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by

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**Terrorism in the Sinai**

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**Terrorism in the Sinai**

**by**

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**Report**

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## **Dedication**

For my parents, who always loved and supported me, even when they didn't quite understand what I was up to.

## **Acknowledgements**

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This project is the culmination not only of the past three years at UT but also of my career in higher education. In many ways, this project was seven years in the making. I would not have been able to complete this endeavor without the ability to study the Middle East, the opportunity to study Arabic and study abroad, and gain experience in the foreign policy field. I'm grateful to my undergraduate advisor, David Cook, for teaching me as much as he did about the region and to the Katherine Zimmerman at the American Enterprise Institute for giving me the opportunity to use open source intelligence and research terrorism.

Lastly, I would not be here were it not for my friends and family. Thanks to dear friends who have supported me – and most importantly – listened to my rantings on this subject for hours on end. Thanks to my wonderful parents loved and believed in me no matter what. And thanks to my Ben who has supported me throughout the lengthy process of this project and provided me with unlimited cups of coffee.

## **Abstract**

### **Terrorism in the Sinai**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

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This report tracks and analyzes militant activity in the Sinai Peninsula. It focuses on the violence that has occurred since 2011, and particularly on the major increase in violence that has been ongoing since July 2013. The project relies on open source intelligence to identify the reasons for the increase in violence and also determine the nature of the violence – who is carrying out the attacks and why.

On July 3, 2013, the Egyptian military removed the democratically elected President Mohamed Morsi. What followed was an unprecedented increase in violence in the Sinai Peninsula. Since the fall of 2013, the violence has spread from the Sinai Peninsula into the mainland of Egypt. Hundreds of security personnel have been killed or injured since the uptick in the violence. After the coup that removed Morsi, there was a significant shift in the targets of attacks and the tactics used and this shift is indicative of the presence of the global jihadi network in the Sinai. Terrorist groups stopped targeting Israel and turned almost exclusively to Egypt security personnel. There has also been a

major increase in suicide attacks, which indicates that there is a connection between the global jihadi network and Egyptian militant groups.

The military is once again in control of Egypt's government yet they have focused on consolidating political control instead of dealing with Egypt's mounting security problem. The military has consistently insisted that the Muslim Brotherhood is behind the terror and ignored the true cause of the violence. This willful omission has allowed the terrorist groups in the Sinai to flourish and threaten security in mainland Egypt.

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## **Note on Graphics**

All graphics were generated using DecisionGrid analytical software ([www.decisiongrid.com](http://www.decisiongrid.com)), unless otherwise noted. All information contained within the graphics is based on information I collected and inputted into the software. Events, organizations and people were created within the software for analytical purposes.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

On July 3, 2013, as some protestors demanded the removal of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi and others aggressively demonstrated on his behalf, one hopeful jihadi posted on an Internet forum.<sup>1</sup> The anonymous author called on Egyptian Salafists to begin training and collecting weapons for a coming jihad.<sup>2</sup> He recommended that hopeful militants seek refuge in the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>3</sup> The author even hopefully called for the establishment of an Egyptian version of the Syrian al Qaeda affiliate.<sup>4</sup> On the same day, the military forced Morsi out of office and a major terrorist outbreak in the Sinai began.

Between July 2013 and November 2013, there were more than 250 reported violent attacks in the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>5</sup> Although there has been an increase in violence in the Sinai since early 2011, the summer and fall of 2013 represent a major uptick in attacks: between January 25, 2011 and May 2012, security sources only reported 50 violent attacks.<sup>6</sup> The vast majority of these attacks targeted security personnel both at static installations such as checkpoints and police stations.

The military initially blamed terrorists in the Gaza Strip for the attacks. They alleged Palestinian groups are behind the many of the attacks. As the violence progressed, however, they began to blame the Muslim Brotherhood for the violence, claiming that the group's leadership was funding the attacks. The military cracked down

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<sup>1</sup> Richards, "The al Qaeda Network Responds to Egypt," 2013

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Barnett, "Ansar Jerusalem: The war has yet to start," 2013

<sup>6</sup> "Palestinian armed groups, al-Qaeda launched 50 attacks on Sinai police since Mubarak's ouster," 2012.

on the organization and launched an offensive to eliminate the violence in the peninsula. Until recently, security officials publically maintained that the militant problem would be taken care of “very soon.”<sup>7</sup>

