7 October 2013, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/10/215171.htm>; Fahmy, Lister, and Cruickshank, "Militants at large since Arab Spring complicate anti-terrorism efforts" (2012), <http://www.cnn.com/2012/10/04/world/meast/egypt-freed-militants/>.

⁷¹ Office of the Spokesperson, "Terrorist Designations of the Muhammad Jamal Network and Muhammad Jamal" (2013), <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/10/215171.htm>.

⁷² Interview with State Department advisors on counterterrorism assistance programs (2014).

⁷³ D. Barnett, "Ansar Jerusalem releases video of assassination attempt on Egypt's interior minister", *The Long War Journal*, 26 October 2013, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/10/ansar_jerusalem_rele.php.

⁷⁴ A. Shalabi, "Judicial sources confirm the former army officer carrying out attempt to assassinate interior minister", *al Masry al Youm*, 26 October 2013, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/332431>.

4.8 Takfir wal Higra

Takfir wal Higra (“Excommunication and Exodus”) was a precursor group to AQ. A violent off-shoot of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, it was crushed in its home country decades ago: although salafi jihadist groups in other locales use the name. Takfir wal Higra re-emerged briefly in Sinai following the 2011 uprising.⁷⁵ It is unclear, however, if the members of this group had any relation to the original iteration, or if it simply appropriated the familiar name.

Takfir wal Higra was reportedly being aided by Ramzi Mahmoud al Mowafi, known as “the chemist”, who was an explosives expert and had been the personal doctor to Osama Bin Laden before his 1996 arrest in Egypt for being an AQ member.⁷⁶ As reported by *CNN*, al Mowafi fled his life sentence during the 30 January 2011 mass prison breaks, and by August 2011 he was spotted in North Sinai.⁷⁷

5. Regional Linkages of Violent Actors in Sinai

Egyptian security sources believe ABM includes Syrians, Yemenis and other foreign Arabs, but is primarily made up of Sinai Arabs and Gazans.⁷⁸ There is also growing concern about Egyptians returning from Syria’s civil war and aiding salafi jihadists in Sinai with skills gained fighting abroad.⁷⁹

5.1 Palestinian Salafi groups

The neighbouring Gaza Strip is a source of international support for salafi jihadists operating in Sinai. In addition to bordering Sinai, Gaza has long served as a training ground for foreign jihadists.⁸⁰ Egyptian intelligence sources are concerned that Hamas allows Gaza-based salafi jihadists to cooperate with Sinai cells.⁸¹ In addition to its links with the Gaza-based Mujahideen Shura Council, ABM is also known to collaborate with the Popular Resistance Committees in the Palestinian enclave.⁸²

Hamas, the Islamist group ruling the Gaza Strip, has come under tremendous pressure from Cairo: both for its relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood – of which Hamas is an off-shoot – and for the suspected salafi jihadist threat emanating from Gaza.

5.2 Al Qaeda associates

Meanwhile, known associates of AQ leaders provide possible, but unverified, links between Sinai’s salafi jihadist groups and AQ. Ramzi Mahmoud al Mowafi’s arrival in Sinai coincided with the short-lived “AQ in the Sinai Peninsula”, which announced its presence in al Arish in 2011 and was never heard from again.⁸³ In September

⁷⁵ M. Fahmy, “Egypt cracks down on terror cells in Sinai; bin Laden’s doctor spotted”, *CNN*, 16 August 2011, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/africa/08/16/egypt.sinai/>.

⁷⁶ N. Heras, “Military operations against salafist insurgents in the Sinai draw attention to the role of top Bin Laden aide”, *Militant Leadership Monitor* 4, no. 8, The Jamestown Foundation, 5 August 2013, http://mlm.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=41274&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=553&cHash=3fbef7be7d3c5ee03086860d33a27f1b.

⁷⁷ Fahmy, “Egypt cracks down on terror cells in Sinai; bin Laden’s doctor spotted” (2011), <http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/africa/08/16/egypt.sinai/>.

⁷⁸ Hatita, “Security sources talk about the alliance between ‘the Brotherhood’ and ‘Ansar Bayt al Maqdis’ and ‘al Furqan Brigades’” (2013), <http://beta.aawsat.com/home/article/14825>.

⁷⁹ D. Kirkpatrick and E. Schmitt, “Jihadist Return Is Said to Drive Attacks in Egypt”, *The New York Times*, 5 February 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/06/world/middleeast/jihadist-return-is-said-to-drive-attacks-in-egypt.html>.

⁸⁰ V. Salama, “What’s Behind the Wave of Terror in the Sinai”, *The Atlantic*, 22 November 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/11/whats-behind-the-wave-of-terror-in-the-sinai/281751/>.

⁸¹ E. Yaari, “The New Triangle of Egypt, Israel, and Hamas”, *Policywatch* 2193, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 17 January 2014, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-new-triangle-of-egypt-israel-and-hamas>.

⁸² G. Cohen and *Reuters*, “Israeli army hits Palestinian global jihadist in air strike on Gaza”, *Haaretz*, 9 February 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.573212>.

⁸³ Fahmy, “Egypt cracks down on terror cells in Sinai; bin Laden’s doctor spotted” (2011), <http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/africa/08/16/egypt.sinai/>; “Local sources say Bin Laden’s doctor trains Sinai militants, security official denies”, *al Arabiya*, 25 August 2011, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/08/25/163956.html>.

