Terror in the Sinai
By Emily Dyer and Oren Kessler
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Front Cover Image: Looking north along Egypt-Israel border north of Eilat,
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Foreword

Following the 1982 withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Sinai Peninsula, the Hosni Mubarak regime imposed a full media blackout on Egypt’s north-eastern frontier. Three decades later, the Sinai has returned to the front pages, due to an unprecedented wave of terrorism that poses major threats to Egypt, Israel and the future of peace in the region.

Amid political instability and civil unrest that followed the January 2011 revolution, militant groups flocked to the Sinai Peninsula to fill the security vacuum left by an ailing state. Terrorist attacks by armed groups based in Sinai are now a common occurrence in the Egyptian heartland, particularly in the capital Cairo and the Nile Delta.

Since the ouster of President Mohamed Morsi in July 2013, Egypt’s military-led government has taken a heavy-handed approach to restoring stability. Having conducted several violent crackdowns against supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, the government has recently sentenced hundreds of its members to death. Not only have these actions stoked concerns in Western capitals – prompting policymakers to hold back military assistance to Cairo – it has also roused militant groups to begin, and justify, waging full-scale ‘jihad’ against the state. At the same time, Egypt’s economy is in dire condition, battered by diminishing tourism and investors’ concerns over continued instability.

Meanwhile, the Egyptian army has launched the largest military operations in the Sinai since its demilitarisation by the 1978 peace accords with Israel, claiming many successes in the killing and arrests of militants operating there. However, there have been few concrete signs of the army effectively curbing the threat and, with forthcoming elections in May, militant attacks are likely to rise instead. Mid-2014 could therefore leave Egyptian, Israeli and Western interests in the region vulnerable to even greater risk.

This new report by the Henry Jackson Society could not come at a more crucial time. Terror in the Sinai offers fresh insights, and the most comprehensive statistical analysis to date, into new trends to have emerged in recent months. The report provides an in-depth study of the growing threat posed by Egypt’s most dangerous militant groups – such as Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis – which are conducting ever-more organised attacks, and increasingly striking the Egyptian mainland.

Among the report’s most troubling findings is the extent to which North Sinai is becoming a full-fledged terrorist base from which attacks are waged against Egypt and Israel. Foreign fighters and weapons continue to flow into the Sinai, and al-Qaeda and several of its most operationally active franchises are now making inroads into the peninsula.

Terror in the Sinai shows that Egypt’s terrorist threat is not going away anytime soon; rather, it is poised to grow far beyond its current state. Thoughtful and nuanced analysis is therefore urgently needed for decision-makers to effectively confront and contain the ongoing crisis. This report is an invaluable contribution to that effort.

Mohannad Sabry

Mohannad Sabry is an Egyptian journalist and forthcoming author based in Cairo. He is a Managing Editor of Special Reports for The Groundtruth Project at GlobalPost, and a finalist for the 2011 Livingston Award for International Reporting.

May 2014
Executive Summary

Terror in the Sinai presents an in-depth analysis of the terrorist threat coming from the Sinai Peninsula. The report finds an increasingly sophisticated and co-ordinated terrorist threat more likely than ever to wage bomb attacks against the Egyptian mainland, a rising al-Qaeda (AQ) presence in the peninsula and a growing terrorist threat against the Egyptian state, Western tourists and Israel.

The report’s first section – “The Evolution of the Threat” – examines why and how the threat has grown in the Sinai, with a focus on: AQ in the peninsula; the influx of foreign fighters and weapons; Bedouin-jihadist ties; and, the Egyptian military’s recent anti-terror campaigns.

The second section of the report – “The Threat: A Statistical Analysis” – identifies key trends based on statistical data, such as the rate, type and location of Sinai militant attacks in the peninsula itself, in mainland Egypt and in Israel. The analysis – based on The Henry Jackson Society’s database of all reported open-source attacks from 2010 to 2014 – shows how the threat and its targets have evolved over time.

The final section is a series of profiles on both Sinai- and Gaza-based militant groups reported to be operating in the Sinai.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE THREAT

Al-Qaeda in the Sinai

- Al-Qaeda (AQ) ideology appears to have a growing presence within the Sinai.
  - Al-Qaeda central (AQ); its most operationally active franchise, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP); and its offshoot the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) are reported to be making inroads into the peninsula.
  - Leaders of certain Sinai armed groups are believed to have links to AQ, AQAP, ISIS and, reportedly, unspecified leaders of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Ramzi al-Mowafi, (Osama bin Laden’s former personal physician), for example, is believed to reside in the peninsula. The leader of another group, Muhammad Jamal of the Muhammad Jamal Network (MJN), is believed to have been in contact with top-level AQ leadership.
  - Several militant groups in the Sinai appear to have taken direct inspiration and/or instruction from AQ and its leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Foreign fighters in the Sinai

- There are strong indications of a foreign fighter presence in the Sinai.
  - Recent references from al-Qaeda (AQ)’s leadership regarding the presence of foreign fighters in the peninsula – combined with numerous reports of fighters entering the area from abroad – suggest a considerable foreign presence there. International jihadist leaders and ideologues have reportedly called for individuals to travel to the Sinai to fight.
  - The largest foreign fighter contingents in the Sinai likely hail from the Gaza Strip and Yemen, as well as North Africa (Sudan, Algeria and Libya), Saudi Arabia and Syria. As many as several hundred jihadists from Yemen – home to AQ’s most active franchise, AQAP – are believed to have travelled to the Sinai.
  - Of all the Gaza-based groups operating in the Sinai, the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem (MSC) and Army of Islam are reportedly the most active. Hamas has reportedly allowed militants to conduct training in the Gaza Strip on the condition that they take their operations out of the Strip and into its neighbours’ territories instead.
  - As the Syrian civil war continues and Hamas tightens its control over the Gaza Strip, it is likely that the Sinai will become a key hub for the traffic of fighters to and from Gaza, Syria and elsewhere.
Weapons in the Sinai

- The Sinai’s longstanding smuggling routes are being used by militant groups to stockpile arms for use in attacks in the peninsula.
  - While the flow of weapons used to travel through the Sinai to the Gaza Strip, this dynamic is now reversing.
  - As a result of Libya’s breakdown in security, large amounts of Libyan arms have been smuggled into the Sinai.
  - Weapons arriving in the Sinai range from light to heavier arms, including landmines, RPGs, and Grad rockets.
- Iran continues to funnel arms to the Sinai through arms factories and smuggling networks it operates in Sudan.
- Hamas has likely set up rocket-production facilities and forward operating bases in the Sinai.

Military action in the Sinai

- While the military regularly claims progress in confronting terrorist groups in the Sinai, actual evidence of its success is limited.
  - The army’s recent campaigns in the Sinai are causing Sinai residents to sympathise with militant groups, due to widespread damage to homes and the reported killing of innocent individuals during military operations.

Bedouin-jihadist ties

- The government’s deteriorating relationship with Bedouin tribal leaders and poor treatment of the wider population is undermining its attempt to re-establish stability in the peninsula.
  - There appears to be an increasing overlap between Sinai Bedouins, Salafi ideology and militant groups. For example, some of the leading members of Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis reportedly also belong to the Sinai’s powerful Sawarka tribe.
- Mutual resentment and the breakdown in co-operation between the government and Bedouins have likely led to a weakened military-intelligence network, preventing forces from waging an effective security crackdown. The government’s failure to address the Bedouins’ grievances has therefore created long-term threats to Sinai security.
- Until the government addresses the peninsula’s instability with not just military action but real development, it is unlikely to see real improvements to the security situation in the Sinai.

The threat to Israel

- After Egypt, no country is more threatened by instability in the Sinai than Israel.
  - Israel has been targeted at least 19 times by acts of sabotage and violence originating in Sinai.
  - The completed border fence between Israel and Egypt has reduced – but far from eradicated – the smuggling of weapons from the Sinai.
  - Military-to-military co-operation between Egypt and Israel appears to be at a high point, as both countries recognise their mutual interests lie in ensuring order in their shared buffer of the Sinai. Israel has allowed Egypt to significantly increase its military and police presence in the Sinai, despite the 1979 peace treaty limiting force numbers there.

THE THREAT:
A STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Rate of attacks

- Militant groups from the Sinai are now more than twice as likely to wage an attack against Egypt or Israel than in the period immediately prior to President Mohamed Morsi’s ousting in July 2013.
  - The 2011 revolution brought a steady rise in the number of attacks in and from the Sinai, with several larger spikes in February 2011 (7 attacks) and July-August (4-6 attacks, respectively). July 2013 saw the largest rise in attacks to date – to 112 from 7 the previous month (a fifteen-fold increase).
Types of attack

- **Militant groups in the Sinai have adopted increasingly co-ordinated and sophisticated methods of attack.**
  - While, in 2013, shootings were the most common type of attack, making up half of the total 270 attacks, 2014 has so far seen a reversal of this trend, as bombings are now more prevalent than shootings.
  - In December 2013, the number of bomb attacks (6) overtook that of shootings (2). In February 2014, bombings (8) made up 80% of all attacks, while there were no shootings.

Attack locations

- **In addition to waging more sophisticated attacks, armed groups have broadened the geographic spread of their operations. Now, attacks by Sinai militants are increasingly likely to target other locations in mainland Egypt and Israel rather than North Sinai.**
  - While nearly all attacks in 2011 took place in North Sinai, the figure has dropped to 54% in 2014 (January-March). Attacks in Cairo waged by Sinai militants have increased from just 2% of all attacks in 2013 to 20% in 2014.

The threat to the Egyptian state

- **The Egyptian state has paid a high cost (in personnel and property) in its attempt to restore security in the Sinai.**
  - Of the 270 militant attacks in 2013, over three-quarters (79%) targeted the police, military, government and security forces.
  - Of all the 41 attacks to have occurred so far in 2014 (between January and March), attacks against the police have been the most common, at just under a third (32%) of the total amount.

MILITANT GROUPS OPERATING IN THE SINAI

- The most operationally active and deadliest militant group in the Sinai is Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM, a.k.a. Ansar Jerusalem). Although an overwhelming majority of attacks (87%) go unclaimed, the group has taken ownership of 63% of all attacks for which responsibility has been claimed or attributed. Of all Sinai militant groups, ABM has the most diverse range of attack locations (the most common being North and South Sinai, Cairo, and Eilat, Israel).
  - Of all groups believed to be linked to the Sinai, Ajnad Misr is most likely to launch militant attacks in Cairo.

While North Sinai was once deemed the backyard of the volatile Gaza Strip, the peninsula itself is increasingly becoming a hub for terrorism and militant activity. From late 2013, militant groups have shown a marked difference in strategy, from relatively small-scale attacks on security forces in North Sinai to high-level attacks against military and political targets. Moreover, these attacks are increasingly likely to target Cairo and other towns, cities and tourist resorts throughout Egypt, as well as Israel, as North Sinai militants broaden their target locations. The fact that Sinai militants now favour al-Qaeda (AQ)-style co-ordinated bomb attacks presages still more sophisticated attacks in the future.
The 2011 revolution that toppled President Hosni Mubarak sparked a rise in Salafi-jihadist activity in the north of the Sinai Peninsula. In the years that followed, the Sinai has experienced a downward spiral in security, with police and security forces there facing regular militant attacks.

The removal of President Mohamed Morsi from power on 3 July 2013 – and the new interim government’s subsequent crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood – not only turned Egypt’s political landscape on its head, but sparked unforeseen violence in the Sinai. Militant groups began calling for Egyptians to take up arms against the army, while extremist ideologues called for jihad against the military-led government. The Sinai is now increasingly being used by militant groups as a hub from which to launch terrorist attacks, not only in North Sinai, but throughout mainland Egypt and Israel.