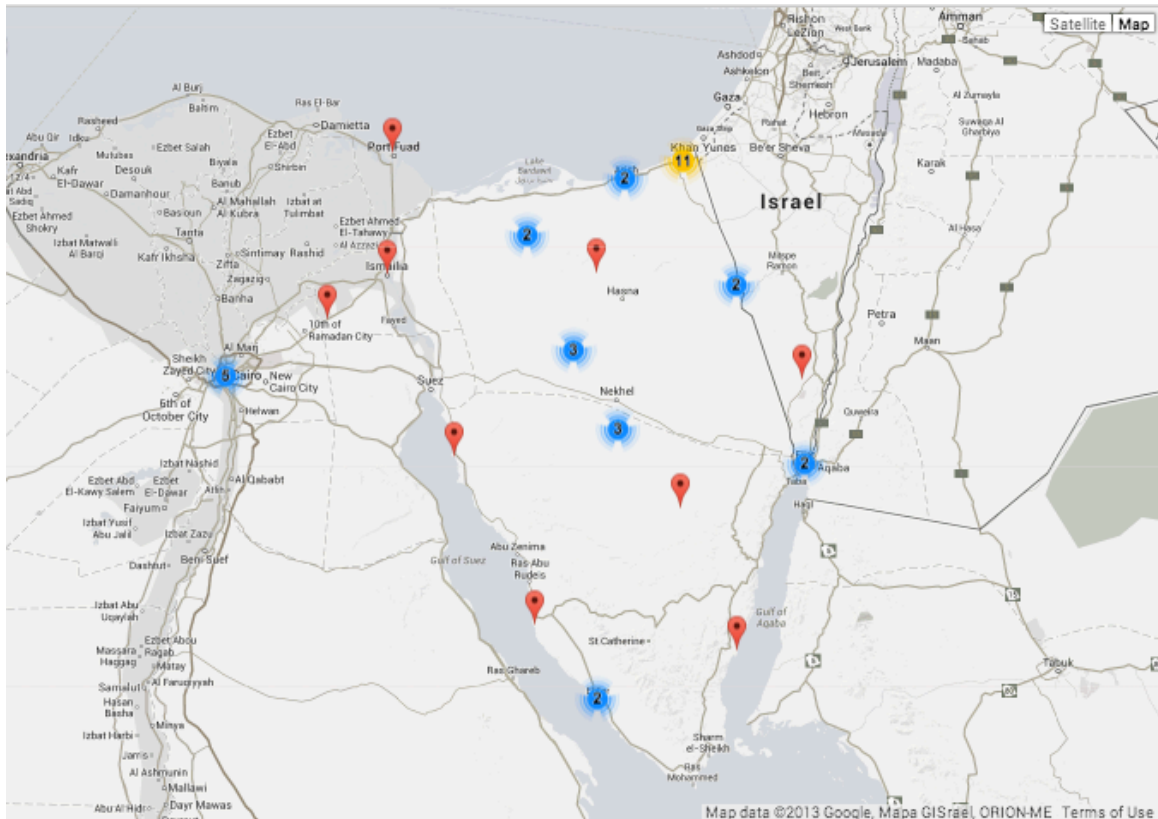


Figure 1: Locations of Major Attacks Since 2011

The attacks, however, have not just increased. There are not simply more of the same type of attacks that occurred between 2011 and the summer of 2013. There has been a shift in tactics and targets. Attacks have become much more complex, requiring more resources, planning, technical knowledge and careful timing. The changes in attacks are indicative of increased organization among the militants of the Sinai but are also signs of

<sup>7</sup> Barnett, “Egypt intel chief: Eradicating Sinai jihadist cells ‘could take some time,’” 2013

increased training and logistical support from an international terrorist network. The al Qaeda network has established a presence within the peninsula and provided support to the local militants. Sinai-based terrorist groups have shown an unprecedented connection to the global al Qaeda network. Understanding the nature of the violence in the Sinai is critical for developing an effective counterterrorism strategy. The Egyptian military is performing counterterrorism operations as though they are fighting a domestic terrorist outbreak and not a manifestation of a global terrorist enterprise.

## Chapter 2: Literature on Terrorism

Egypt has a long history of terrorism and is in many ways the birthplace of the global jihadi movement. Yet despite this, there is very little recent literature on terrorism in Egypt. The ongoing outbreak of terrorism is too recent to have produced much scholarship and in recent decades, terrorist attacks in Egypt have been limited – particularly in comparison to other terrorist “hotspots” like Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. It is, however, useful to explore more general theories of terrorism and apply them to the most recent Egyptian case of terrorism in the Sinai.

### DEFINING TERRORISM

Scholars have proposed a number of competing definitions of terrorism. Defining terrorism is often a politically charged exercise. Although there are a number of differing definitions, there is a consensus on a few major aspects of terrorism. Terrorism is generally defined as violence or the threat of violence conducted for political reasons that effect a broader audience beyond the immediate target.<sup>8</sup> This violence is carried out by an “identifiable organization” and by non-state actors.<sup>9</sup>

Some definitions of terrorism distinguish between violence against civilians or security personnel.<sup>10</sup> Violence against security personnel is often considered terrorism when the security personnel are not actively engaging in combat.<sup>11</sup> Although there is

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<sup>8</sup> Lutz, 9-10

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Bjørgo, Tore, 2

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

some disagreement among the scholars, terrorism for the purposes of this study includes attacks against security personnel. The attacks in the Sinai are typically against security personnel when they performing daily tasks – such as manning security checkpoints or moving through the area. These attacks are terrorist attacks not only because of the direct target, but because the broader purpose of the violence is to disrupt the security mission of the Egyptian military and government. When terrorists target one army convoy, the entire military is affected. The terrorists in the Sinai are attempting to create fear that forces the government to yield to their political objectives and cease military operations.