2013, the *Associated Press* reported that al Mowafi “is bringing together multiple al-Qaida-inspired militant groups in Egypt’s Sinai to fight the country’s military”.⁸⁴

As a free man, Muhammad Jamal developed connections with the leadership of AQ and its affiliates in North Africa (al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) and Yemen (al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), as well as with terrorists in Europe.⁸⁵ According to a report in Egypt’s *al Masry al Youm*, Muhammad Jamal told his interrogators that ABM “belongs to al Qaeda”.⁸⁶

Other Egyptian reports link ABM to Ayman al Zawahiri with varying degrees of veracity. For example, in December 2013, *al Shorouk* reported that another al Zawahiri associate, Ahmed Salama Mabrouk, established ABM on the AQ leader’s instructions after he was released from prison in fall 2012 – at least a year after the group was founded.⁸⁷

In an audio message released on 24 January 2014, al Zawahiri directly addressed Sinai’s salafi jihadist groups, calling “for your patience before the aggression of the Americanized army of [Egypt’s Defence Minister Abdul-Fatah al] Sisi that conspires with Israel against you”.⁸⁸ Despite praise of Sinai attacks, AQ has never claimed an affiliate group in Sinai. Neither has ABM issued a statement of loyalty to the AQ leader, as have known affiliates.

This raises two related questions: is ABM a covert AQ affiliate? And does it matter? Sinai-based salafi jihadists are clearly taking their cues from AQ ideology and operations. According to *The Daily Beast*, “aspiring al Qaeda affiliates” in Sinai participated in a secure online meeting with Ayman al Zawahiri and leaders of other affiliates in summer 2013.⁸⁹ Additionally, like many other known AQ affiliates, ABM is already pursuing a localised terror campaign against a perceived corrupt regime. As such, whether or not ABM or any other group in Sinai is technically a part of AQ seems not to matter.

One key threat indicator for future research would be a growth in foreign fighter involvement in the Sinai insurgency. To date, however, the Sinai jihad does not appear to have anywhere near the same draw for foreigners as does the civil war in Syria, or as did the opportunity to fight the US and the shi’a in Iraq.

6. Egypt’s Policy Responses and Initiatives towards Sinai

6.1 Government prior to 2011

For the Egyptian government in Cairo, the Sinai Peninsula has been a longstanding problem viewed primarily from a security perspective. As such, the solution was viewed as a security one. Prior to the 2011 uprising, Sinai governance was overseen by the Ministry of Interior and Egyptian intelligence, in collaboration with regime-appointed tribal leaders. As a strategic backwater, the state wished to maintain a certain level of calm without paying much attention to the local population. This attitude, of course, was not limited to Sinai and was in many ways the driving force that led to the 25 January Revolution.

Despite US and Israeli protests, the Mubarak regime generally looked the other way as Sinai Bedouin and Gazans established smuggling routes. Some observers insist the Egyptian intelligence service even helped them.⁹⁰ However, threats to Egyptian security – and especially to its important tourist economy – were dealt with by

⁸⁴ M. Michael, “Egypt’s Sinai emerges as new theater for jihad”, *Associated Press*, 3 September 2013, <http://news.yahoo.com/egypts-sinai-emerges-theater-jihad-175258911.html>.

⁸⁵ Office of the Spokesperson, “Terrorist Designations of the Muhammad Jamal Network and Muhammad Jamal” (2013), <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/10/215171.htm>.

⁸⁶ Shalabi, “Judicial sources confirm the former army officer carrying out attempt to assassinate interior minister” (2013), <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/332431>.

⁸⁷ Sharkawy, “Investigations of the prosecution: Leader of Ansar Bayt al Maqdis exited [prison] by pardon of Morsi ... The group was established on the instructions of ‘al Qaeda’” (2013), <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/print.aspx?cdate=22122013&id=84d10683-9c61-44fc-a97a-08d4b8c3f954>.

⁸⁸ D. Barnett, “Zawahiri’s message ‘to our people in Sinai’”, *The Long War Journal*, 27 January 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2014/01/zawahiris_message_to_our_peopl.php.

⁸⁹ E. Lake and J. Rogin, “Exclusive: U.S. Intercepted Al Qaeda’s ‘Legion of Doom’ Conference Call”, *The Daily Beast*, 7 August 2013, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/08/07/al-qaeda-conference-call-intercepted-by-u-s-officials-sparked-alerts.html>.

⁹⁰ M. Sabry (journalist), in discussion with the author, 7 February 2013.

harsh response. In reaction to the South Sinai resort bombings of 2004-2006 mentioned above, Egypt's police and intelligence forces went after Sinai's population with a vengeance. Thousands were arrested, some reportedly tortured, and many remain imprisoned indefinitely.⁹¹

6.2 SCAF government, 2011-2012

The grievances of the past three decades sat heavily on the Sinai population by the time of the 2011 uprising. The interim authorities acknowledged the mistakes of the past. The army hoped to have a better relationship with the people of Sinai than did the Ministry of Interior.⁹² The police had dissolved nationwide and general law and order was left to the military. Immediately, the SCAF worked out an arrangement with the Israeli government to permit more forces in the Sinai Peninsula than is allowed for by the security annex of the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty.⁹³

Despite consistent attacks on police and the gas pipeline after Mubarak's ouster, it was in summer 2011 that the Sinai threat really grabbed Cairo's attention. In late July of that year, a large number of salafi jihadists paraded through al Arish, the capital of North Sinai governorate, carrying the black flags that have become a symbol of salafi jihadism. Weeks later in August 2011, when "AQ in the Sinai Peninsula" announced its intention to form an Islamic state in the peninsula, Cairo launched Operation Eagle to scare away the salafi jihadist threat. Two special forces brigades, tanks and Apache helicopters were deployed to North Sinai, with tanks operating around al Arish, Rafah and Shaykh Zuweid for the first time since the signing of the peace treaty.⁹⁴ In this early iteration, Operation Eagle's purpose was to kick the salafi jihadists out of North Sinai's population centres, which was successful. However, Operation Eagle did not significantly challenge salafi jihadist hideouts in the isolated peninsula or aim to break the link between allied groups in Gaza and Sinai. Indeed, a week into the operation, on 18 August, salafi jihadists carried out the worst cross-border attack on Israel in the post-Mubarak period.