The instability in the peninsula poses a serious threat, not only to Egyptian security and economic interests, but to the wider region. The Suez Canal and natural-gas pipelines are pillars of the Egyptian economy, yet both are increasingly becoming targets of militant attacks. The Egyptian army’s campaign in the Sinai has brought previously strained relations with the US to a head, with Washington’s postponement of arms sales prompting Egypt to look to new weapons providers such as Russia.

The importance of securing the peninsula has not been lost on the Egyptian authorities. Since late 2013, the interim government has prioritised its campaign
against rising militant activity, launching a series of military operations in the Sinai’s northern governorate. However, despite the increasing use of military force and countless state reports of success (namely, the arrest or killing of Sinai-based militants), the area appears to be more dangerous than ever.

Continued Salafi-jihadist activity in the Sinai could potentially threaten the stability of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, a cornerstone of Western (particularly American) Middle East policy. The treaty’s stipulation that the Sinai remain largely demilitarised has long rankled Egyptians, many of whom deem it an infringement of their national sovereignty. Deteriorating security in the peninsula could exacerbate that feeling. Additional Sinai-based terror attacks in Israel, moreover, could prompt the Israeli public to demand firmer security measures from their government along the Egyptian border, potentially undermining Israeli-Egyptian relations further.

Terror in the Sinai examines the movement of foreign fighters and weapons into the peninsula; the threat militant groups in the Sinai pose to Western interests, the Egyptian state and Israel; Bedouin-jihadist ties and the Egyptian army’s recent efforts in the area. Furthermore, this report provides the first statistical data of its kind to show how the militant threat has evolved throughout the Sinai’s three-year wave of violence. The data provide a basis for analysing the nature of the threat, from shifts in intended targets to the locations and types of attacks, as well as profiles of militant groups reported to be operating in the Sinai. Terror in the Sinai aims to provide much-needed clarity to regional and Western policy makers in how to confront and contain this growing threat.
Methodology

The research and analysis which form the basis of the first chapter of this report are largely based on existing academic literature and media reports on the Sinai, and first-hand interviews with experts and Sinai residents. The statistical analysis in chapters 2 and 3 is based on a database of all reported Sinai-linked militant attacks, created by the report’s authors. For more information, see below.

GROUP PROFILES

Chapter 3 of the report features profiles on Sinai and Gaza-based groups operating in the peninsula. Profiles have been given the following structure:

NAME: The name of the group most widely used, either by the group itself and/or by media; government; and intelligence sources

ALIASSES: Group aliases, in Arabic and English

REPORTED LEADERSHIP/PROMINENT MEMBERS: Includes former leaders and/or deceased individuals

KNOWN/REPORTED LINKS: Includes known links to other individuals and groups, and known links to other terrorist/militant groups

ATTRIBUTED ATTACKS: Attacks claimed by groups themselves or attributed by credible media and/or government or intelligence sources

NOTES: Additional notes outlining the history, formation, and ideology of the group and its leadership

DATABASE OF ATTACKS

The database documents all reported militant attacks, both successful and attempted, in the Sinai – or elsewhere in Egypt or Israel if reportedly committed by militants operating in the Sinai. All attacks in the database took place between 1 January 2010 and 31 March 2014.

Multiple attacks that have taken place on the same day and/or by the same group, and/or in the same location are documented separately, except in cases of multiple rocket-fire and other co-ordinated attacks. For example, a series of attacks carried out on the same day by the same group but in different parts of the same city will be listed as separate attacks, whereas an attack on various targets (military; civilian; government; religious, etc.) in the same immediate location will be counted as one co-ordinated attack.
Glossary

ARABIC TERMS

Ansar: “ Helpers”, “partisans” or “supporters”; the people of Madina who welcomed and aided the prophet Muhammad and his early companions

Bay’ah: The swearing of an oath of allegiance to an emir

Emir: A leader

Fatwa: An authoritative statement on a point of Islamic law

Hijra (Muhajireen): Emigration in the way of Allah. Islamic dating begins with the Hijra of Muhammad, from Makka to Madina, in 622 CE

Jihad: Struggle, particularly fighting in the way of Allah

Jund / Jaysh: Army, band, group, wing of the army; also denotes a military district

Kafir (pl. Kuffar) / Kufr: “Non-believer” (referring to non-Muslims); the term can also be used derogatorily to suggest disbelief (by a Muslim or non-Muslim) in God and/or denial of truth

Majlis: Assembly, ruling council

Bayt al-Maqdis: An archaic or poetic name for Jerusalem (Al-Quds)

Mujahid (pl. Mujahideen): A person or group of people who take part in jihad

Muslimeen (pl): Muslims

Sharia / Shariah: “Law”; the Muslim religious code of conduct; a range of diverse religious traditions and interpretations, from strict rules to broad principles and objectives

Shura: “Consultation”, board of electors, a council of state, advisers to the sovereign, a parliament (in modern times)

Sunna / Sunnah: The customary practice of a group of people or of a person; has come to refer to the practice of Muhammad and of the first generation of Muslims

Takfir: To declare that someone is a kafir – an “unbeliever” or “pagan” – and thereby to excommunicate him or her from the community of believers

Tawhid: The doctrine of divine unity

Ummah: The Islamic “nation” of believers

Background

TIMELINE OF MAJOR EVENTS IN EGYPT (2011-2014)

- 25 January 2011: Egyptian revolution begins against President Hosni Mubarak's regime; \(^2\)
- 5 February 2011: First attack on natural-gas pipeline to Israel (militants have attacked pipeline at least 18 times since); \(^3\) \(^4\)
- 11 February 2011: Mubarak resigns as president; \(^5\)
- 18 August 2011: Cross-border multi-stage attack in and around Eilat, Israel; \(^6\) 8 Israelis reported killed; \(^7\)
- August 2011: “Operation Eagle” launched in the Sinai; \(^8\)
- 28 November 2011: Start of Egyptian presidential elections; \(^9\)
- 24 June 2012: Mohamed Morsi elected president; \(^10\)
- 5 August 2012: Ambush of Egyptian troops near the border with the Gaza Strip and Israel, 16 reported killed; \(^11\)
- August 2012: “Operation Sinai” launched in the Sinai after 5 August attacks, initially as extension of “Operation Eagle”; \(^12\)
- 30 June 2013: Large-scale protests against Morsi begin; \(^13\)
- 3 July 2013: Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood removed from office; \(^14\)
- 19 August 2013: Ambush of police in Rafah, North Sinai, 24 reported killed; \(^15\)
- 20 November 2013: Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIED) attack on Egyptian soldiers, 11 reported killed; \(^16\)
- 24 December 2013: Explosion at Daqahliya Security Directorate, 16 reported killed; \(^17\)
- 24 January 2014: Bombing of Cairo security directorate, 6 reported killed, over 100 wounded; \(^18\)
- 31 January 2014: Egyptian airstrike, 13 militants reported killed; \(^19\)

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• 3 February 2014: Egyptian airstrike, 30 militants reported killed;\textsuperscript{20}

• 7 February 2014: Egyptian airstrike, 16 militants reported killed;\textsuperscript{21}

• 16 February 2014: Bomb attack on tourist bus in Taba, North Sinai, 3 South Korean tourists and Egyptian driver reported killed;\textsuperscript{22}

• 19 February 2014: Egyptian airstrike and ground operation, 16 militants reported killed;\textsuperscript{23}

• 22-24 February 2014: Combined Egyptian military operations, 14 militants reported killed;\textsuperscript{24}

• 24 February 2014: Interim government of Prime Minister Hazem el-Beblawi resigns;\textsuperscript{25}

• 26 March 2014: Gen. Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi announces resignation as military commander-in-chief and Defence Minister, declares presidential candidacy;\textsuperscript{26}

• 2 April 2014: Triple bomb attack in Cairo kills police brigadier-general, wounds five other police officers, Ajnad Misr claims responsibility.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{20}‘Military airstrikes kill 30 militants in North Sinai: media reports’, \textit{Ahram Online}, 3 February 2014, available at: \url{http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/93405.aspx}.


THE SINAI PENINSULA

Shaded relief map of the Sinai Peninsula, 1992
[produced by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons]
THE SINAI PENINSULA: A BRIEF GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Sinai is a triangular peninsula of 60,000 square kilometres, that bridges North Africa and the Levant. To its east is Israel, the Gaza Strip, and the Gulf of Aqaba; to its west is the Suez Canal and Gulf of Suez; to its north is the Mediterranean; and, to its south, the Red Sea (see above map). The Sinai is divided into two of Egypt’s 27 governorates – North and South Sinai – with district capitals in el-Arish and el-Tor, respectively.

While the Sinai makes up 6% of Egypt’s land mass, it is home to just 600,000 people – or, 0.7% of Egypt’s population of 86.5 million. For the sake of comparison, the cities of Port Said and Port Fuad, at the mouth of the Suez Canal, each have a population comparable to that of the entire peninsula.

The governorates of North and South Sinai cover the bulk of the peninsula (along with parts of the Port Said; Ismailia; and Suez governorates, all of which straddle the canal). Just one-third of the Sinai’s people live in South Sinai; another third live in the peninsula’s two largest towns (el-Arish and Sheikh Zuwayyed, both on the Mediterranean); and an additional third live elsewhere in North Sinai.

Bedouins – historically nomadic tribes with roots in Arabia who, for centuries, were occupied primarily in livestock-rearing – comprise approximately 70% of the Sinai’s population, while the rest are non-Bedouin Egyptians (mostly recent or veteran immigrants from the Nile Delta). Of the Sinai’s residents, 99% are Sunni Muslim. The peninsula’s Christian population is estimated at a few thousand; but, their numbers have dwindled since 2011.

Due to few opportunities for legitimate employment, trade has flourished in narcotics; weapons; and the trafficking of goods and people in and out of the Sinai. Israel’s 2005 pull-out from the Gaza Strip increased the flow of people and ideas with the peninsula, and, two years later, Hamas’ seizure of the Strip provided more opportunities for illegal activity. The blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip in 2007, by both Israel and Egypt, created one of the world’s most lucrative markets for smuggling networks.

Over the last decade, the Sinai has seen a string of terror attacks against tourists – in 2004 in Tabar and Nuweiba, in 2005 in Sharm el-Sheikh and in 2006 in Dahab – that collectively killed at least 123 people, including more than a dozen Britons. The Egyptian government attributed the attacks to extremists from the Sinai (chiefly Tawhid Wal-Jihad) and the Gaza Strip, and subsequently arrested more than 2,000 people across the peninsula.
The current conditions have restricted MFO operations to the extent that forces cannot leave their camps without body armour. Troops stationed at the biggest MFO camp (el-Gorah) have even had to build their own wells, so as not to have to rely on local supplies.\textsuperscript{44}

The security vacuum in the Sinai has allowed Salafi-jihadist groups to operate in the peninsula. In recent months, jihadist leaders have issued fatwas over Mohamed Morsi’s removal, adding to the repeated calls by AQ’s emir, Ayman al-Zawahiri, for “jihad” as a means of securing sharia law in Egypt. Salafi-jihadist groups have launched weekly – in some cases, daily – attacks against police and security forces, and occasionally against Israeli and foreign targets.

\section*{AL-QAEDA’S PRESENCE IN THE SINAI}

There are strong indications that al-Qaeda central (AQ), al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) are establishing links to individuals and groups within the Sinai, and therefore that the Egyptian peninsula is becoming AQ’s latest international hub.