#### **CAUSES OF TERRORISM**

Most scholars have agreed that there is no single cause that can account for terrorism. However complex the answer might be, understanding the causes of a particular terrorist outbreak is critical to developing an effective counterterror strategy.

One terrorism scholar, Tore Bjørgo proposed a four-level causal framework.<sup>12</sup> The broadest level is structural causes, which includes things like globalization and economic underdevelopment that affect populations in ways they may not even be aware.<sup>13</sup> The next level contains the facilitator or accelerator causes. Causes in this level might be social media or ungoverned spaces that make it easier for terrorists to carry out attacks.<sup>14</sup> The third level of causes is the motivational level.<sup>15</sup> These are the personal

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<sup>12</sup> Tore, 3-4

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

factors that drive individuals to participate in terrorism like ideology and perceived economic inequality. Lastly, there are triggering causes that directly lead to a terrorist outbreak.

This framework is a particularly useful way to analyze individual terrorist outbreaks. It allows for universal forces that may encourage terrorist activity in many places, but also for unique forces in particular areas.

### **PERSONAL MOTIVATION FOR TERRORISM**

One of the most difficult to understand aspects of terrorism is at the individual level. Why would someone make a conscious decision to kill others? Why would someone take his own life in order to promote a distant political agenda? Although it is hard for many to fathom, researchers must take the motivations and decision making of the individuals who participate in terror seriously. Oftentimes, terrorists are written off as insane, desperate, or deluded. While this may be true in some cases, it is not a useful way in which to evaluate terror.

The most recent terrorist outbreak in the Sinai Peninsula is an area where it is particularly useful to try and ascertain the personal motivations behind the terrorist activity. Unlike Iraq in the 2000s or in the Palestinian Territories, there is no obvious occupying force. Islamic fundamentalism is also an inadequate explanation for this terrorism. Additionally, an examination of the personal motivations behind the violence is necessary to explain why the major uptick in terrorist activity occurred in 2013 after Morsi's ouster and not in 2011 after the end of the Mubarak regime. Personal motivations



can also help explain why the violence, once localized in the Sinai Peninsula, has spread into mainland Egypt.

Robert Pape's 2005 study of suicide terrorism, *Dying to Win*, provides an in-depth study of the history of suicide terrorism. He argues that Islamic fundamentalism is inadequate to explain suicide terrorism; instead, suicide terrorism is most likely where there is a foreign occupying force.<sup>16</sup> Other scholars have identified a number of diverse motivations behind suicide terrorism: social status, personal significance, lack of alternative prospects, displacement, moral obligation, status, humiliation and injustice, and vengeance.<sup>17</sup> Kruglanski et al. argues that while these motivating factors are useful, they may result in different responses in different situations.<sup>18</sup> Many, if not all of these factors are at play in the Sinai Peninsula, where decades of government discrimination has marginalized the population.

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<sup>16</sup> Pape 4

<sup>17</sup> Kruglanski et al., 332

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 334

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Policy makers must understand the nature of the threat to develop an effective counterterror strategy. Because the Egyptian military has political incentives to misrepresent the nature of the terrorist outbreak, scholars must conduct an independent investigation into the causes and driving factors of the activity in the Sinai Peninsula.

The shadowy nature of terrorist groups does not lend itself to conventional research methods. First-hand acquisitions such as surveys and interviews are largely out of the question. Additionally, the developments are too recent to rely on secondary source material or archives – even if they existed. This paper is therefore based on an analysis of open-source intelligence. This refers to any information available without a security clearance.

In this instance, I have used news articles that report the occurrence of various attacks and relevant incidents. I have also used the statements released by the groups within the Sinai. The collection of these sources creates an accurate picture of the trends of the terrorist outbreak. I have imported the source material into analytic database software.<sup>19</sup> I have coded the attacks to show difference in tactics (shooting or bombing) and targets (police or military, civilian and static or moving). I have also used the software to generate maps, timelines and network diagrams that assist in my analysis.

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<sup>19</sup> The software used is DecisionGrid. For more, see [www.decisiongrid.com](http://www.decisiongrid.com).