6.3 Morsi government, 2012-2013

During SCAF rule, Sinai's salafi jihadist groups rarely offered direct challenges to the military: primarily, they were keen to present a show of force in North Sinai. As such, Operation Eagle was the military's counter: showing its force. The AQ name disappeared from North Sinai, and the military redeployed back to the Suez Canal. The situation changed a year later.

On 5 August 2012, an attack on the Rafah barracks shook the Egyptian military and population. Only a month into his term, President Mohamed Morsi sacked the longstanding defence minister and promoted General al Sisi to take his place. The military launched Operation Eagle II, this time "to confront criminals and achieve security and stability in Sinai".⁹⁵

By October 2012, a large amount of Egyptian forces had been withdrawn from Sinai, and local media was questioning the effectiveness of the military's Sinai campaign.⁹⁶ In the winter months, however, the Egyptian military stepped up its campaign to counter smuggling through underground tunnels between Gaza and Sinai. Overnight, Egyptian officials viewed these tunnels as a threat to national security, and in February 2013 the armed forces even began flooding them.⁹⁷

⁹¹ S. Assir, "Law of the land", *al Ahram Weekly On-line*, no. 775 (29 December 2005 - 4 January 2006), <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/775/eg41.htm>.

⁹² Interview with Egyptian military officials (2013).

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ O. Khaled, "Special forces deployed to Sinai to restore security", *Egypt Independent*, 11 August 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/special-forces-deployed-sinai-restore-security>; S. ElBoluk, "Army tanks in N. Sinai for first time since Israeli peace treaty", *Egypt Independent*, 14 August 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/army-tanks-n-sinai-first-time-israeli-peace-treaty>.

⁹⁵ "Operation Eagle to continue, say military sources", *Egypt Independent*, 28 August 2012, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/operation-eagle-continue-say-military-sources>.

⁹⁶ A. Eleiba, "Egypt's 'Operation Eagle' Sinai campaign draws mixed reviews", *Ahram Online*, 4 September 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/52021.aspx>; "Armed Forces adopt new strategy in Operation Eagle, says military source", *Egypt Independent*, 6 September 2012, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/armed-forces-adopt-new-strategy-operation-eagle-says-military-source>.

⁹⁷ P. Taylor and Y. Saleh, "Egypt flooded tunnels to cut Gaza arms flow: aide", *Reuters*, 18 February 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/18/us-palestinians-tunnels-egypt-iduSBre91H0JA20130218>.

In conjunction with military operations in autumn 2012, under state auspices, al Azhar University conducted religious lessons and other counter-radicalisation programming in Sinai as part of an effort to counter violent extremist ideology.⁹⁸ At the same time, salafi groups aligned with the Morsi presidency conducted “political dialogue” with salafi jihadist groups in an effort to get the Sinai groups not to aim their arms at the state.⁹⁹ However, political outreach to Sinai’s salafi jihadists was controversial: opponents of Morsi viewed these missions as appeasement at best and tacit support for the salafi jihadist cause at worst.

6.4 Post-Morsi interim government, 2013-present

The Morsi period ended with an aggressive clampdown on the Sinai Peninsula. To the west, the Egyptian Ministry of Interior announced that it would close all routes from Sinai to the mainland in the lead up to the nationwide protests that brought down Morsi.¹⁰⁰ To the east, the Egyptian military had for all intents and purposes halted tunnel trade between Gaza and Sinai. Immediately after the 3 July coup, fewer than ten tunnels were still functioning.¹⁰¹

Post-Morsi Egypt has witnessed the most intense and sustained military operations in Sinai; but it has also seen an increase in deadly attacks by Sinai’s salafi jihadists both inside and outside the peninsula. To date, major military offensives in Sinai since Morsi’s ouster have continued a similar pattern as in the previous year: each carried out in response to an escalation in Sinai-based violence. The first, the two-day Operation Desert Storm, was launched at the end of July 2013.¹⁰² The deployment came one day after Egyptians answered Defence Minister al Sisi’s call to rally in support of a security crackdown against terrorism and violence.¹⁰³ The *de facto* Egyptian leader’s rallying cry focused on the political violence that had rocked Egyptian cities since the coup, but it also came on the same day as Egypt’s first car-bombing since the 2011 uprising.¹⁰⁴ The 24 July car-bomb in al Arish exploded before reaching its intended target, killing only the three attackers, but it was a sign of what Sinai’s salafi jihadists had in store for the peninsula and the entire country.

Another military offensive followed the September 2013 assassination attempt on Egypt’s interior minister. Two days later, the armed forces launched the largest and most protracted operation in Sinai since the 1973 war. Not only did the military deploy massive amounts of troops and armament, but witnesses reported door-to-door searches for salafi jihadist suspects.¹⁰⁵

However, the sustained campaign did not end the threat – neither in Sinai nor west of the Suez. Days after the latest military operation picked up, two more near-simultaneous car-bombs killed six soldiers in Rafah.¹⁰⁶ Exactly a month after the September 2012 deployment, ABM struck a security directorate in al Tor: the first car-bomb in South Sinai since 2006.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁸ Interview with Egyptian military officials (2013).

⁹⁹ Eleiba, “Egypt’s ‘Operation Eagle’ Sinai campaign draws mixed reviews” (2012), <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/52021.aspx>.