Sinai militants reportedly have links to the upper echelons of al-Qaeda central. According to US intelligence officials, “aspiring al-Qaeda affiliates operating in the Sinai”\textsuperscript{45} participated in a July 2013 “conference call” of more than 20 top-level al-Qaeda operatives – including Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of AQ central (The Daily Beast reported that security fears stoked by that call were one reason the US State Department temporarily closed its embassy in Tel


\textsuperscript{40} ‘Egyptian police protest in Sinai, Cairo demanding weapons’, \textit{Ahram Online}, 5 March 2013, available at: http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/66160/Egypt/Politics-/Egyptian-police-protest-in-Sinai-Cairo-demanding.aspx.


\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.

One group operating in the Sinai and thought to have particularly close links to AQAP, as well as AQ central and AQIM, is the Muhammad Jamal Network (MJN). Jamal, an Egyptian, travelled to Afghanistan in the 1980s to fight the “jihad” against the invading Soviet forces, and upon his return was jailed by Egyptian authorities for militant activities with Egyptian Islamic Jihad (an AQ forerunner led by al-Zawahiri). Released from prison after the 2011 Egyptian revolution, Jamal founded his network and allegedly began plotting attacks inside Egypt (he was re-arrested in November 2012, and remains imprisoned).

Jamal has been described by a United Nations Security Council committee as a link in the worldwide al-Qaeda network, one with a direct personal connection to AQAP leader Nasir ‘abd al-Karim Abdullah al-Wahishi, and leaders of AQIM. According to the US State Department, Jamal is also thought to have received funding from AQAP, and to have “used the AQAP network to smuggle fighters into training camps.”

In 2012, Egyptian authorities discovered letters between Jamal and al-Zawahiri in which the former discussed his plans to establish armed groups in the Sinai. Al-Zawahiri responded by giving his blessing to Jamal’s plan. Jamal described the Sinai as “the next confrontation area with the Jews and the Americans.”

In July 2011, a group calling itself “Al-Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula” (AQSP) claimed responsibility for an attack in which as many as 100 gunmen targeted the el-Arish police headquarters and a gas pipeline to Israel. Following the attack, the group demanded Egypt revoke its peace treaty with Israel.

While the size, composition or operational activity of AQSP is currently unclear, the group is believed to be led by the Egyptian Ramzi al-Mowafi who, in the 1990s, travelled to Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan to render services to AQ, eventually becoming Osama bin Laden’s personal doctor and AQ’s chief chemical-weapons producer. More recently, he escaped from an Egyptian prison following the 2011 revolution, before reportedly fleeing to the Sinai. However, while both AQSP and the MJN rarely claim responsibility for militant attacks, as Thomas Joscelyn of The Long War Journal noted in his February 2014 testimony to the US House of Representatives Homeland Security Committee, AQ has often groomed local networks without explicitly taking credit for their operations. The same could be the case for these two groups.

Sinai militant groups are adopting increasingly similar methods of attack to those of AQ. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM), for example, is showing ever-more
sophisticated operations – including an August 2011 cross-border attack that killed eight Israelis, and the downing of an Egyptian military helicopter in January 2014 – and has conducted a number of AQ-style suicide bombings. 62

ABM has also received the implicit blessing of al-Zawahiri, who played footage of one of its funerals in a January 2014 taped message. 60 The group’s messages are also regularly featured prominently on Al-Fajr Media Centre – al-Qaeda’s online forum – indicating the importance the AQ leadership attach to its activity. 61 In Joscelyn’s words to the House committee, ABM is “at a minimum, pursuing al-Qaeda’s agenda and al-Qaeda’s senior leadership approves of the organization.” He added that there is a mounting body of evidence suggesting ABM is itself now part of AQ’s international terror network. 62

ABM’s recent videos have included speeches from leaders of ISIS – the AQ offshoot with roots in Iraq that is one of the largest anti-government contingents in the Syrian civil war. In December 2013, an ISIS sharia-court judge in Syria addressed his “mujahideen in the Syrian civil war. In December 2013, an ISIS sharia-court judge in Syria addressed his “mujahideen in the Sinai, the peninsula. Salafi-jihadists in the Sinai appear to be both inspired by AQ ideology and, in some cases, directly instructed by, its leadership. As a result, both mainland Egypt and Israel now have a likely al-Qaeda hotspot at their front door, one that could also threaten Western visitors and strategic interests.

FOREGN FIGHTERS IN THE SINAI

Given a lack of conclusive evidence, the precise scope of foreign fighter infiltration into the Sinai remains unclear. However, recent references from al-Qaeda regarding the presence of foreign fighters in the peninsula – combined with numerous reports of fighters entering the area from abroad – suggests a significant foreign presence there.

The most convincing indication so far of foreign fighter activity in the Sinai has come from the very top of al-Qaeda (AQ). On 24 January 2014, AQ leader Ayman al-Zawahiri released a message to “our people in the Sinai ... to offer sanctuary to your brothers the Egyptian society for Economic and Social Rights observed, in reference to Sinai militants: “Within Islamist circles, it is a very clear sign that [ISIS’] ideology is their choice. They respect ISIS, but it’s more than respect; it might be an organisational bond.” 63 Other Sinai groups – while not proven to have firm ties with AQ – could nevertheless be described as being AQ-inspired. The Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem (MSC), for example, has dedicated attacks to al-Zawahiri and his predecessor bin Laden. 66 The Army of Islam – based in the Gaza Strip but operationally active in the Sinai – has reportedly contacted AQ central to ask whether it is permissible to sell drugs to “the Jews” in order to “harm them and take their money.” 67

While it is difficult to precisely quantify al-Qaeda’s presence in the Sinai, there are strong indications that the group’s various branches are making inroads in the peninsula.

In late April 2014, Cairo’s Almasry Alyoum cited Egyptian military officials saying they had indications that ISIS operatives had relocated to the Sinai from the fighting in Syria, and had carried out attacks against Egyptian security forces. 64 As Ismail Alexanderni of the


Muhajireen [foreign fighters]. 68 Foreign fighters present in the Sinai reportedly include individuals largely from Afghanistan, 69 Syria, 70 Yemen, 71 Sudan, 72 Libya, Algeria, 73 Somalia, 74 Saudi Arabia, 75 and elsewhere.

Reports of foreign fighters in the Sinai date back to before Morsi’s removal in July 2013. Yemeni and Somalian jihadists were among those believed to be operating in the Sinai, according to a “senior diplomatic source” quoted in The Daily Beast, in January 2013. 76 The same month, Egyptian authorities voiced concerns that militants from Libya and Algeria had joined militant groups in the peninsula. 77

One of the largest reported contingents of foreign fighters in the Sinai appears to come from Yemen – the home of what is widely considered al-Qaeda’s (AQ’s) most operationally active franchise, 78 al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). 79 A CNN report from August 2012 quoted an Egyptian security official speaking of at least ten Yemeni militants operating in the Sinai, and two Bedouin tribal elders confirmed their presence there. 80 An Associated Press report from September 2013 put the number of Yemenis in the hundreds – many believed to have arrived in the peninsula after Morsi’s ousting, in response to Yemeni clerics’ edicts to travel to Egypt fight a “jihad” against the Cairo government. 81

Furthermore, international jihadist leaders have called for individuals to travel to the Sinai to fight. In calling for Egyptian Muslims to take arms against the military in early-November 2013, the Mauritanian 82 ideologue Sheikh Abu al Mundhir al-Shinqiti said: “The goal of the security campaign that the tyrannical army in Egypt is directing in the Sinai is to protect Israel and its borders.” Shinqiti praised attacks by ‘your mujahideen brothers’ in the Sinai and called on Egyptian Muslims to ‘support them [and] increase their ranks…jihad in the Sinai is a great opportunity for you to gather and unite under a pure flag’. 83

Groups originating from the Gaza Strip are thought to have a strong presence in North Sinai. The group which appears to be the most operationally active in the Sinai is the Gaza-based Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem (MSC) (see “Group Profiles”). Like all jihadist groups that operate in the Sinai, the exact size; structure; and composition of the MSC remain unclear. However, the MSC is believed to be an umbrella group formed by a merger


70 ‘Captured foreign fighters in Sinai say they were paid to fight Egypt’s military’, World Tribune, 6 August 2013, available at: http://www.worldtribune.com/2013/08/06/captured-foreign-fighters-in-sinai-said-they-were-paid-to-fight-egypt-military/.

71 Ibid.


74 ‘Captured foreign fighters in Sinai say they were paid to fight Egypt’s military’, World Tribune, 6 August 2013, available at: http://www.worldtribune.com/2013/08/06/captured-foreign-fighters-in-sinai-said-they-were-paid-to-fight-egypt-military/.


of two smaller Gaza-based groups – Ansar al-Sunna and Tawhid Wal-Jihad. 86

Saudi citizen Adi Saleh Abdullah al-Hadhli was one of two Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC) fighters killed after murdering an Israeli-Arab civilian working on the Egyptian-Israeli border fence in June 2012. 87 Following the attack – for which the MSC claimed responsibility – the group released a video dedicating the attack to Osama bin Laden; Ayman al-Zawahiri; and the ‘Syrian Muslim jihadi people’, 88 and stated its aim as the institution of sharia and the return of the Islamic Caliphate. 89

Another Palestinian group thought to be active in the Sinai is the Army of Islam (‘Jaysh al-Islam’, in Arabic), run by the powerful Dughmush clan (see “Group Profiles”). The organisation grew out of Gaza; but, the bulk of its operations are now in the Sinai, which it uses as a base from which to attack the Egyptian Army and to launch rockets at Israel. The Army of Islam has, at times, referred to itself as “al-Qaeda in Palestine”90 and has been linked to the Jordanian extremist cleric, Abu Qatada, whom the United Nations has sanctioned over his ties to al-Qaeda. 91

Given the mounting reports of foreign fighters in the Sinai, it is possible that they now have a significant presence within the peninsula, posing an evolving and substantial threat to both the Sinai and mainland Egypt. Furthermore, as the Syrian civil war continues indefinitely and Hamas tightens its control over the Gaza Strip, the Sinai could potentially become a key hub for the rising traffic of fighters to and from Gaza, Syria and elsewhere.

WEAPONS IN THE SINAI

The Sinai’s strategic location and rugged, mountainous terrain have for centuries proven ideal for smuggling goods through the peninsula. The breakdown of security following the 2011 revolution provided further opportunity for these existing smuggling networks to thrive, and for Sinai-based Salafi-jihadist groups to take advantage of them.

The majority of weapons smuggled into the Sinai arrive from Libya in the west, the Gaza Strip in the east, and the Sudan in the south. In Libya, the two-and-a-half years following the overthrow of leader Muammar Gaddafi have seen rebels looting vast amounts of weapons from unsecured warehouses, 92 and the central government in Tripoli remains virtually powerless to reassert control. 93

Amid the breakdown in security, large amounts of Libyan weapons have been smuggled into the Sinai Peninsula, often through towns along Egypt’s frontier with Libya such as Salloum 94 and Marsa Matruh. 95 Egyptian officials believe many of the weapons are earmarked for rebels fighting against the Syrian regime, as well as for Hamas and other militant groups in the Gaza Strip. 96

In November 2012, Egyptian authorities seized 185 crates of Libyan arms – including anti-tank and anti-aircraft munitions, landmines, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), ammunition and explosives – worth

had seized more than 100 Grad rockets and 400,000 rounds of anti-aircraft ammunition that had arrived from Libya. Israel Defense Forces (IDF) officials have recently claimed that advanced weapons including anti-tank guided missiles, Sniper Support Rifles (SSRs) and shoulder-fired missiles (a.k.a. MANPADS) were entering the Sinai from Libya in large quantities and being sold at open-air auctions to the highest bidder.