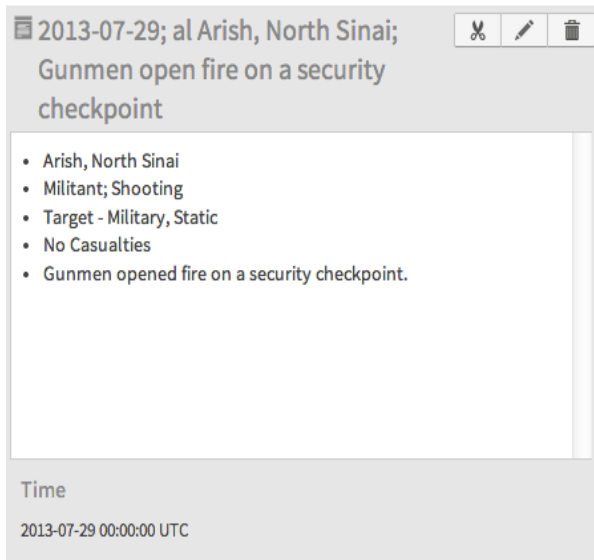


Figure 2: Sample Event

The software has allowed me to collect and store the relevant data and then analyze it for important trends. Although the data I collected cannot be taken to represent every single terrorist attack in the peninsula since January 2011, it does show useful changes in terrorist activities and the attacks of greatest significance.

## Chapter 4: The Sinai Peninsula



Figure 3: Map of the Sinai

The Sinai Peninsula is a mountainous, desert area situated between Egypt and Israel. It is large – about 23,500 square miles – and sparsely populated.<sup>20</sup> The triangular peninsula acts as the only land bridge between Africa and Asia. The Suez Canal, a critical shipping lane, lies on the western edge of the peninsula, while the Gaza Strip and Israel border on the east. The mountains within the peninsula contain the country’s highest peak, Mount Sinai. Although the mountains are not particularly high by global standards, they distinguish Sinai from the relatively flat mainland.



Figure 4: Satellite View of the Sinai

<sup>20</sup> “Sinai Peninsula,” 2009

*Satellite imagery shows the stark contrast between the sparse desert of the Sinai and the fertile, more densely populated Nile Delta. Source: Google Maps*

Today, the peninsula has a population roughly 600,000.<sup>21</sup> About one-third of the population belongs to one of fifteen Bedouin tribes.<sup>22</sup> Most of the population lives in the northern edge of the peninsula, along the Mediterranean, or along the western coast.<sup>23</sup> In Northern Sinai, the Sawarka and Tarabin are the largest tribes while the Muszeina tribe is the largest in the South.<sup>24</sup> The various tribes have loose but long-standing territorial boundaries. Tourism and government development in the peninsula complicated the tribes' holdings and they have struggled to maintain their semi-nomadic way of life.

Prior to 1956, the Egyptian government largely ignored the peninsula, effectively allowing the Bedouin to administer the territory.<sup>25</sup> However, following the Suez Crisis in 1956, the Egyptian government attempted to develop the peninsula.<sup>26</sup> They built a road connecting the eastern coast city of Sharm al Sheikh with Suez and mines to access minerals and petroleum.<sup>27</sup> Although this could have been an opportunity for the Bedouin to achieve increased employment, most of the jobs associated with development went to workers from Sudan and mainland Egypt.<sup>28</sup> Instead, many Bedouin turned to narcotics smuggling, a nuisance Egypt was unable to effectively combat.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Kovac "Armed Groups in the Sinai Peninsula," 2013

<sup>22</sup> Balanga, "Sinai: A Territory Without a Master," 2012

<sup>23</sup> Kovac "Armed Groups in the Sinai Peninsula," 2013

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Lavie, 1984, 35

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 36

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

Following the 1967 war with Israel, Egypt lost control of the peninsula to Israel, who occupied the territory for more than a decade.<sup>30</sup> Unlike the Egyptian government, who relied upon sheikhs as intermediaries to the Bedouin, the Israelis worked directly with the local tribes.<sup>31</sup> The Israeli government sought to understand Bedouin tribal structure and provided social services, such as food and medical aid.<sup>32</sup> During their occupation of the peninsula, Israeli civilians settled parts of the peninsula, namely in St. Catherine's Monastery and Sharm al Sheikh.<sup>33</sup> They also focused on developing a tourist industry in the area.<sup>34</sup> Although there were some improvements in the quality of life in the Sinai during Israeli occupation, Bedouin still defined themselves in contrast to "the Jews."<sup>35</sup> Although historically not particularly devout Muslims, the occupation triggered a sort of Islamic revival amongst the Bedouin.<sup>36</sup>

As part of the 1978 Camp David Accords, Israel agreed to return the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt.<sup>37</sup> The "Framework for the Conclusion of a Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel" provided for the interim withdrawal of Israeli forces, the stationing of United Nations forces and the deployment of no more than one division of Egyptian forces in the westernmost part of the peninsula.<sup>38</sup> The 1979 treaty between Israel and Egypt divided the Sinai into Zones A, B, and C, with different levels of Egyptian military

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<sup>30</sup> Kovac "Armed Groups in the Sinai Peninsula," 2013

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 36

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 37

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 38

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 40

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> "Framework for the Conclusion of a Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel"

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

force allowed in each: one division was allowed in Zone A, the westernmost zone, no more than four thousand border guards would be allowed in the middle zone, Zone B, while only police forces were permitted in Zone C, which borders Israel.<sup>39</sup> Egypt's use of its aircraft and naval forces were also restricted across the peninsula.<sup>40</sup> Although the parties initially hoped to have a UN peacekeeping force, the UN was unable to provide one. Instead, they created the Multinational Force and Observers, still active in Zone C today.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> "MFO Origins"