¹⁰⁰ “Egyptian interior ministry to close routes from Sinai to mainland for 30 June”, *Ahram Online*, 18 June 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/74314.aspx>.

¹⁰¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs occupied Palestinian territory, “Protection of Civilians Weekly Report 2-8 July 2013”, pp. 4-5, http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_protection_of_civilians_weekly_report_2013_07_12_english.pdf.

¹⁰² A. Sternman and L. Berman, “Egyptian military launches major Sinai offensive”, *The Times of Israel*, 27 July 2013, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/egyptian-military-launches-major-sinai-offensive/>.

¹⁰³ “Defence Minister El-Sisi calls on citizens to rally against ‘terrorism’”, *Ahram Online*, 24 July 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/77235.aspx>.

¹⁰⁴ “Car bomb explodes in Sinai, kills three militants: Egypt state television”, *Reuters* and *Ahram Online*, 24 July 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/77283.aspx>.

¹⁰⁵ M. Michael and A. Sweilam, “Egypt launches offensive against Sinai militants”, *Associated Press*, 7 September 2013, <http://news.yahoo.com/egypt-launches-offensive-against-sinai-militants-125550723.html>.

¹⁰⁶ “Six soldiers dead in twin bomb attack on Egyptian military in Sinai”, *Ahram Online*, 11 September 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/news/81321.aspx>.

¹⁰⁷ A. Hauslohner, “Bomb hits Egypt’s Sinai, soldiers ambushed a day after deadly clashes in capital”, *The Washington Post*, 7 October 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/bomb-hits-egypts-sinai-a-day-after-deadly-clashes/2013/10/07/ca5011a6-2f46-11e3-9ddd-bdd3022f66ee_story.html

Reacting to the ABM attack on the Dakahliya Security Directorate in Mansoura in December 2013, the armed forces spokesman said it “increases our resolve to cleanse the homeland” of “supporters of extremist groups”.¹⁰⁸ Within a day, 47 suspected criminal centres in Sinai had been struck by the military.¹⁰⁹

The Egyptian armed forces again concentrated its operations at the end of January and beginning of February 2014. ABM again escalated its attacks with the use of a man-portable air-defence system (MANPADS) on 25 January 2014, the day after the Cairo Security Directorate bombing. In the weeks following the helicopter attack, the Egyptian military pounded suspected salafi jihadist safe-havens around al Arish, Rafah and Shaykh Zuweid using Apache helicopters. The blatant use of helicopters in these operations was the most effective – and indiscriminate – way to take on the salafi jihadists, but it was also a clear signal that one MANPADS attack had not hindered the military’s operations.

Although the armed forces and police are more seriously cracking down on Sinai’s terror threat than at any other time since the 2011 uprising, some Sinai residents and Egyptian activists worry about military excesses. Residents of North Sinai claim the army is “burning whole villages in retribution” as part of a “scorched earth” policy.¹¹⁰ When military operations are ongoing, telephone and internet connections are cut for the population, sometimes from before sunrise to after sunset.¹¹¹

In the current period, Egypt’s ministry of interior also has become more proficient in intelligence, investigative and police work. In early January 2014, Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim announced during a press conference that a man named Tawfik Mohammed Freij was the leader of ABM.¹¹² ABM never mentioned Freij as one of its leaders, until the group announced his death on 14 March.¹¹³ Also in March, the police also hunted down another ABM member, suspected of involvement in the January Cairo bombing.¹¹⁴ Operating off a tip in the early morning of 19 March, the police and armed forces conducted a joint raid on an ABM bomb-manufacturing plant in in Qalioubiya governorate, which resulted in the death of six militants and two officers during an hours-long shoot-out.¹¹⁵ Joint raids between police and military forces have become more common, in and out of Sinai, and according to statements by the Egyptian armed forces spokesman information on detained suspects is shared with Egypt’s judiciary for legal prosecutions.¹¹⁶

6.5 Needed: More Than a Security Solution

An overarching theme of Egyptian policy toward Sinai has been the focus on Sinai as a “security” issue. The above periods have differed in the intensity of Cairo’s response to Sinai’s impact on national security, but there has been little consideration of Sinai in any other context. Since Mubarak’s ouster, successive governments have spoken of the need to address Sinai’s economic, developmental and unemployment problems, but no major projects have been implemented.

¹⁰⁸ Official Page of the Military Spokesman of the Armed Forces, Facebook, 24 December 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=413297088801279>.

¹⁰⁹ “A military source: The end of ABM soon ... and hitting of 47 criminal centres in Sinai”, *ONA*, 25 December 2013, <http://onaeg.com/?p=1362659>.

¹¹⁰ “Two extremists killed, other 12 arrested in Arish”, *Egypt Independent*, 19 December 2013, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/two-extremists-killed-other-12-arrested-arish>.

¹¹¹ A. Saleh, “Communications returned after an interruption of 11 hours in Sinai”, *al Balad*, 1 February 2014, <http://www.el-balad.com/802865>.

¹¹² Official Page of the Ministry of Interior, “Press conference of Mr. Mohammed Ibrahim Interior Minister reveals the names of those involved” (2014), <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.652096988167301.1073743048.181662475210757&type=1>.

¹¹³ Barnett, “Ansar Jerusalem confirms deaths of 2 members, including founder” (2014), http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/03/sinai-based_ansar_je.php.

¹¹⁴ Barnett, “Ansar Jerusalem confirms deaths of 2 members, including founder” (2014), http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/03/sinai-based_ansar_je.php.

¹¹⁵ “Two army officers killed in raid on terrorist hideout in Nile Delta”, *MENA* and *Ahram Online*, 19 March 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/97028.aspx>.