In early 2013, after Egyptian authorities had seized 60 anti-tank missiles smuggled in pick-up trucks from Libya, a European diplomat observed that Egyptian authorities “are becoming alarmed that [Libyan] weapons are now being stockpiled by Egyptian Salafi groups. They are starting to uncover arms trafficked from Libya in the [Nile] Delta and believe other weapons are being stored in Sinai. It is making them very nervous.”

Moreover, while Sinai was once deemed the backyard of the volatile Gaza Strip, this dynamic is in the process of being reversed. A report by the Shin Bet, Israel’s internal-security agency, reported that hundreds of high-quality weapons – including long-range rockets and advanced anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons – passed through the Sinai en route to Gaza in 2012 alone.

What is more, Israeli officials believe that weapons smuggled into Gaza – many of them via the Sinai – are now being returned to the peninsula to be used against Egyptian targets. As a result, since early 2013, Egypt’s army has flooded tunnels between the Sinai and the Gaza Strip – with water, or even sewage – to prevent a two-way flow of smuggled arms.

Even the Muslim Brotherhood regime of President Mohamed Morsi appeared to recognise the urgency of blocking the weapons flow the Gaza Strip. In February 2013, Morsi’s national-security adviser, Essam el-Haddad, said: ‘We don’t want to see these tunnels used for illegal ways of smuggling either people or weapons that can really harm Egyptian security […] We would not like to see arms smuggled through these tunnels either in or out, […] and we have captured actually across Egypt heavy arms that could be used in a very dangerous way.’

However, Morsi’s efforts to close tunnels were extremely ineffective, given that, a very low number of tunnels were flooded at that time, and, the majority of tunnels that were hit re-opened soon after.

Weapons are not only smuggled from the Gaza Strip to the Sinai, but are reportedly being produced within the peninsula as well. Hamas is reported to have set up rocket-production facilities and forward operating bases within the peninsula in late 2011, believing them to be far less vulnerable to Israeli air strikes than in the Gaza Strip. In 2012, Maj. Gen. Warren Whiting, the then-head of the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), confirmed that Gaza-based militants had test-fired an Iranian advanced Fajr-5 missile within the Sinai.

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Sinai and the Gaza Strip. In 2009, Israel reportedly conducted three airstrike in Sudan against suspected Iranian weapons convoy bound for Gaza. In 2012, Sudan accused Israel of bombing a Sudanese weapons-production facility that Israel and the United States believed was under Iranian control. Following the 2012 airstrike, Iran’s then-foreign minister – Ali Akbar Salehi – said, “Let’s assume that Iran has established an arms factory in the Sudan. Is this forbidden? Within the framework of international laws, if there is a country that wants to buy weapons from us, we are ready.”

Iranian weapon shipments bound for the Sinai and Gaza Strip have continued into 2014. In March 2014, the Israeli Navy intercepted a weapons shipment off the coast of the Sudan containing dozens of advanced 100-mile-range Syrian rockets. Israeli officials attributed the shipment to Iran, and said that, had the weapons reached their destination, they would have been a ‘game-changer’ for the Islamic Republic’s terror war against Israel. Israeli officials originally said the shipment had been bound for Gaza, but US intelligence analysts claimed the shipment was most likely headed for Sinai itself. Israel, it appears, was merely attempting to help its Egyptian partners save face.

Israeli military officials have told the authors of this report that their co-operation with their Egyptian counterparts is at a level unseen in years. If there is a silver lining to the chaos roiling Sinai, it is the realisation – by both Cairo and Jerusalem – that their mutual interest lies in a secure buffer between them.

**MILITARY ACTION IN THE SINAI**

Since the 2011 Egyptian revolution, Egypt’s army has launched three major anti-terror campaigns in North Sinai. The first (‘Operation Eagle’) came on the back of an August 2011 cross-border attack that killed eight Israelis (and five Egyptian troops in the ensuing pursuit); the second (‘Operation Sinai’) was in reaction to an attack a year later that killed 16 Egyptian troops; the third (‘Operation Desert Storm’) came in response to a spike in attacks since July 2013. The operations’ success remains the subject of debate: the army has repeatedly released statements reporting large numbers of militants whom it says were arrested or killed. Yet, given the growing terrorist base in North Sinai, any validity behind the military’s claims is looking increasingly doubtful.

The deterioration in the Sinai security environment from early 2011 pushed the Egyptian military to intervene in an attempt to stem the growing threat against police and security forces. Alongside the rise in Sinai militancy, the levels of troops and range of assets deployed have continued to increase: Operation Eagle, for example, included 1,000 soldiers and a few hundred armoured personnel carriers. Nonetheless, the violence has persisted. Operation Sinai, which took place a year later, marked a significant increase in the security presence in the peninsula and the first firing of missiles in the Sinai since 1973.
Since Operation Sinai, military attacks and operations have not been undertaken as separate, long-term deployments but, rather, as follow-on operations. In mid-July 2013, following the violence in the Sinai that followed Morsi’s dismissal, the army launched Operation Desert Storm.\(^{122}\) The operation marked yet another shift towards greater military force in North Sinai – with the deployment of two additional infantry battalions, helicopters and tanks, as well as the launch of nightly attacks against militants in the area.\(^{123}\) According to the Egyptian military, 103 suspected militants were arrested and 60 were killed in the period between 5 July and 4 August 2013.\(^{124}\)

Since then, the army has regularly made claims of high numbers of militant deaths and arrests, particularly since Operation Sinai. Throughout the first month of that operation, the military said that it had killed some three dozen militants,\(^{125}\) whereas, in a recent airstrike, it claimed that it had killed 30 militants in just a single day.\(^{126}\) More recently, the period between late January and early March 2014 has shown the highest levels of apparent military success, as shown below:

- 31 January: Egyptian airstrike, 13 militants reported killed;\(^{127}\)
- 3 February: Egyptian airstrike, 30 militants reported killed;\(^{126}\)
- 7 February: Egyptian airstrike, 16 militants reported killed.\(^{129}\)

The army’s statements, however, often contradict each other and cannot be independently verified. Furthermore, according to The Henry Jackson Society database of attacks, the military operations in question seem to have had little impact upon the persistence of more sophisticated militant activity in the Sinai. Since 2011, the overall trend has been of rising violence on both sides. In fact, despite apparent recent successes, the Egyptian military has been criticised for its weak intelligence network – a product of its deteriorating condition of anonymity in January 2014. Western officials say that Egypt and Israel have agreed that the latter is allowed to take action against Sinai militants only as a last resort if the Egyptians are not in a position to stop an imminent threat.\(^{135}\)

131 Interviews with Ibrahim El-Menaei, head of the independent Sinai Tribes Union in Rafah, October 2013. Three other sources spoke of this later on condition of anonymity in January 2014.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
US military aid to Egypt has continued since Hosni Mubarak was overthrown in February 2011. In January 2014, Congress allowed the Obama administration to resume its $1.5 billion in military aid to Egypt, having withheld that aid (including tank-kits, Apache attack helicopters, harpoon missiles, and F-16 jets) since the previous July. However, the Obama administration has yet to decide whether to resume military aid to Egypt, as Washington is still waiting for Cairo to address its concerns regarding the military-led government’s crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood.

As a result, the Egyptian army has even looked to purchase weapons from Russia, following a proposed $2 billion arms deal discussed in November 2013. Russia reportedly pledged to supply 24 MiG-29 fighter jets, air defence systems, the KORNET anti-tank missile complex and Ka-25, Mi-28 and Mi-25 combat helicopters.

While additional Russian aid would greater benefit the military’s existing forces in combating the threat in North Sinai, and, despite its renewed co-operation with Egypt over security in the Sinai, Israel has still shown a wariness at the idea. Faced with the prospect of having its qualitative military edge degraded by a transfer of weapons from Russia, Israel urged the Obama administration not to cancel the sale of 10 Apache helicopters to Egypt.

On April 22 the US government agreed to let the sale go through, with American officials making clear that they view instability in the Sinai as a threat to the US, to its partner Egypt and to its ally Israel. According to Pentagon spokesman Rear Adm. John Kirby, “This is one element of the president’s broader efforts to work with partners across the region to build their capacity to counter terrorist threats, and is the United States’ national security interest.” A day later, State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki echoed the same sentiment: “[T]hese new helicopters will help the Egyptian Government counter extremists who threaten not just Egypt, but Israeli security as well as the United States.” The same day, US Secretary of State John Kerry hosted a meeting lasting several hours with the head of Egyptian intelligence.

To conclude, the military campaign in the Sinai has several failings. Firstly, due to a lack of trust and communication between Bedouin tribes and the Egyptian government, the military’s key sources of information and intelligence on the ground are likely to have largely disintegrated, thereby limiting its ability to curb the terrorist threat in North Sinai. While the rate of militant deaths has reportedly increased alongside the apparent decline in recent attacks, the terrorist threat in the Sinai is expanding and diversifying.

**BEDOUIN–JIHADIST TIES**

The government’s deteriorating relationship with the Sinai’s Bedouin tribal leaders is severely undermining its attempt to re-establish stability in the peninsula. Bedouins make up around three-quarters of the Sinai’s population, with their tribal system controlling the vast majority of the peninsula’s land and smuggling networks. Yet, the Bedouins are showing an increasing reluctance to help the government, and, in many cases, have chosen to join rather than help fight militant groups.

The Sinai Bedouins – just 10% of whom are formally employed – have long been neglected and...
discriminated against by the Egyptian government. Among their grievances are their systematic exclusion from police academies and the military, and the absence of basic public services in their towns and villages. When, in 1967, Israel took control of the Sinai, in the Six-Day War, many Bedouins saw economic opportunity. Israeli tourism entrepreneurs built the resort towns of Sharm el-Sheikh; Taba; Nuweiba; and Dahab, and many Bedouins learned Hebrew and found work in the new hotels.

In 1982, three years after the Egypt–Israel peace treaty, the peninsula returned to Egypt. For the Bedouins, the return to Egyptian sovereignty brought an attendant increase in government repression, as they were branded a “fifth column” for having worked with Israel. The regional government took control of the appointments of tribal chiefs; further strictures were imposed against Bedouins working with the army or security forces; and Bedouins were barred from employment with the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) international peacekeeping force. The perception that some Bedouins “yearned for the days of Israeli occupation” built a mutual distrust, between the Bedouins and the Egyptian government, which remains today.

Following the 2011 revolution, the Egyptian government turned to powerful Sinai Bedouin tribal leaders for help confronting the rise of Salafi militancy in the peninsula. Many agreed, hoping for a new period of prosperity post-Mubarak. Tribal leaders provided Egypt’s then-ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) – and, later, the Muslim Brotherhood government – the local intelligence needed to crack down on terrorism, and the army approached Bedouin leaders to help mediate crises involving militant groups. The seven soldiers kidnapped in May 2013, for example, were released unharmed only due to Bedouin mediation with the kidnappers. Under the rule of the SCAF, the Brotherhood; and the current interim government, tribes have been contracted by the government and by state-owned companies to provide security for industrial sites and pipelines throughout the peninsula.

However, despite enhanced co-operation from the Bedouins, the government failed to deliver on its promises: ‘the development never came […] the justice never came’, according to the Sinai-based journalist, Mohannad Sabry. The Egyptian military took a heavy-handed approach to its crackdown on violence in the peninsula, failing to differentiate between militants; criminals; and law-abiding citizens, resulting in Bedouins being caught in the crossfire in military raids. As a result, the Bedouins have shown increasing reluctance to turn in their neighbours to the authorities.