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*





Figure 5: Map of Zones of Sinai

*Source: Multinational Force and Observers*

Under the 1979 peace treaty, the Sinai became a buffer zone between Egypt and Israel, and life did not improve for the Bedouin.<sup>42</sup> The Mubarak regime socially and economically oppressed this semi-nomadic population for decades. In 1982, the government encouraged Egyptians from the Nile Delta to migrate to the peninsula and as

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<sup>42</sup> Laub, "Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and Security," 2013

a result, many Bedouin were removed from their traditional lands.<sup>43</sup> Under Mubarak, they were not allowed to serve in the military or government.<sup>44</sup> There has been very limited economic development in the area; most of the development has been focused on tourist resorts along the Red Sea.<sup>45</sup> However, the vast majority of the jobs associated with the tourist industry were given to Egyptians from elsewhere in Egypt and not to locals.<sup>46</sup> Half of the Bedouin population reportedly lives in poverty.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the Sinai is isolated from mainland Egypt; only two roads link the area to the rest of the country.

In 2006, Egypt's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics reported that more than half of population of North Sinai was unemployed<sup>48</sup> while Egypt as a whole had an unemployment rate of 8.3%.<sup>49</sup> As a result of the limited economic opportunity, much of the population resorted to smuggling things like drugs, cigarettes and weapons across the border.<sup>50</sup> Under Morsi, smuggling flourished, but that changed dramatically once the military came to power.<sup>51</sup> The military has moved to shut down the smuggling tunnels in an attempt to improve the security situation but as a result there is very little economic opportunity in the peninsula.

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<sup>43</sup> Balanga, "Sinai: A Territory Without a Master," 2012

<sup>44</sup> "Egypt: Bedouins begin to demand equal citizenship rights," 2013

<sup>45</sup> Pfeffer, "The key to restoring Sinai security," 2013

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Gerges, "Egypt's Sinai problem won't be solved with air strikes," 2012

<sup>48</sup> "Egypt's revolution brings little to underdeveloped Sinai," 2013

<sup>49</sup> Assaad, 2007

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Aziz, "Sinai's Role in Morsi's Ouster," 2013

Because of the limited military presence in the Sinai, security was left to the police and the Mukhabarat.<sup>52</sup> The military therefore had limited experience within the Sinai while the police were left to “scare the population with sheer brutality.”<sup>53</sup> During the Sinai resort bombings of 2004-2006, police forces arrested thousands of Bedouin and imprisoned them “without evidence or reason.”<sup>54</sup> Following the January 25 revolution, the police presence in the peninsula dropped dramatically.<sup>55</sup> The absence of the police force “allowed the Bedouin population of Sinai – as well as Sinai-based Salafi-jihadis – to exact revenge for years of perceived ill-treatment by the police and state.”<sup>56</sup>

One key to the terrorist outbreak in the Sinai is understanding the relationship between the local population and the government. According to one report:

The security problems emanating from the Sinai must be viewed, first, from a human angle. While Sinai’s harsh and sparsely populated terrain provide a vast hiding space for violent jihadis and criminal elements, the Egyptian state’s treatment of the region’s Bedouin population breeds a contempt for the state, of which these elements have long taken advantage.<sup>57</sup>

Sinai-based Bedouins and the Egyptian government have no history of a positive relationship. Egyptian government policies created an environment that isolated, marginalized and discriminated against the population of the Sinai. The residents of the Sinai may not see the Egyptian government as a legitimate governing body. The return of the military to the head of the political government in July 2013 may have provided both

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<sup>52</sup> Pfeffer 2013

<sup>53</sup> Gold 2013

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Pfeffer 2013

<sup>56</sup> Gold 2013

<sup>57</sup> Gold, “Sinai Security,” 2013

the opening and the impetus to mobilize a larger portion of the population to commit acts of violence.

## Chapter 5: Sinai-based Terrorism Since July 2013

### POLITICAL CHANGES, MILITANT OPENING

The popular protests that occurred in Egypt in January and February of 2011 were unprecedented. Tens of thousands of Egyptians poured into Tahrir Square in Cairo and other city centers around the country to demand political change. They got what they – and global leaders – asked for. The Egyptian military pushed Hosni Mubarak, who had been president of the country for thirty years, out of his office after eighteen days of popular protests. Following Mubarak’s resignation on February 11, observers and Egyptians alike were optimistic about the prospects for the country’s future. There was, however, something else that occurred on February 11 in another corner of the country that would foreshadow the coming turmoil.

In the North Sinai city of al Arish, hundreds attacked a police station.<sup>58</sup> They threw gasoline bombs at the building in an attempt to free prisoners.<sup>59</sup> Once the smoke had cleared, five were dead, including three police officers, and forty-two were injured.<sup>60</sup> The clash had partially destroyed the police station and five police vehicles.<sup>61</sup> Some of the prisoners being held in the station were able to escape.<sup>62</sup> The clash in the small city was largely overlooked in the bigger news of the day. It was, however, just the beginning of the upheaval and violence that would grow and eventually explode in the Sinai Peninsula.