¹¹⁶ Official Page of the Military Spokesman of the Armed Forces, “Intense activity for the border guards on all strategic directions”, Facebook, 24 December 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=413297088801279>.

The current interim government, despite multiple promises, still has yet to compensate North Sinai's population for the destruction caused by its war against salafi jihadists.¹¹⁷ Meanwhile, Sinai residents have complained in the Egyptian press about human rights abuses and the feeling of being treated with suspicion by the rest of the country – views that differentiate little from pre-2011 Egypt.¹¹⁸ On 25 January 2013, thirteen domestic human rights groups wrote an open letter to the Egyptian government, advocating a comprehensive approach: [A]ddressing terrorism requires that a more comprehensive vision be adopted which confronts the religious discourse that praises terrorism. This vision must also take into consideration the economic, social, and political circumstances in which terrorism emerges and spreads. Counterterrorism efforts must not include arbitrary measures but rather be conducted within a framework that respects the law and individual rights throughout the process of identifying the real perpetrators.¹¹⁹

7. International Policy Responses towards Sinai

7.1 Israeli government

The Israeli government is considerably worried about Sinai, both as a platform for cross-border terrorism and because of the smuggling routes to Gaza. Since the 2011 uprising, Israel's political relations with Egypt have been strained. This was certainly true during the year-long presidency of the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi, but it was also the case under SCAF rule and still stands today. However, military and intelligence cooperation are at their height – and were unaffected by the Islamist president. Although the security annex of the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty limits the number of troops and types of armament in the Sinai Peninsula, Israel has regularly waived such regulations and permitted significant Egyptian armed forces deployments to counter the salafi jihadist threat.

Primarily, Israeli policy toward the Sinai threat – of rockets, smugglers and infiltrators of both the economic and terrorist variety – is defensive. In December 2013, Israel completed its 245km-long fence on the Egyptian border.¹²⁰ Although Israel and Egypt were at peace, an initiative to stop infiltration on the Israeli-Egyptian border – known as Project Hourglass – was first conceived in 2005. According to the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), the initial purpose of the project was to counter drug smuggling and the possibility of Hamas terrorists crossing into Israel from Sinai following the IDF's redeployment from the Gaza-Egypt border.¹²¹ However, in early 2010 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu proposed the fence as a method for keeping out African migrants.¹²² When Mubarak and with it the police state in Sinai fell, and when salafi jihadists crossed the border to attack in August 2011, the idea of building the border barrier seemed prescient.

With the border fence complete, the possibility of attacking Israel across the border is significantly more difficult. Instead, salafi jihadists have taken to attacking over it. To counter the threat of incoming rockets, Israel depends on its Iron Dome anti-rocket system, developed to counter projectiles regularly fired from Gaza. In August 2013, an Iron Dome battery intercepted a rocket incoming from Sinai for the first time.¹²³ After a 20

¹¹⁷ H. al Jahmi, "'al Sisi' apologizes to the people of the Sinai for their losses in the war on terrorism and pledges to compensate them", *al Shorouk*, 1 October 2013, <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=01102013&id=cd8e496c-b650-4c18-93aa-298a464592cb>.

¹¹⁸ B. Fadel, "SOS from Sinai", *al Shorouk*, 22 January 2014, <http://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=22012014&id=9bb5e44e-f032-49e0-94eb-35ecd37fef4e>.

¹¹⁹ Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, "Rights groups condemn terrorist explosions, concerned by increasing violence and excessive force by security forces", 25 January 2014, <http://www.cihrs.org/?p=7971&lang=en>.

¹²⁰ "Construction of Israel-Egypt border fence has been completed", *The Jerusalem Post*, 4 December 2013, <http://www.jpost.com/Breaking-News/Construction-of-Israel-Egypt-border-fence-has-been-completed-333927>.

¹²¹ H. Duvdevani, "Hourglass project to prevent infiltrations on Israel-Egypt border", Israel Defense Forces, 28 February 2012, <http://www.idf.il/1283-15057-en/Dover.aspx>.

¹²² R. McCarthy, "Israel to build surveillance fence along Egyptian border", *The Guardian*, 11 January 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jan/11/israel-fence-egypt>.

¹²³ A. Fisher-Ilan, "Israel shoots down rocket targeting resort city Eilat", *Reuters*, 13 August 2013, <http://mobile.reuters.com/article/iduSBre97C00420130813?irpc=932>.

January 2014 attack caught Israel by surprise, Israel Radio announced an Iron Dome unit would be deployed in Eilat “until further notice”.¹²⁴ The system successfully engaged on 31 January.

Israel has also taken precautions to protect civilian aircraft landing in or taking off from Eilat from possible MANPADS attacks. In August 2013, Israel briefly closed the Eilat airport, and diverted air-traffic, following intelligence from Egypt regarding a threat to Eilat aviation.¹²⁵ Israel’s Civil Aviation Authority has also adjusted flight-paths from Tel Aviv to Eilat, which had previously hugged the Egyptian border on incoming.¹²⁶

Finally, while Israeli policymakers have been willing to tackle the militant threat with targeted killings, to date Israeli leaders have preferred not carrying out such provocative measures inside Egyptian territory – instead using the Gaza theatre to target salafi jihadists involved in attacking Israel from Sinai. Most recently, an Israeli aircraft fired upon Abdallah Kharti, who was involved in cross-border attacks, while he was in Gaza on 9 February 2014.¹²⁷