In addition, Salafi-jihadist groups are making it increasingly difficult for the Bedouins to help the military restore order. On 4 October 2013, the group


153 Ibid.

154 Author interview with Mohannad Sabry, 27 August 2013.


161 Author interview with Mohannad Sabry, 27 August 2013.

162 Ibid.


164 Author interview with Mohannad Sabry, 27 August 2013.
al-Salafiyya al-Jihadiyya released a statement threatening those caught providing ‘information and spies’ to the security forces: anyone ‘who participate[s] in their sinful campaigns against the villages, and works as a guide for them...is merely an apostate and deserves to be killed by us’. The state’s failure to address Bedouin grievances, combined with the rise of Salafi power in the Sinai, has left the Bedouins ‘squeezed between terrorism and those fighting it’, according to writer and activist Mosaad Abu Fajr. By late 2013, only a few Bedouin tribal leaders were still co-operating with the military.

This dynamic is manifesting itself in not only a lack of co-operation with Egypt’s military, but also an apparent thawing in relations between militants and the Bedouins. Salafi-jihadist groups in the Sinai have recently listed Bedouin-specific grievances alongside more typically Islamist demands (such as the abolition of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and the introduction of sharia law). For example, in July 2011, a group calling itself al-Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula (AQSP) circulated pamphlets denouncing discrimination against the Sinai Bedouins. Salafi groups that emerged following the 2011 revolution have been active in recruiting Bedouin youth, who, in turn, have abandoned their tribal loyalties and lifestyles in favour of Islamism. This increasing overlap between the two cultures has begun to tip the balance of power and authority away from the Bedouin elders, towards Salafi group leaders.

For example, Shady al-Menaei – thought to be the best known field commander of militant group Answer Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM) – belongs to the Menaei clan of Sinai’s large Sawarka tribe.

Meanwhile, the traditional Bedouin legal code (known locally as ‘urf) is being superseded by a more explicitly Islamic form of justice. Bedouin justice is seen as expensive and prone to corruption, while at the same time, many Bedouins resent the infiltration of the police and intelligence services in their daily lives. As a result, many see themselves as having no choice but to embrace the ‘Islamisation’ of Sinai justice.

The Sinai Bedouins appear to have been pulled in opposite directions: from the military on one side, and armed groups on the other. Both forces have successfully recruited Bedouins – who, despite their marginalisation, remain the largest and most influential force in the peninsula – to their side. Still, the government’s failure to address the Bedouins’ grievances has created long-term threats to Sinai’s security. Mutual resentment and the breakdown in co-operation between the Egyptian government and the Bedouins have led to a weakened military-intelligence network, which has, in turn, prevented the Egyptian military from reasserting control. Until the government addresses the peninsula’s instability with not just military action but development, terror in the Sinai will only strike deeper roots.

The Threat to Israel

After Egypt, no country is more concerned by the security breakdown in the Sinai than Israel. Since 2011, Israel has come under attack from Sinai-based militants on numerous occasions, resulting in the deaths of over a dozen soldiers and civilians and injuring scores more. Groups such as the Gaza-based Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem (MSC) have described their attacks against Jews as a religious obligation from God to attack the “unbelievers.” Where once Israeli tourists flocked to Sinai’s beaches, Israeli authorities now warn...
their citizens from travelling there. The 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty placed strict controls over Egypt’s military presence in the region, prohibiting the Egyptians from deploying troops in the roughly two-thirds of the peninsula closest to Israel and limiting the number of police and security forces in the rest. The treaty essentially codified the peninsula’s status as a buffer zone, as it has been for most of modern history. Indeed, the British first drew the eastern border of Egypt, in 1906, with the primary objective of distancing the Ottoman Empire from the Suez Canal.176

In the three decades since, Israel has come to expect relative tranquility from its long border with Egypt: removing its Border Police from the Sinai in 2007,177 as well as leaving the IDF troops stationed there with antiquated equipment.178 In 2010, Israel began to build an electrified, computerised border fence along the entire length of its frontier with Egypt. Israel’s motive, however, had little to do with Sinai insurgents and far more to do with the flow of tens of thousands of Africans to the country seeking jobs and security.179

The fence was completed in 2013 and, as a result, illegal African migration to Israel has stopped almost completely.180 For the Israelis, it has been a welcome unintended consequence that the fence has also helped contain the Sinai insurgency from spilling over into the country. That containment, however, has not been total. The pipeline bringing Egyptian natural gas to Israel, for example, has been sabotaged at least a dozen times since the 2011 Egyptian revolution.181 Still, Israel’s own newly tapped natural-gas resources mean that it can compensate for its lost Egyptian fuel.

In February 2014, it signed a gas-export deal with Jordan,182 and may begin exporting gas to Egypt as well.183 The fact that Egyptian security forces have reportedly discovered Hamas arms warehouses, workshops, and rocket-firing ranges in the Sinai has likely only added to Israeli concerns.184 On several occasions, Israel has also come under direct attack from Sinai-based jihadists, the most devastating of which saw a triple-pronged attack on 18 August 2011, waged by nine Gazan and three Egyptian militants operating from the Sinai. First, the assailants opened fire at an Israeli civilian bus near Eilat, injuring several soldiers; another militant blew himself up next to a second bus that had stopped, killing himself and the driver; a third militant opened fire at a civilian car, killing the female driver. Minutes later, a bomb was detonated near an Israeli Army patrol close to the border; and, shortly thereafter, the assailants fired an anti-tank missile at a private car, killing all four family members inside. In all, the string of attacks lasted several hours and took the lives of six Israeli civilians; one police sniper; and one soldier. Some 40 Israelis were wounded. Israeli forces gave chase after the perpetrators, entering Egyptian territory and accidentally killing five Egyptian troops in addition to the 10 militants (the gunmen had worn brown uniforms similar to the Egyptian Army’s).185

The ensuing uproar in Egypt led to diplomatic fallout between the two countries: crowds stormed the Israeli embassy in Cairo on 9 September 2011,186 forcing a US-mediated187 evacuation of the entire embassy staff (the deputy ambassador remained in Cairo, but...
worked out of the US embassy). Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM) claimed responsibility; but, Israel pinned the blame on the Popular Resistance Committees, an armed group based in Gaza.188 190

On 18 June 2012, militants (thought to belong to the MSC due to the group having claimed of responsibility) detonated an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) near Israeli civilians repairing the border fence, killing an Arab father of four from Haifa and wounding two other workers.191 192 193 Then, on 5 August 2012, up to two dozen militants194 stormed an Egyptian military post near the border with Gaza and Israel, killing 16 soldiers. Stealing two armoured cars, they broke through the Israeli border, to which the Israeli air force responded with an airstrike, killing all of the attackers.195 While no Israelis were wounded, Israel’s then-defence minister, Ehud Barak, said that the incident should serve as a “wake-up call” to Egypt in confronting its terror problem in the Sinai.196

Just a month later, however, an Israeli soldier was killed and another wounded when gunmen opened fire on a group of troops securing civilians working on the border fence near the Nitzana crossing. ABM once again claimed responsibility, declaring it an attempt to “punish the Jews for their heinous crimes” and a response to the anti-Islamic film, Innocence of Muslims.197 In response, in August 2013, Israeli authorities took the unprecedented step of temporarily closing Eilat airport.198 The closure came in response to Israeli intelligence alerts of an imminent attack, with rockets or rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) procured from post-Gaddafi Libya, targeting a civilian aircraft.199

Indeed, rocket and missile attacks have also been a regular threat to southern Israel. In mid-November 2012, at least 14 missiles were fired at the Jewish state, with responsibility claimed by the MSC. The MSC also claimed March; April; and August 2013 attacks on the western Negev, as well as a 20 January 2014 rocket on Eilat that was intercepted by the Iron Dome system. After the last of these attacks, it issued this statement: ‘Jews must understand that our war with the enemy inside [the Egyptian state] will not make us forget the prime enemy of the [Muslim] nation, who occupies the land and defiles the sacred places’.200

In light of the deteriorating security in the Sinai, Israel has at least twice allowed Egypt to significantly expand its security presence there. In August 2011, Egypt deployed 2,500 troops and 250 armoured personnel carriers in key spots in the Sinai – the first significant introduction of troops and heavy equipment since 1967.201 A year later came the second major force – this time involving Apache helicopters – after the border attack that killed the Arab-Israeli civilian.202 203

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In all, over the past three years, Israel has approved at least two dozen specific Egyptian requests for a greater military presence in the Sinai, and Israeli–Egyptian military co-operation has never been closer. A salient example came in August 2013, when Egypt allowed Israel to conduct a drone strike over the Sinai – killing five militants preparing to launch rockets – the first planned Israeli military operation in the peninsula in three decades.204 Author interviews with high-level IDF officers confirm that military-to-military co-operation between Israel and Egypt are at record levels of co-operation, as both sides understand the imperative of ensuring order in their shared buffer of the Sinai.205

Still, Israeli officials have also urged caution, warning that, in some instances, Egypt has increased its military presence even without prior co-ordination with Israel. The introduction of tanks, in contravention of the peace treaty, has been of particular concern. In the words of Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman: ‘We must make sure that every detail is upheld, otherwise we’ll find ourselves [on] a slippery slope as far as the peace treaty is concerned.’206 In 2012, with the help of American mediation, the Israelis made these concerns known,207 and Arabic media reported that al-Sisi, the Egyptian defence minister, had called his Israeli counterpart to assure him that the peace treaty would remain respected. At the same time, then-president Morsi issued similar assurances that international treaties would be honoured, but refrained from mentioning Israel by name.208

It is the threat posed by Sinai-based jihadists, rather than that posed by the Egyptian Army, that is likely to be cause for most concern to Israeli officials. As Middle East analyst Jonathan Spyer wrote in The Jerusalem Post, Israel now faces ‘the prospect of two de facto al-Qaida-controlled areas adjoining its border—one in southern Syria, and the other in the Salafi playground that is now northern Sinai.’209


The authors have documented all reported attacks from 2010 to March 2014 in a proprietary database, in order to analyse trends in the nature and scope of attacks. The database includes all reported attacks believed to have been carried out by Salafi-jihadist groups active in the Sinai – either in the peninsula itself, in mainland Egypt, or in Israel.

**Rate of militant attacks**

The 2011 revolution brought a steady rise in the number of militant attacks, with several larger spikes in February 2011 (7) and between July and August (4 and 6 attacks respectively). July 2013 – the month of President Mohamed Morsi’s ousting – saw the largest rise in attacks to date, from 7 reported in June to fifteen times as many (112) the following month. Following the July 2013 peak, the level of attacks steadily decreased, dropping to 8 in December of that year. However, the first three months of 2014 have shown a higher number of attacks (41) than the three months leading up to July 2013 (16) – showing a significantly higher threat than before Morsi’s removal. For example, the number of attacks in January 2014 (24) was seven times that of the same month a year before (3).

**Types of militant attacks**

Militant groups in the Sinai have adopted increasingly co-ordinated and sophisticated methods of attack (one such example was the bombing of the Daqahlia Security Directorate in Mansoura, on 24 December 2013, which killed 16 people). In 2013, shootings

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210 While all known attacks from open sources have been included, there are likely to be additional attacks that have not been included, either due to failing to fit the report’s criteria or not having been reported in open, non-private sources.