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<sup>58</sup> Hammond, “Police and protestors clash in Egypt’s Sinai, 5 dead,” 2011

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

Before the popular revolt had run its course, the military sought approval from Israel to deploy two battalions – roughly 800 troops – to the Sinai.<sup>63</sup> Israel approved the request on January 31; this was the first time Egyptian troops entered the easternmost section of the peninsula since the conclusion of the 1979 peace treaty.<sup>64</sup> The battalions, however, went to the southern resort town of Sharm al Sheikh and not the northern part of the peninsula where most of the population lives.<sup>65</sup> This small military presence in the southernmost tip of the country could not have possibly prevented a security vacuum from developing.

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<sup>63</sup> Sobelman, “Egypt and Israel,” 2011

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

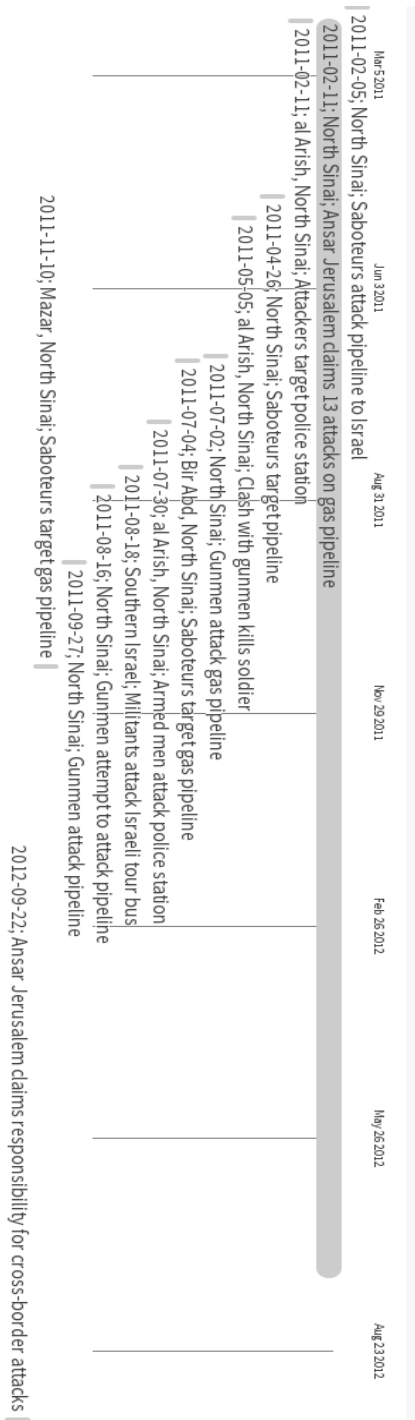


Figure 6: Timeline of Major Attacks in 2011

Attacks in the peninsula began even before Mubarak resigned. The first attack would come to be very common between 2011 and mid-2013 – a bombing of the gas pipeline to Israel and Jordan.<sup>66</sup> There would be at least seven more attacks and attempted attacks of the Arish-Ashkelon pipeline in 2011 alone.

The pipeline became a major target because of its controversial nature. The pipeline supplies forty percent of Israel’s natural gas.<sup>67</sup> The export prices were fixed as part of a twenty-year deal struck during the Mubarak regime.<sup>68</sup> Many objected to the deal on the grounds that the set price was below market rate and argued that the Egyptian people were not benefiting from the deal.<sup>69</sup> While many of the attacks were not attributed to anyone in particular, one militant group would later claim responsibility for at least thirteen attempts to sabotage the pipeline.

Ansar Beit al Maqdis, or as they are more commonly known, Ansar Jerusalem is a militant group that operates primarily in the North Sinai area. The group announced their existence in a video released on jihadi forums on July 24, 2012.<sup>70</sup> Their name means “Supporters of Jerusalem” and the video states that the group ““was established after al Qaeda leader Sheikh Ayman al Zawahiri called for a cessation of the transfer of gas to the State of Israel.”<sup>71</sup> The group reported they had bombed the Arish-Ashkelon gas pipeline

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<sup>66</sup> Edmund, “Saboteurs attack Egypt-Israel gas pipeline,” 2011

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> “Blasts hit gas pipeline between Egypt, Jordan, and Israel,” 2011

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group, July 2012

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*



numerous times dating back to 2011.<sup>72</sup> In the video, the group spokesman claimed that the deal to export gas to Israel constitutes treason and harms the Egyptian people.<sup>73</sup> The video contains footage of militants attacking the pipeline in the first documentation of the sabotage.<sup>74</sup>