7.2 US and European governments

Since 2011, stability in Sinai has been a key mutual interest in US-Egyptian relations because of the security threat violent actors in the region pose to Egypt, Israel and other US interests. US\$1.3 billion of annual US aid to Egypt – of US\$1.55 total – is spent on its military. Some of this funding for border security and counter-smuggling directly supports military operations in Sinai, but most of this support is spent on major systems. Although the Egyptian armed forces have deployed tanks and F-16s to Sinai, the more effective counter-terrorism tool of such big-ticket items is Apache helicopters. Following the July 2013 coup, the Obama administration decided to halt the transfer of ten Apaches the Egyptians had previously purchased.¹²⁸ Administration officials argue that this halt has not affected Egypt’s ability to fight terrorism in Sinai, although from a military perspective more Apaches would allow for more operations.¹²⁹

The European Union and individual European nations also are concerned about the threat of terrorism in and from Sinai. For instance, in October 2012, the government of the Netherlands voiced concern that “[t]he lack of effective authority in [Sinai] means that jihadists, whether international or Egyptian, are able to operate freely”.¹³⁰ In the November 2013, public summary of the 34th edition of its “Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands”, the Dutch government noted that Sinai-based salafi jihadists might target civilian aircraft with surface-to-air missiles.¹³¹ Indeed, in October 2013, the Dutch airline Transavia halted its flights to Sharm al Shaykh based on the possibility of such a threat.¹³²

¹²⁴ “10:00 Army Radio News Report”, 27 January 2014 (as translated by *Israel News Today*, Jerusalem, 27 January 2014).

¹²⁵ Y. Zitun, “IDF closes Eilat airport for 2 hours over security concerns”, *Ynet News*, 8 August 2013, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4415595,00.html>.

¹²⁶ “El Al stops day flights to Eilat over security”, *Reuters*, 11 September 2013, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4428226,00.html>; Z. Blumenkrantz, “El Al halts day flights to Eilat, citing safety concerns”, *Haaretz*, 24 September 2013, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/.premium-1.548845>.

¹²⁷ Cohen and *Reuters*, “Israeli army hits Palestinian global jihadist in air strike on Gaza” (2014), <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.573212>.

¹²⁸ D. Riechmann, “US holds out possibility of restoring aid to Egypt”, *Associated Press*, 10 October 2013, <http://news.yahoo.com/us-holds-possibility-restoring-aid-egypt-072341805--politics.html>.

¹²⁹ P. McLeary, “Egypt’s Sinai Offensive Unaffected by US Hold on Aid, Officials Say”, *Defense News*, 29 October 2013, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20131029/DEFREG04/310290021/Egypt-s-Sinai-Offensive-Unaffected-by-US-Hold-Aid-Officials-Say>; US Senate Committee on Armed Services, “U.S. Central Command and U.S. Africa Command”, 6 March 2014, http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/us-central-command-and-us-africa-command_03/06/2014.

¹³⁰ National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism, “Letter of 8 October 2012 from the Minister of Security and Justice to the House of Representatives of the States General containing a summary of the September 2012 edition of the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (DTN30)”, Netherlands Ministry of Security and Justice, p. 2, http://english.nctv.nl/Images/summary-dtn-30_tcm92-454216.pdf.

¹³¹ National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism, “Summary of the 34th edition of the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (DTN34)”, Netherlands Ministry of Security and Justice, 7 November 2013, p. 2, http://english.nctv.nl/Images/dtn34-tk-brief-uk_tcm92-521418.pdf.

¹³² O. Smith, “Rocket attack fear for flights to Egypt”, *The Telegraph*, 17 October 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/travelnews/10385199/Rocket-attack-fear-for-flights-to-Egypt.html>.

Despite these statements of concern, Europe tends to provide economic and development – not security – aid to Egypt. Since 2005, the European Union has funded the €64 million South Sinai Regional Development Programme.¹³³

The US also provides support for such programmes through the US Agency for International Development (USAID). USAID’s Livelihood and Income from the Environment in Sinai (LIFE Sinai) programme focused on, from 2008-2012, “the goal of improving the livelihood of low-income Egyptians through the promotion of sustainable development”.¹³⁴ In 2014, the US Congress passed a law that counter-terrorism aid to Egypt and development aid for Sinai could be delivered regardless of other laws restricting US assistance to Egypt.¹³⁵

The US and European nations also provide support to Sinai’s stability through the Multinational Force & Observers (MFO) mission. The MFO, which oversees the bilateral obligations of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, is primarily funded by equal contributions from each of the treaty parties and the US (US\$25 million, or 31.3 percent of the budget, each).¹³⁶ In the last fiscal year, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands increased contributions to the MFO and the United Kingdom contributed for the first time.¹³⁷ The other financial donor countries are Finland, Japan, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.¹³⁸ Last year the Czech Republic also deployed aircraft to meet MFO “operational and logistical needs”.¹³⁹ In addition to financial contributions, thirteen nations contribute force contingents to the MFO.¹⁴⁰

8. Four Future Scenarios for Sinai

Given the security situation as it exists currently in the Sinai Peninsula, it is difficult to predict the threat of Sinai-based terrorism over the next five to ten years. The four scenarios below consider the situation improving over the long- or short-term and also the situation deteriorating, both for Egypt and for the international community. Factors that may further develop the Sinai threat include a failure to address popular grievances, intensified connections between Sinai and international salafi jihadist groups and an influx of foreign fighters searching for the next jihad after the Syrian conflict ends. Factors that may mitigate the Sinai threat include long-term success in military and law enforcement campaigns, improved consideration of the needs of the Sinai population and increased efforts to interdict smuggled weapons at borders and foreign fighters at ports of entry.

Scenario A: Draining the swamp

An ideal outcome is the removal of the Sinai-based terrorist threat to Egyptian national security and the collapse of support for anti-state violence among Sinai’s population. To achieve such a result requires a two-pronged approach to Sinai.