Terror in the Sinai

Figure 2: Types of militant attacks, 2011-2014

were the most common type of attack, making up half 50% (134) of the 270 attacks overall, and just under three times higher than the number of bombings (49) that year. July 2013 alone saw 65 shootings, making up 58% of all 112 attacks conducted that month.

The year 2014, however, has seen a reversal of that trend, moving instead towards more al-Qaeda-style bomb attacks. In December 2013, the six bomb attacks (including explosions; IEDs; VBIEDs and suicide attacks) overtook the two shootings and, in January 2014, bombings made up 58% (14) of all attacks, whilst shootings stood at 21% (5). In February 2014, bombings (8) made up 80% of all attacks in that month, while there were no shootings at all.

Location of militant attacks

The majority of attacks from January 2010 to March 2014 have taken place in North Sinai (329), making up 79% of the total (414). However, in addition to waging more sophisticated attacks, armed groups have also broadened the geographic spread of their operations. In 2011 the vast majority (94%) of the 31 attacks took place in the Sinai (29), with most of those being in North Sinai (26 attacks, 84% of all attacks).

Following Morsi’s dismissal in July 2013, however, the number of attacks outside the Sinai began to increase, spiking in early 2014. Overall, while attacks in North Sinai made up 84% of all attacks in 2011, they only made up 54% of all attacks in 2014 (January-March).

In 2014, attacks by Sinai militant groups are increasingly likely to target locations in mainland Egypt and Israel rather than in North Sinai itself. In fact, although Cairo saw only 2% (6) of all attacks (270) in 2013, the Egyptian capital was targeted in 20% (8) of the 41 attacks so far in 2014 (January-March).

From late 2013, militant groups have shown a marked difference in strategy, from relatively small-scale
attacks on security forces in North Sinai to more co-ordinated, elaborate and well-planned attacks. The fact that Sinai militants now favour al-Qaeda (AQ)-style bomb attacks (including car bombs and suicide attacks) in larger towns and cities throughout Egypt presages still more sophisticated and far-reaching attacks in the future.

THE THREAT TO THE EGYPTIAN STATE

Following the ousting of President Mohamed Morsi in July 2013, the rhetoric and strategy of Sinai militant groups has become increasingly political, aimed at undermining the new military-led interim government and their supporters.

Armed groups have targeted the state at the highest level. In August 2013, several terror cells allegedly travelled from North Sinai to Cairo in an assassination plot against then-military leader Gen. Fattah al-Sisi; Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim and ex-presidential candidate Mohamed ElBaradei – the three key players behind Morsi’s political downfall.\footnote{Al-Salafiyya Al-Jihadiyya in Sinai Call for War Against the “Apostate” Egyptian Army, Police’, SITE Monitoring Service, 13 January 2014, available at: https://news.siteringroup.com/index.php/19-jihadist-news/3426-al-salafiyaa-al-jihadiyya-in-sinai-call-for-war-against-the-apostate-egyptian-army-police.}

Jihadist groups have portrayed the interim government as waging a war on Islam. From late 2013, their statements have increasingly called for violent jihad against the supposed oppressors of the faith – including the “apostate” army and political leaders.\footnote{‘Muslim Brotherhood financing attacks: Egypt minister’, AFP, 24 November 2013, available at: http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/muslim-brotherhood-financing-attacks-egypt-minister.} Groups have also played on anti-government grievances among Sinai Bedouin tribes while attempting to recruit Bedouin youths (see “Bedouin-Jihadist Ties”).

The interim government has been forthright in blaming the rise in terrorism against the Muslim Brotherhood. In November 2013, Interior Minister Ibrahim said the Brotherhood ‘supports and massively finances from abroad numerous radical terrorists in several groups.’\footnote{Ibid.} A month later, the government declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organisation.\footnote{Ibid.}

For their part, hard-line Egyptian Islamists have explicitly threatened to conduct acts of violence in response to Morsi’s removal. Egyptian Islamist Mohamed al-Zawahiri (the al-Qaeda leader’s brother), for example allegedly warned that, if the deposed president were not returned to power, the

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|}
\hline
Year & No. attacks in North Sinai / Total attacks & Percentage \\
\hline
2011 & 26/31 & 84\% \\
2012 & 45/68 & 66\% \\
2013 & 236/270 & 87\% \\
2014 & 22/41 & 54\% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Percentage of attacks conducted in North Sinai, 2011-2014\footnote{HJS Database, The Henry Jackson Society, 2014.}}
\end{table}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|}
\hline
Year & No. attacks in Cairo / Total attacks & Percentage \\
\hline
2011 & 0/31 & 0\% \\
2012 & 0/68 & 0\% \\
2013 & 6/270 & 2\% \\
2014 & 8/41 & 20\% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Percentage of attacks conducted in Cairo, 2011-2014\footnote{Ibid.}}
\end{table}
Figure 3: Month-by-month breakdown of intended targets, 2011-2014

A AQ-affiliated group, al-Salafiyya al-Jihadiyya, would take up arms against Egyptian authorities.\(^{221}\)

The shift in militant attacks against the Egyptian state has not been contained to just political, military, police, and security personnel; rather, militant groups have made a conscious decision to attack the state through its economy. In September 2013, the al-Furqan Brigades issued a statement claiming responsibility for attacks on the Suez Canal and warned that they would launch future attacks against the canal,\(^{222}\) as ‘it is the lifeblood of trade for the states of infidelity and oppression’.\(^{223}\) ABM, who claimed responsibility for the attack on a tourist bus on 16 February 2014, warned that it would ‘target [Egypt’s] economic interests everywhere, to cripple them and their actions against the Muslim people.’\(^{224}\) ‘The attack was yet another blow to Egypt’s flagging tourism industry, which has suffered from the political unrest roiling the country since 2011.\(^{225}\) Furthermore, the repeated attacks on the natural-gas pipeline to Jordan and Israel have cost the Egyptian economy more than LE 1 billion (approximately $166 million).\(^{226}\)

From July 2013 onwards, groups have increasingly threatened to attack anyone perceived to support; work with; or belong to the government.\(^{227}\) For example, in December 2013, ABM released a statement warning the Egyptian police and military to abandon their posts and stop working for the government, ‘to preserve their religion and lives’.\(^{228}\)

As Figure 3 indicates, not only did the rate of attacks significantly increase following Morsi’s removal from power, but so did the proportion of attacks against the state: the government; the military, police and security forces.\(^{229}\) In July 2013, attacks most commonly targeted security forces, making up 29% of attacks that month (33 out of 112). However, the political unrest roiling the country since 2011, 31% of August’s (15 out of 49). In September, the military was the leading target at 49% of that month’s attacks (19 out of 39), and remained such throughout the rest of 2013. Overall, of the total 270 attacks that took place in 2013, 79% (212) targeted the police, military, government and security forces.

Furthermore, while attacks against the police have been most common thus far in 2014 (January-March), accounting for 32% of the total (13), attacks against the military reached 40% (4 of 10) in February, showing a significant increase from the previous month.

Following the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo and militants in the Sinai – the militant threat from the Sinai has rapidly evolved, from small-scale attacks on police and security forces in North Sinai to targeting top military officials; government buildings; infrastructure in Cairo and the Nile Delta. In its attempt to restore security in Egypt and the Sinai, the Egyptian state has paid a high price, as the military (alongside the police) continues to be the leading target among militant groups. Should al-Sisi win presidential elections in May, he, the government and the military are likely to face a still-greater threat.
3. Militant Groups Operating in the Sinai

The origin and activities of militant Gaza- and Sinai-based groups operating in the peninsula remain the subject of debate, as well as their links to al-Qaeda (AQ) franchises. Egyptian authorities have attempted to downplay foreign penetration into the peninsula:

For example, Maj. Gen. Ahmed Bakr, the former head of North Sinai police, insists there ‘is no evidence of highly organised groups in Sinai regardless of such statements released on the net’. An increasing body of evidence, however, suggests the contrary.

BREAKDOWN: SALAFI-JIHADIST MILITANT GROUPS LINKED TO THE SINAI, 2010-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group name</th>
<th>Reported leadership/prominent member(s)</th>
<th>Most common attack type(s)</th>
<th>Most common target type(s)</th>
<th>Most common attack location(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis [Ansar Jerusalem] [ABM]</td>
<td>Ibrahim Aweida [deceased]; Mohamed Ibrahim Freg [deceased]; Shadi al-Menaei; Kamal Allam</td>
<td>Bombings</td>
<td>Military; Security forces; Israel</td>
<td>North Sinai; South Sinai; Cairo; Eilat, Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tawhid Wal-Jihad in the Sinai Peninsula</td>
<td>Ahmed Hamdan Harb Malki [deceased]; Khalid Massaad Salem; Hisham al-Saeedi [deceased]; Abu Munir [deceased]</td>
<td>Shootings</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>North Sinai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula [AQSP] and Ansar al-Jihad</td>
<td>Ramzi Mahmoud al-Mowafi</td>
<td>Bombings</td>
<td>Pipelines</td>
<td>North Sinai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhammad Jamal Network [MJN]</td>
<td>Muhammad Jamal</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajnad Misr</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Bombings</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>Cairo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army of Islam [Jaysh al-Islam]</td>
<td>Muntaz Dughmush</td>
<td>Bombings; Ambush</td>
<td>Religious targets; Security forces</td>
<td>North Sinai; Alexandria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most operationally active and deadliest militant group in the Sinai is Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM, a.k.a. Ansar Jerusalem). Although a clear majority of attacks (87%) go unclaimed, the group has taken ownership of 62% of all attacks for which responsibility has been claimed or attributed. ABM is also more likely than any other group to launch bomb attacks, and to target the military.


GROUP PROFILES

ANSAR BAYT AL-MAQDIS (ABM)

Aliases: Ansar Jerusalem; Jihadi Jerusalem; Supporters of the Holy Places; Supporters of Jerusalem; Champions of Jerusalem

Reported leadership/prominent members:
Ibrahim Aweida (deceased); Ibrahim Mohamed Freg (deceased); Shadi al-Menaei, ‘leading member’; ‘leader of operations since 2011’; Kamal Allam, ‘leading member’

Known/reported links: Unspecified links to al-Qaeda (AQ) and to Ahmed Salama Mabrouk, leader of Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ); possible links with Hisham al-Saeedi (a.k.a. Abu al-Walid al-Maqdisi), the slain leader of Tawhid Wal-Jihad and the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem (MSC); ‘strong ties’ to Tawhid Wal-Jihad

Attributed attacks:
5 February 2011: Attack on natural-gas pipeline in the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt

18 August 2011: Attack on a bus in Eilat, Israel, 8 Israeli civilians and 3 Egyptian security personnel reported killed
21 September 2012: Attack from the Sinai on IDF soldiers in Israel, 1 soldier reported killed
5 September 2013: Assassination attempt on Egyptian Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim
7 October 2013: Suicide attack on South Sinai Security Directorate in el-Tor, 3 reported killed
19 October 2013: Car bomb at military intelligence building in Ismailia, 6 soldiers wounded
20 November 2013: Shooting assassination of police Lt. Col. Mohamed Mabrouk, Nasr City, Cairo, Egypt
24 December 2013: Car-bomb attack against police station in Mansoura, Egypt, 12 reported killed, including 8 police officers
17 January 2014: Attack on natural-gas pipeline in the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt
20 January 2014: Two Grad rockets fired at Eilat, Israel
23 January 2014: Attack on police checkpoint in Beni Suef, Egypt (south of Cairo)
Recent estimates have put ABM’s total number of fighters at 1,000.258 The group’s leading members, Shady al-Menaei and Kamal Allam, are reportedly based in Al Mahdeyya, a village in south Rafah, North Sinai.259 Al-Menaei, who is both a Salafi and a prominent member of the Menaei clan of the Sinai’s Sawarka tribe, is thought to be the group’s best known field commander, and is said to have been running operations from Rafah since 2011. As a result of their presence there, the group is thought to have strong ties to militant group Tawhid Wal-Jihad, also thought to be based in south Rafah.260