Ansar Jerusalem targeted the Arish-Ashkelon pipeline primarily to target Israel and they carried out other attacks in order to cause more damage. In another statement published in September 2012, the group claimed responsibility for two cross-border attacks on Israel. The first attack occurred more than a year prior, on August 18, 2011 when armed men launched a multi-stage attack in southern Israel.<sup>75</sup> This complex attack involved several teams of militants first targeting a tour bus and then bombing first responders. The attack left eight Israelis dead and many civilians wounded.<sup>76</sup> This was reportedly the worst terrorist attack Israel had suffered since 2008.<sup>77</sup> In the statement, they also claimed responsibility for a September 2012 attack on Israeli forces that resulted in the death of one soldier.<sup>78</sup> They claimed this attack was retribution for the recent film portraying the prophet Muhammad in a negative light.<sup>79</sup> These major attacks and the sabotage of the pipeline to Israel constitute a distinct attack signature for Ansar Jerusalem during this time. Their primary focus was on harming Israel both economically

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Bruer, "Militants kill 8 in complex assault on Israeli civilians," 2011

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Roggio, "Ansar Jerusalem claims attack on Israeli troops in the Sinai," 2012

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

and by harming its military and civilians. Their tactics mostly consisted of raids and bombings and were not highly sophisticated methods.

It is not clear where Ansar Jerusalem derived its support during the period from 2011 until July 2013. Based on their chosen target of Israel, it is possible they received some sort of support from Palestinian terrorist groups. During this time, they did not claim attacks on Egyptian civilians or security personnel and their primary goal appears to be to harm Israel. A shift in their tactics and targets in July 2013, however, would come to be indicative of a shift in their support network.



Figure 7: Major Attacks in the Sinai, July 2013

Highlighted attacks, including a sniper attack and a suicide car bomb, indicate increasingly sophisticated tactics.

## THE COUP

On June 30, 2013, thousands of Egyptians staged protests to demand the resignation of President Morsi.<sup>80</sup> It was the one-year anniversary of his election to office, the first democratic presidential election in Egypt's history. Deteriorating economic conditions and the perceived failure of the Morsi administration outraged the anti-Morsi protestors and drove them to the street. The protests turned violent as Morsi supporters launched opposing demonstrations.<sup>81</sup> As the demonstrations entered their second day on July 1, six were dead and more than 600 wounded.<sup>82</sup> Later that day, the army issued an ultimatum to Morsi: resolve the crisis and end the demonstrations within 48 hours or the military would intervene.<sup>83</sup> In their public statement, the army attempted to position itself as neutral, but dubbed the protests "glorious."<sup>84</sup> As protests continued, Morsi demanded that the army take back its ultimatum, but failed to resolve the crisis.<sup>85</sup> On July 3, the military placed Morsi and his aides under house arrest, bringing an end to his presidency.<sup>86</sup>

Reactions within Egypt were split between jubilation and anger. Anti-Morsi protestors went home, their mission accomplished, but pro-Morsi protests intensified. Hundreds of thousands of supporters poured into the streets. The official response from the Brotherhood was outrage. They immediately denounced the actions of the military as

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<sup>80</sup>Carlstrom, "Egypt gripped by anti-Morsi protests," 2013

<sup>81</sup>"Egypt opposition to continue mass protests," 2013

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup>Carlstrom, "Army delivers ultimatum to end Egypt crisis," 2013

<sup>84</sup>"Egypt army statement in full," 2013

<sup>85</sup>"Morsi tells Egypt army to withdraw ultimatum," 2013

<sup>86</sup>"President Morsi overthrown in Egypt," 2013

a coup and said they would “refuse to participate in any action with the usurpers.”<sup>87</sup> A few days later, they called for an uprising “against those who would ‘steal their revolt with tanks and massacres.’”<sup>88</sup> Morsi supporters remained on the streets but the military repressed their action, often with deadly force. Forces fired on protesters on July 8, killing 42 and wounding more than 300.<sup>89</sup>

Al Qaeda and its affiliates expressed similar outrage, in a rare moment of agreement with the Muslim Brotherhood. Despite previous critiques of the Morsi administration (Ayman al Zawahiri had previously lambasted the new constitution), al Qaeda members wasted no time in condemning the actions of the military.<sup>90</sup> Associated groups released statements via social media outlets, pointing out the failure of democracy and the futility of the elections.<sup>91</sup> Groups in North Africa, Kenya and Somalia called for the Egyptian people to rise up and wage jihad.<sup>92</sup> The message was clear: violence is the only way to bring about a “proper” Islamic government.

Terrorist attacks in the Sinai escalated immediately. Meanwhile, violent protests were staged across the country as the Brotherhood took to the streets.

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<sup>87</sup> “Muslim Brotherhood Statement on Military Coup Against Elected President,” 2013

<sup>88</sup> Kenner, “Massacre in Cairo,” 2013

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Richards, “al Qaeda Network Responds to Egypt,” 2013

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

## **MORE POLITICAL INSTABILITY, MORE VIOLENCE**

Following Morsi's ouster, violence increased dramatically from attacks every week or so to multiple attacks per day in the Sinai Peninsula. The attackers, unlike the Islamist protesters encamped in Cairo, were not demanding the return of Morsi but were instead killing security personnel in the peninsula.