The Egyptian police, armed forces and intelligence services would have to root out terrorist networks. Such operations would cut links between Sinai salafi jihadist groups and foreign networks by identifying and arresting foreign fighters in Sinai, disrupting the arrival of salafi jihadists from foreign conflict zones and

¹³³ Delegation of the European Union to Egypt, “Head of the European Union Delegation to Egypt starts a two day visit to South Sinai”, 4 June 2013, http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/egypt/press_corner/all_news/news/2013/20130604_en.htm; South Sinai Regional Development Programme, “Programme Support Unit (PSU) of the South Sinai Regional Development Programme, on behalf of the Governorate of South Sinai (GoSS)”, European Commission, 2006, <http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/tender/data/d35/AOF68635.doc>.

¹³⁴ US Agency for International Development, “Livelihood and Income from the Environment in Sinai (LIFE Sinai): Final Performance Management Report, 2008 – 2012”, April 2012, p. 1, https://dec.usaid.gov/dec/GetDoc.axd?ctID=ODVhZjk4NWQtM2YyMi00YjRmLTkxNjktZTcxMjM2NDNmY2Uy&piD=NTYw&attc_hmnt=VHJ1ZQ==&rID=MzIzOTQz.

¹³⁵ US Congress, “Consolidated Appropriations Act 2014”, 3 January 2014, p. 519, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-113hr3547enr/pdf/BILLS-113hr3547enr.pdf>.

¹³⁶ Multinational Force & Observers, “Multinational Force and Observers Director General’s Report to the 2013 Trilateral Meeting”, 21 November 2013, pp. 35-36, http://mfo.org/assets/docs/annual_report_2013.pdf.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁰ Multinational Force & Observers, “MFO Contingents”, November 2013, <http://mfo.org/contingents>.

countering smuggling efforts across Egypt's borders. Once isolated, Egyptian forces would dismantle ABM as a militant threat – as was successfully done with Tawhid wal Jihad in the 2000s and other violent groups in the 1990s. To ensure that Egypt's efforts do not breed a new generation of militants, Egyptian forces must take care to target only suspected violent actors and not the population as a whole – a differentiation not well-practiced in its campaign against Tawhid wal Jihad.

At the same time, the government in Cairo would focus on addressing the socio-economic, development and other needs of the population in the Sinai Peninsula. By addressing longstanding (tribal) grievances, the government can minimise support for anti-state violence.

Once Egypt succeeded in destroying the salafi jihadist threat in Sinai, the Egyptian armed forces would redeploy, bringing troop and equipment levels in line with the requirements of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, perhaps with minor but permanent modifications to which both parties would agree.

Scenario B: Return of the security state

Egypt could possibly succeed in addressing the threat of Sinai-based terrorism through brute force without addressing underlying grievances. Such a scenario raises comparisons to the situation in Sinai from the 2005 Sharm al Shaykh bombing to the 2011 Egyptian uprising. The peninsula was not entirely calm: there were attacks on tourists, police and Israel. However, Sinai was relatively stable and did not present a significant threat to the mainland.

That stability was achieved through fear. The Sinai population was intimidated by Egypt's security state. Last decade, the security forces also had to crush Tawhid wal Jihad and anyone suspected of supporting it. A return of the security state similarly demands the destruction of the ABM network.

This outcome would solve the immediate security problem. However, it would perpetuate tensions between Sinai and the state. As Sinai's residents proved in January and February of 2011, this tension will only build, waiting to explode. This scenario also raises broader questions about the rule of law and human rights – both from a perspective of international law and whether such actions would affect Egypt's foreign relations.

The Egyptian military would claim victory, redeploy to peace treaty levels and leave Sinai security to the Ministry of Interior and general intelligence. Without regular army patrols of the Rafah border area, the possibility would exist for a resumption of links between Sinai and Gaza salafi jihadists.

Scenario C: Sinai insurgency

There has been a steady rise in political violence and terrorism in Cairo and throughout mainland Egypt since the July 2013 coup. The most horrific attacks have links to Sinai, but the majority are carried out by individuals and small groups based west of the Suez Canal. In summer 2013, there were numerous attacks on churches and police stations, while primitive explosives have increasingly targeted police checkpoints and patrols. Whether the work of Islamists, salafi jihadists or revolutionaries, the spread of these attacks is concerning.

The Egyptian military and police may determine that protecting infrastructure in Cairo and the Suez Canal zone is more important than stabilising Sinai. An intolerably high rate of attacks in Cairo or a credible threat to canal traffic could result in the redeployment from North Sinai without succeeding in clearing the peninsula of salafi jihadist violent actors.

In this scenario, Egypt would manage to isolate Sinai from the rest of Egypt by tightly controlling formal crossings and upping patrols of maritime borders. This vice around the peninsula would also disrupt foreign fighters from reaching Sinai; and Israeli and Egyptian decision-makers would work out an arrangement for an effective Egyptian deployment in the Rafah border area.

Egypt and Israel would continue, and strengthen, security and intelligence cooperation over Sinai. With Egyptian attention turned elsewhere, Israel may consider conducting infrequent cross-border pre-emptive operations. If Egyptian forces halt their operations against a mutual threat, Israeli leaders may seek permission from Cairo to take matters into their own hands.¹⁴¹

Sinai's anti-state insurgency would continue. Small scale attacks would occur regularly against police and security checkpoints and buildings in Sinai. There would be occasional medium- to large-scale strikes against

¹⁴¹ A. MacSwan, "Four Islamist militants killed in Egypt near Israel: sources", *Reuters*, 9 August 2013, <http://mobile.reuters.com/article/iduSBre9780tB20130809?irpc=932>.

security forces such as those that have been seen before: attacks on police busses and car bombs at security and intelligence headquarters. However, Sinai-based groups would have difficulty conducting attacks outside Sinai. While difficult, mainland attacks by Sinai-based salafi jihadists would not be impossible. Events such as a major terrorist attack outside Sinai, but tied to a group there, may draw the Egyptian military back into the peninsula. Similarly, threats or attacks against South Sinai tourist infrastructure or the Suez Canal – major sources of income for Cairo – could result in another military offensive. In this way, a Sinai insurgency scenario could be compared to Egyptian policy over much of 2011-2013: major deployments in response to specific threats or attacks, followed by a let up in operations until the next major threat.