ABM’s largest cross-border attack occurred on 18 August 2011, when 12 gunmen infiltrated the Israeli border and opened fire on an Israeli bus near Eilat. Minutes later, assailants detonated a bomb near an Israeli army patrol, and fired an anti-tank missile at a private car. Eight Israelis – six civilians, a police sniper, and a soldier – were killed and dozens wounded. Israeli forces followed the perpetrators back into the Sinai, and five Egyptian troops were killed in subsequent Israeli airstrikes.261

In September 2013, the group conducted a failed assassination attempt against Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim and bombed a police compound in the Nile Delta city of Mansoura, killing 16.262 In February 2014, the group bombed a tourist bus in Taba, at the border crossing with Israel. Three Egyptian tourists and their Egyptian driver were killed in the first attack against tourists in the Sinai since 2005.263

AMB’s own statements proclaim that it seeks ‘to liberate our Ummah and Muslim people from the slavery of the oppressive, apostate regimes, and establish justice, dignity and freedom for them, and that is only through servitude to Allah alone and implementing His proper Shariah … an army of Muslims that helps the Ummah and the religion is the way to liberate Jerusalem and the rest of Muslim lands

Notes:

Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM) is a Salafi-jihadist group operating in North Sinai and the Gaza Strip, and is responsible for more militant attacks than any other armed group in the peninsula. Since late 2013, the group has expanded its targets, striking locations in mainland Egypt including Cairo and Mansoura.

Recent estimates have put ABM’s total number of fighters (with ‘high strategic and technological capacity’) as high as 1,000.258 The group’s leading members, Shady al-Menaei and Kamal Allam, are reportedly based in Al Mahdeyya, a village in south Rafah, North Sinai.259 Al-Menaei, who is both a


258 Ibid.

255 ‘Another interview with Islamist Judge Hamdin Abu Faisal in September 2011, 2012 and 2013 (all spoke on condition of anonymity), and another interview with Islamist Judge Hamdin Abu Faisal in September 2013. Shady has also been identified by military and security sources numerous times before, and claimed to have been successfully targeted several times (although each time he has not been among the dead), the most recent being three days ago.


252 Interviews with several of Shady al-Menaei’s relatives from the Menaei clan in 2011, 2012 and 2013 (all spoke on condition of anonymity), and another interview with Islamist Judge Hamdin Abu Faisal in September 2013. Shady has also been identified by military and security sources numerous times before, and claimed to have been successfully targeted several times (although each time he has not been among the dead), the most recent being three days ago.


34
and live in freedom, dignity and honour under the shade of the Shariah of the Lord of the Worlds.264

While the extent of communication between ABM and al-Qaeda (if any) is unclear, ABM has received the implicit blessing of AQ leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, who also played footage of an ABM-held funeral in a January 2014 taped message.265

On 24 January 2014, ABM claimed responsibility for a string of bombing attacks on the Cairo security directorate building that killed six people.266 On 11 March 2014, Egyptian forces operating in Cairo killed ABM commander Mohamed el-Sayed Mansour (also known as Abu Obaida). Egyptian authorities suspect el-Toukhy of being responsible for one of the 24 January bombings – at a security compound in Cairo, killing four people. The fact that the militant was killed in Cairo – over an attack that also occurred in the Egyptian capital – underscores the spread of Sinai-based terrorism beyond the peninsula.267

On April 9, 2014, less than two months after ABM’s deadly bus attack on the Korean tourists, the US State Department added the group to its list of Foreign Terrorist Organisations.268 Less than a week later, an Egyptian court followed suit and added the group to the country’s terror list.269

The ABM has shown recent signs of operational expansion into the mainland Egypt. On 23 April 2014, Egyptian security forces raided what they described as an ABM hideout southwest of Alexandria. One policeman and one militant were killed in the raid, the Interior Ministry said, adding that the ABM cell was planning to target police, military and security forces.270

TAWHID WAL-JIHAD IN THE SINAI PENINSULA


Reported leadership/prominent members: Ahmed Hamdan Harb Malki (a.k.a. Abu Mariam), military commander (deceased);273 Khaled Massaad Salem, founder;274 Hisham al-Saedni (a.k.a. Abu al-Walid al-Maqdisi), founder (deceased); Abu Munir, military commander (deceased)275

Known/reported links: Al-Qaeda (AQ)276

Attributed attacks:

- 22 June 2011: Attack on police checkpoint and a Bank of Alexandria branch in el-Arish, 2 reported killed;277 278
- 29/30 July 2011: Attack on police station in el-Arish, North Sinai, 5/6 reported killed.279


271 The Gazan-based Salafist jihadi network Tawhid wal-Jihad carried out the terrorist attack on the Israeli-Egyptian border on June 18, 2012, in which an Israeli civilian was killed. The attack emphasized the threat to Israel from the Sinai Peninsula and Egypt’s difficulty in governing the region, The Marc A. Elrich Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (August 2012), available at: http://www.terrorisminfo.org/ Data/articles/Art_20381/E_155_12_582238727.pdf.


276 Ibid.


AL-QAEDA IN THE SINAI PENINSULA (AQSP) (& ANSAR AL-JIHAD)

Aliases: Unspecified

Reported leadership/prominent members: Ramzi Mahmoud al-Mowaf 287 (a.k.a. ‘The Chemist’)288

Known/reported links: Al-Mowafi, the group’s reported leader, is thought to have contacted militants from the Gaza-based group Army of Islam.289

Attributed attacks:

- 29 July 2011: Attack on police station in el-Arish: 6 reported killed290 (claimed by al-Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula [AQSP])

Notes:

A group calling itself ‘Al-Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula’ (AQSP) is one of the more recent Salafi-jihadist groups thought to have established a base in the Sinai. Debate continues as to its size and composition, as well as its links to official al-Qaeda (AQ) franchises. Ansar al-Jihad – thought to be AQSP’s so-called “military wing” – announced its formation in late 2011, pledging its allegiance to Osama bin Laden.291

AQSP is believed to be led by the Egyptian Ramzi al-Mowafi.292 In the 1990s, al-Mowafi travelled to Afghanistan; Saudi Arabia; and Pakistan, to render services to AQ, eventually becoming bin Laden’s personal doctor and AQ’s chief chemical-weapons producer.293 More recently, he escaped from an

NOTES:

Tawhid Wal-Jihad is a militant group operating in North Sinai, although it reportedly has its roots in a Gaza-based group by the same name. The Sinai branch was founded in early 2000 by Khaled Massaad Salem, a Bedouin dentist, in el-Arish, and became operationally active in North Sinai around 2003.282 283 The group is also believed to have a presence in south Rafah, North Sinai, with ties to Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM), whose leaders are also thought to be based there.284

Tawhid Wal-Jihad has been described as ‘among the most active militant groups in Sinai’.285 The group was responsible for an October 2004 bomb attack in Taba (near the Israeli border), as well as blasts in July 2005 in Sharm el-Sheikh and in April 2006 in Dahab – all of them resorts in South Sinai popular with foreign tourists.286

The founder of the group, Hisham al-Saedni (assassinated by Israel in October 2012), is believed to have fought alongside al-Qaeda in Iraq.287 The name “Tawhid Wal-Jihad” is also sometimes used by various unaffiliated Bedouin gunmen and groups when claiming responsibility for an attack.288


287 Ibid.

288 Ibid.


Egyptian prison, following the 2011 revolution, before reportedly fleeing to the Sinai.\textsuperscript{294}

Al-Mowafi was reportedly spotted in el-Arish later in 2011, where he is claimed to have made contact with the armed group Army of Islam (a.k.a. Jaysh al-Islam).\textsuperscript{295} He is said to have orchestrated a number of attacks,\textsuperscript{296} and to have provided military training to around 40 operatives – some as young as 15.\textsuperscript{297}

AQSP has only once claimed responsibility for a militant attack: a 29 July 2011 shooting, at a police station in el-Arish, which killed 6 police officers.\textsuperscript{298} For its part, Ansar al-Jihad has claimed numerous pipeline attacks – one credible report linked the group to as many as 11 such attacks in a single year.\textsuperscript{299}

\textbf{MUHAMMAD JAMAL NETWORK (MJN)}

\textbf{Aliases:} Jamal Network;\textsuperscript{300} Muhamed Jamal Abu Ahmed Group\textsuperscript{301}

\textbf{Reported leadership/prominent members:} Muhammad Jamal Abd-Al Rahim Ahmad al-Kashif\textsuperscript{302} (a.k.a. Abu Ahmad al-Masri)\textsuperscript{303}

\textbf{Known/reported links:} Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda (AQ);\textsuperscript{304} Nasir 'abd al-Karim, Abdullah al-Wahishi (AQAP); Qasim Yahya Mahdi al-Rimi (AQAP); “Nasr City Cell”;\textsuperscript{305} unspecified leaders, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)\textsuperscript{306}

\textbf{Attributed attacks:} None

\textbf{Notes:}

The Muhammad Jamal Network (MJN) operates in North Sinai – and in training camps in the Gaza Strip, Egypt and in Libya – and is thought to be part of al-Qaeda (AQ)’s international terrorist network. Muhammad Jamal established the network shortly after his escape from an Egyptian prison during the 2011 Egyptian revolution,\textsuperscript{307} he was then re-arrested in November 2012.

Jamal has established links to AQ (namely the group’s emir, Ayman al-Zawahiri) and jihadist networks in Europe, according to a United Nations Security Council committee.\textsuperscript{308} He was a leading member (head of the operational wing) of Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ)\textsuperscript{309} and was the leader of the “Nasr City Cell”, which has been accused of plotting attacks inside Egypt.\textsuperscript{310}

Through Jamal’s links to AQ, MJN has received funding from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and has used the AQAP network to smuggle terrorists into MJN training camps run.\textsuperscript{311} In letters to al-Zawahiri, Jamal admitted to establishing armed groups in the Sinai; to training suicide bombers; and to acquiring weapons. Al-Zawahiri is reported to have given Jamal his blessing to launch terrorist attacks in Libya and Egypt.\textsuperscript{312} Several of the perpetrators of the deadly 2012 assault on the US diplomatic mission in

\begin{itemize}
    \item [\textsuperscript{295}] Ibid.
    \item [\textsuperscript{301}] Ibid.
    \item [\textsuperscript{305}] Ibid.
    \item [\textsuperscript{307}] Ibid.
    \item [\textsuperscript{312}] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Benghazi, Libya, reportedly received terrorist training at Jamal’s camps in Libya.313

Despite Jamal’s re-arrest that year, the group is still considered to be operational, with MJN operatives reportedly conspiring with other groups to undertake a number of militant attacks since.314

**AJNAD MISR**

**Aliases:** Egypt’s Soldiers

**Reported leadership/prominent members:** Unknown

**Known/reported links:** Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM)315

**Attributed attacks:**

- 20 November 2013: Bombing at police checkpoint in Cairo, 4 wounded;316
- 25 November 2013: Improvised Explosive Device (IED) at police checkpoint in Cairo, 2 wounded;317
- 7 January 2014: Grenade attack on police car in Cairo, 1 wounded;318
- 31 January 2014: IED at police checkpoint in Cairo, 2 wounded;319
- 7 February 2014: Bombing at police checkpoint in the Cairo suburb of Giza, 8 wounded;320
- 2 April 2014: Triple bomb attack in Cairo, police brigadier-general reported killed, 5 police officers wounded;321
- 10 April 2014: Bomb attack against traffic policeman in Cairo, 1 police officer wounded;322
- 15 April 2014: Bomb attack in Cairo, 2 police officers, 1 civilian wounded;323
- 18 April 2014: Bombing in central Cairo square, 1 police major reported killed, 3 others wounded;324
- 11 March 2014: Bomb attack on police car near Israeli embassy in Cairo, no casualties;325
- 29 March 2014: Bombing at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, no casualties;326
- 2 April 2014: Triple bombing in Cairo, police brigadier-general reported killed, 5 police officers wounded.327
- 10 April 2014: Bombing in Cairo, 1 police officer wounded;328
- 15 April 2014: Bombing in Cairo, 2 police officers and 1 civilian wounded;329
- 18 April 2014: Bombing in central Cairo square, 1 police major reported killed, 3 others wounded;330

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Ajnad Misr (“Egypt’s Soldiers”) is the most recent militant group to have emerged in Egypt, announcing its existence in January 2014 in a statement condemning “criminal” elements within the Egyptian government. Since the start of the year the group has taken credit for more than a dozen attacks, all of them in Cairo and its vicinity.