Scenario D: Global jihadist safe-haven

In a worst-case scenario, the Egyptian military also would redeploy from Sinai without succeeding in draining Sinai of violent actors. Unlike the “Sinai insurgency” outcome, however, Egypt would fail to localise the insurgency. Terrorists with ties to Sinai regularly would conduct attacks in cities along the Suez Canal and throughout the country, including large-scale bombings, targeting of ships in the Suez and threats against foreign embassies.

Egypt likely will be too concerned with countering threats to the mainland and the Suez Canal to again deploy troops into Sinai, so the peninsula could become a safe-haven for foreign jihadists and a training hub for foreign fighters. If South Sinai remains a tourist destination, attacks there may be a “red line” for the Egyptian government. However, given the nationwide descent into violence in this scenario, Egypt’s tourism industry may further collapse.

In such a scenario, Israel, the US and other members of the international community may be more likely to act in and around Sinai to counter the international threat. As a safe-haven for foreign salafi jihadists, Sinai could be compared to the western tribal areas of Pakistan: as there, the state has limited will or capacity to counter a growing threat to itself, its cross-border neighbour (with which it maintains tense relations) and the international community.

Looking Ahead

These scenarios are laid out above in order of best- to worst-case. In order of probabilities, the likelihood of such scenarios is Scenario B: “Return of the security state”; Scenario C: “Sinai insurgency”; Scenario A: “Draining the swamp”; and Scenario D: “Global jihadist safe-haven”. While most worrisome, the safe-haven scenario is made even less likely by regional events. Although there has been a growing concern about foreign fighters traveling to Sinai to fight the Egyptian military, the civil war in Syria is an exponentially bigger draw for foreign fighters. At the same time, nearby Libya and Yemen (and, further afield, Somalia and Mali) already provide salafi jihadist safe-havens. Similarly, Gaza has an established infrastructure of training camps for foreign fighters.

The international community, through security cooperation and training, can increase the likelihood that Egypt will succeed in its operations against Sinai-based violent actors (scenarios A and B). Through targeted aid and investment, the international community could possibly increase the likelihood that the Egyptian government will address local grievances after a successful security approach, providing for a more sustainable solution (scenario A).

8. Policy Recommendations

Scenario A (“Draining the swamp”) is the best possible outcome for Egypt, the region and the international community; while the more likely scenario B (“Return of the security state”) may also manage in the short- to medium-term to quiet anti-state violence – taking into account that such an interim solution would likely breed future unrest without a more comprehensive, sustainable solution. Therefore, Egyptian and international policies should steer current trends towards these outcomes.

Egypt should:

1. Continue its military and law enforcement campaign in Sinai, working with the local population to address mutual security threats and rebuild trust;
2. Ensure to as great an extent as possible the protection of Sinai’s civilian population during pursuit of suspected salafi jihadists and promptly investigate and release those falsely arrested in security raids;

3. Provide promised financial aid to Sinai residents affected by military operations;
4. Strengthen border security through increased technology and better trained patrols; and
5. Work with tribal leaders, the Sinai population and development specialists to address sources of economic and other frustrations among the peninsula's residents.

While this Paper focuses on the threat of Sinai-based terrorism, Egypt's current political conflict is exacerbating the terrorist threat to the mainland. Disenfranchised and angry factions of society are both more susceptible to a violent salafi jihadist narrative and more likely to conduct anti-state violence – inspired by salafi jihadism or not – that distracts the Egyptian government from the more dangerous threat in Sinai. Egypt's leaders must consider this reality to avoid the country's continuation down a violent path.

To assist Egypt in these policy decisions, *the international community should:*

1. Provide Egypt with border security and counter-terrorism equipment and training;
 - a. Especially for the US, this will require serious but difficult conversations regarding Egypt's real needs and adjusting arms sales accordingly;
 - b. International governments cannot continue business as usual with the government of Egypt if the latter is not moving in a democratic direction, but relationships must at least adapt into a transactional one in which international interests – including Sinai security – are being met;
2. Share intelligence with Egypt on known routes of foreign fighters going to and from Syria in an effort to keep Egyptians or other experienced fighters from joining salafi jihadists in Sinai;
3. Continue to offer advice and assistance for development projects in Sinai and encourage Egyptian counterparts to understand the national security benefit of accepting such aid;
4. Offer Egypt support in addressing the threat of Sinai-based terrorism, but publicly and privately differentiate clearly between the real terrorist threat and political opposition; and
5. Encourage the Egyptian government to provide political space for legitimate grievances to be raised peacefully, which may separate political violence from salafi jihadist violence.

Consideration of scenarios C and D ("Sinai insurgency" and "Global jihadist safe-haven") requires Cairo to have mostly "given up" on Sinai: unlikely, but still possible. To avoid the continuation of Sinai's terrorism trend towards scenario C or D, the international community should be proactive with Egypt: privately cajoling the Egyptian government to address its responsibilities as the peninsula's sovereign and warning of a willingness to ignore that sovereignty if it does not.

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