Little is known about whether Ajnad Misr is based in the Sinai and/or the Egyptian mainland. In April 2014, however, Egyptian Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim described the group as an offshoot of Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM), and charged that it is run by the Muslim Brotherhood. As Ibrahim - himself the co-founder, member, former head of Tawhid Wal-Jihad (deceased), 

Notes:

Ajnad Misr claimed responsibility for a 2 April 2014 triple bomb attack in Cairo that killed a police brigadier-general and wounded five other police officers. On 17 April, the group released its first-ever video – a 23-minute montage of the government’s anti-Islamist activity – in which it claimed no fewer than eight attacks. A day later, it claimed an 18 April bombing in Cairo’s upscale Mohandessin district that killed a police major, and wounded another high-level police officer and two other individuals. Five days later, it claimed another Cairo bombing which killed a police brigadier general.

MUJAHIDEEN SHURA COUNCIL IN THE ENVIRONS OF JERUSALEM (MSC)

Aliases: Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen Fi Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis (full), Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen (short), Holy Warriors’ Guidance Council

Reported leadership/prominent members: Hisham al-Sa’edi (a.k.a. Abu al-Walid al-Maqdisi), co-founder, member, former head of Tawhid Wal-Jihad (deceased).

Known/reported links: Tawhid Wal-Jihad; Ansar al-Sunna

Attributed attacks:

- 18 June 2012: Cross-border attack on Israel, 1 Israeli civilian reported killed
- 5 August 2012: Cross-border attack on Israel, 16 troops reported killed (attack also attributed to Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen)

339 Ibid.
to Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM), the Army of Islam, and Takfir Wal-Hijra);348

- 14 November 2012: Four Grad rockets fired at western Negev, Israel, no reported casualties;349
- 17 April 2013: Two rocket attacks fired at Eilat, Israel, no reported casualties;350 351
- 13 August 2013: Grad rocket attack on Eilat, Israel, no reported casualties.352 353

Notes:
The Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem (MSC) formed in 2012, paying homage to Osama bin Laden and declaring itself ‘a building block in the global project aiming for the return of the rightly-guided Caliphate and the institution of the pure Shariah.’354 The Ibn Taymiyyah Media Center (ITMC) is the MSC’s official “public-relations” firm.355

The MSC is believed to be an umbrella organisation resulting from the merger of several Gaza-based groups – Ansar al-Sunna and Tawhid Wal-Jihad – operating in the Sinai.356 Today, the MSC is part of an extensive network of armed groups in Gaza and has focused its attacks primarily at Israel.357

The MSC was co-founded by the leaders of Ansar al-Sunna (Ashraf al-Sabah) and Tawhid Wal-Jihad (Hisham al-Saedni), both of whom were killed by Israeli forces in October 2012.358 Its current leadership is unknown.

348 For reports on the attribution of this attack to the Army of Islam and Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM), see their individual profiles.
350 Ibid.
357 Ibid.
358 Ibid.

ARMY OF ISLAM
Aliases: Jaysh al-Islam; Palestinian Islamic Army359
Reported leadership/prominent members: Mumtaz Dughmush360
Known/reported links: Hamas,361 Hizbollah362

Attributed attacks:
- 2006: Kidnapping, in Gaza, of two Fox News journalists, both held for two weeks;364
- 22 February 2009: Attack on a market in Cairo, Egypt, 1 French tourist reported killed;365
- 1 January 2011: Attack on a Coptic church in Alexandria, Egypt, 25 reported killed;366
- 5 August 2012: Cross-border attack near the border with the Gaza Strip and Israel, 16 troops reported killed367 (attack also attributed to Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM), the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem (MSC), and Takfir Wal-Hijra);368
- Numerous occasions: Rocket-fire on Israel.369

Notes:
The Army of Islam (Jaysh al-Islam) is a Gaza-based militant group operating primarily in the Sinai, from

368 For reports on the attribution of this attack to the other three groups listed (excluding Takfir Wal-Hijra), see their individual profiles.
which it launches frequent attacks against the Egyptian Army and Israel. The group – founded in the Gaza Strip by Mumtaz Dughmush, a member of the powerful Dughmush clan – is described by the US State Department as ‘a splinter group of Hamas’.  

The Army of Islam was responsible for the 2006 kidnappings, in the Gaza Strip, of two Fox News journalists who, after a gunpoint conversion to Islam, were released through Hamas mediation. The same year, it abducted IDF Cpl. Gilad Shalit, holding him for five years, and, the following year, took BBC reporter Alan Johnston hostage, holding him for four months. 

The organisation has been linked to the Jordanian extremist leader, Abu Qatada, and has, at times, referred to itself as “al-Qaeda in Palestine.” In 2009, it waged an attack in Cairo’s iconic Khan el-Khalili market, killing a French tourist. The following year, its leader Mohammad Namnam was killed in an Israeli airstrike on Gaza City, after Egyptian authorities tipped off their Israeli counterparts that he was planning an attack on American and Israeli forces in the Sinai. On New Year’s Day 2011, Egyptian authorities implicated the Army of Islam in an attack on a Coptic church that left 23 worshippers dead – the worst attack on Egyptian Christians in a decade.

Israeli intelligence believes that Mumtaz Dughmush runs the majority of terrorist-training camps in the Gaza Strip, providing training lasting several weeks to foreign fighters who then travel to operate from locations including Yemen; Syria; and the Sinai. This flow of trained foreign fighters from Gaza is reportedly due to Hamas allowing Dughmush to continue training on condition that he not threaten internal stability or Hamas rule in the Strip. In mid-2011, the US State Department placed the Army of Islam (and, several months later, Dughmush himself) on its terror blacklist, due to its numerous attacks on Egyptian and Israeli targets.

In a 2005 letter, Army of Islam leaders asked al-Qaeda (AQ) operative Atiyatullah al-Libi whether it was permissible to sell drugs to “the Jews” and their soldiers in an effort to weaken them. The 11-page letter – uncovered by US troops in the 2011 raid in Pakistan that killed Osama bin Laden – is the clearest extant evidence of a link between the Army of Islam and AQ.

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Conclusion

The Sinai insurgency is unlikely go away anytime soon; on the contrary, it should be expected to grow in intensity. Following Morsi’s dismissal, Sinai attacks increased fifteen-fold in just one month and, while the rate of attacks has fallen since late 2013, it has remained far higher than before the Brotherhood’s fall from power. Recent efforts by the Egyptian army to restore order have shown an unprecedented use of force, yet much remains to be done in order to effectively curb the threat.

This report’s data show that the Sinai threat is simultaneously expanding and diversifying, with attacks becoming increasingly sophisticated and wide-reaching. From late last year, militant groups have shown a marked difference in strategy, from waging relatively small-scale attacks on security forces in North Sinai to high-level attacks against military and political targets. Groups have adopted increasingly co-ordinated methods, with al-Qaeda-style bomb attacks overtaking shootings in recent months. Attacks are now more likely than ever to take place beyond North Sinai: throughout mainland Egypt, particularly Cairo and along the Suez Canal.

Meanwhile, militant groups’ ties to global-jihad movements are becoming both more intimate and more complex. There are strong indications that al-Qaeda central, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and potentially al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham have made inroads into the peninsula. It is therefore not inconceivable that, as the Syrian civil war drags on and Hamas tightens its control over the Gaza Strip, the Sinai could become a launch pad for training and dispatching jihadists to Syria. Among the extremist leaders believed to be currently in the Sinai, Ramzi al-Mowafi (Osama bin Laden’s former personal physician) and Muhammad Jamal are among the most dangerous, given their alleged connections to high-level international jihadists.

Western governments and businesses are rightly concerned about the Sinai insurgency’s spill-over effect on the Suez Canal, Egypt’s vital trading route. Yet, the canal is now just one target among many. The Multinational Force and Observers – 700 of whom are American – have come under increasing threat of late, including kidnappings and attacks. Western tourists in southern Sinai holiday resorts such as Sharm al-Sheikh are, despite the private security, also at risk of similar mass-casualty attacks that struck Sinai resorts between 2004 and 2006.

Western policymakers are also understandably concerned about the resilience of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Israel – which appeared to have relaxed its security measures along its Egyptian border during the Mubarak era – now faces an unprecedented threat on its frontier with Egypt. To many al-Qaeda-inspired groups and fighters, the Sinai provides the ideal battleground for waging war against Israel and the West, as well as Egypt’s military.

Tunnel smuggling to and from Gaza continues to destabilise the Sinai, yet Egyptian authorities appear to have acknowledged that Egypt’s national security – not just Israel’s – is undermined by the tunnel industry. And, while Egyptian-Israeli military co-operation seems to be at a high point, Western countries – particularly the US – must facilitate additional co-operation. Israel has world-class intelligence capabilities, but is prevented from placing its intelligence agents on Egyptian ground or even launching surveillance drones. Egyptian authorities have significant on-the-ground presence in the Sinai, yet appear to lack Israel’s knowledge and expertise. For the security of both countries, it is essential that bilateral military and intelligence co-operation continue and expand.

Yet, to tackle its terror problem, Egypt will have to apply measures beyond military action. Bedouins in the Sinai remain the gatekeepers of information on the ground, and are therefore crucial to the government’s efforts to tackle the terror threat. However, the Bedouins’ increasing disillusionment with the government’s longstanding mistreatment of Bedouin
tribes and heavy-handed presence in the peninsula is cutting off the government’s most precious lifelines in the Sinai. The United States, Britain, and other Western allies of Egypt must encourage Cairo to help integrate the Bedouins into Egyptian life.

Priority must therefore be given to Bedouin education and employment programs and to devoting significantly more infrastructure investment to the North and South Sinai governorates. Bedouins must be allowed into the army and security forces, in order to feel that they have a say in the country’s future. They must be allowed to work at the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) – in management, and not just menial, roles – and, while Egyptian forces must be vigilant in rooting out terrorists in the Sinai, there can be no excuse for detaining Bedouins simply because they are Bedouins.

Militant attacks from the peninsula now pose an unparalleled threat to Egypt, Israel and Western interests. The peninsula’s strategic importance means that it demands close, constant attention from Egypt, its neighbours and the international community. As this report has demonstrated, the risks of failing to confront the terror threat in the Sinai could not be greater.
TERROR IN THE SINAI

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