At first, many of the attacks in July 2013 were consistent with the anarchy that was prevalent throughout Egypt. Most of the attacks were shootings that targeted security personnel. Gunmen would open fire on a particular security installation, usually a checkpoint or a police station, and then escape on vehicles. Attacks such as these could have been carried out by almost anyone for almost any purpose. There were, however, two notable attacks that indicate a much higher level of sophistication. In al Arish, the capital of the North Sinai Governorate, a sniper killed three police officers on July 21 in the first of such attacks reported in the area.<sup>93</sup> The police were guarding three separate buildings in the city – an administrative building, a television station and a police station.<sup>94</sup> This was a coordinated attack<sup>95</sup> that required significant knowledge and skills. The use of a sniper rifle requires specialized training, not to mention the acquisition of a specialized weapon.

There has also been a significant shift in targets since early July. There have been surprisingly few cross-border attacks targeting Israel; the vast majority of attacks have

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<sup>93</sup> Sweilam, "Militant attacks on north Sinai city kill 5," 2013

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

been against Egyptian security personnel. From September 2013 until December 2013, there were no major, reported attacks on Israel launched from the Sinai Peninsula. This is in stark contrast to the preceding two years, where Israeli resorts and security personnel were frequently targeted. During these months, terrorist attacks turned inward and focused not on the pipeline or Israel, but on Egyptian security personnel.

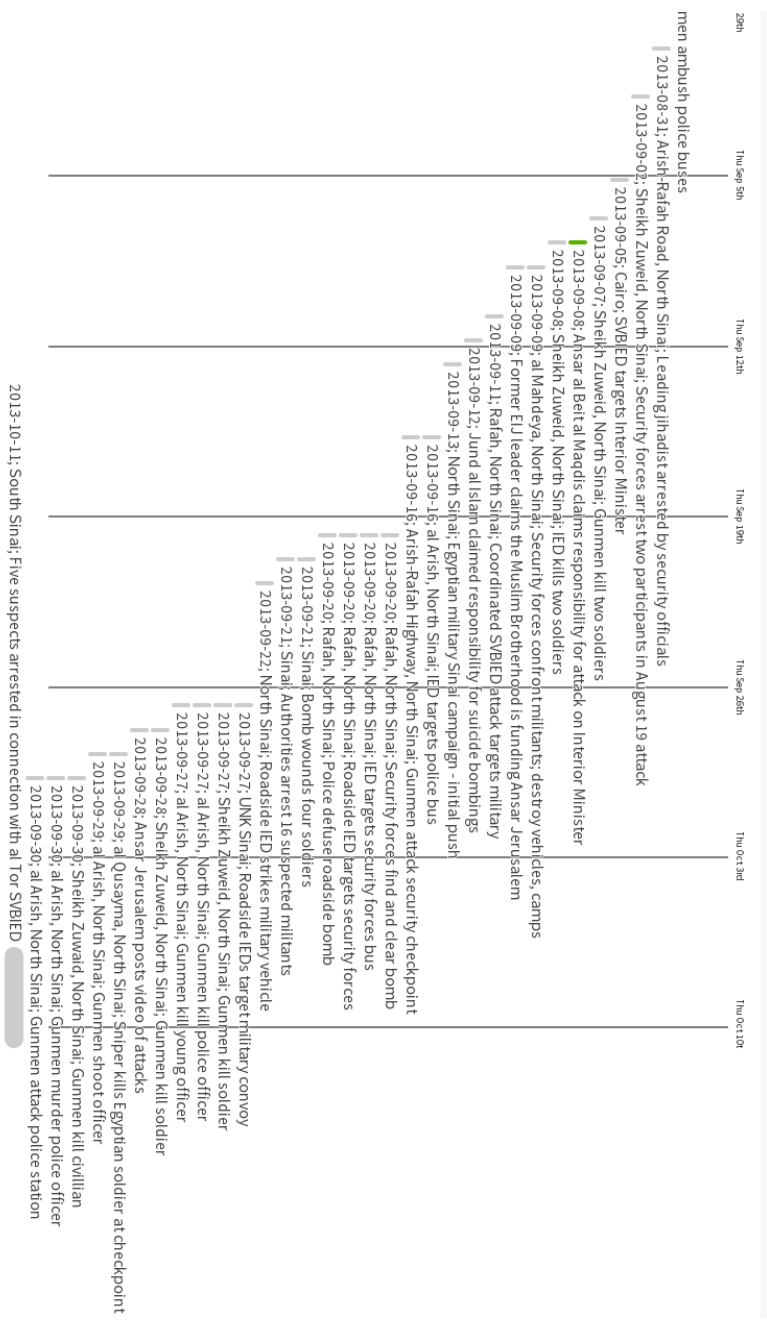


Figure 8: Major Attacks in the Sinai, September 2013



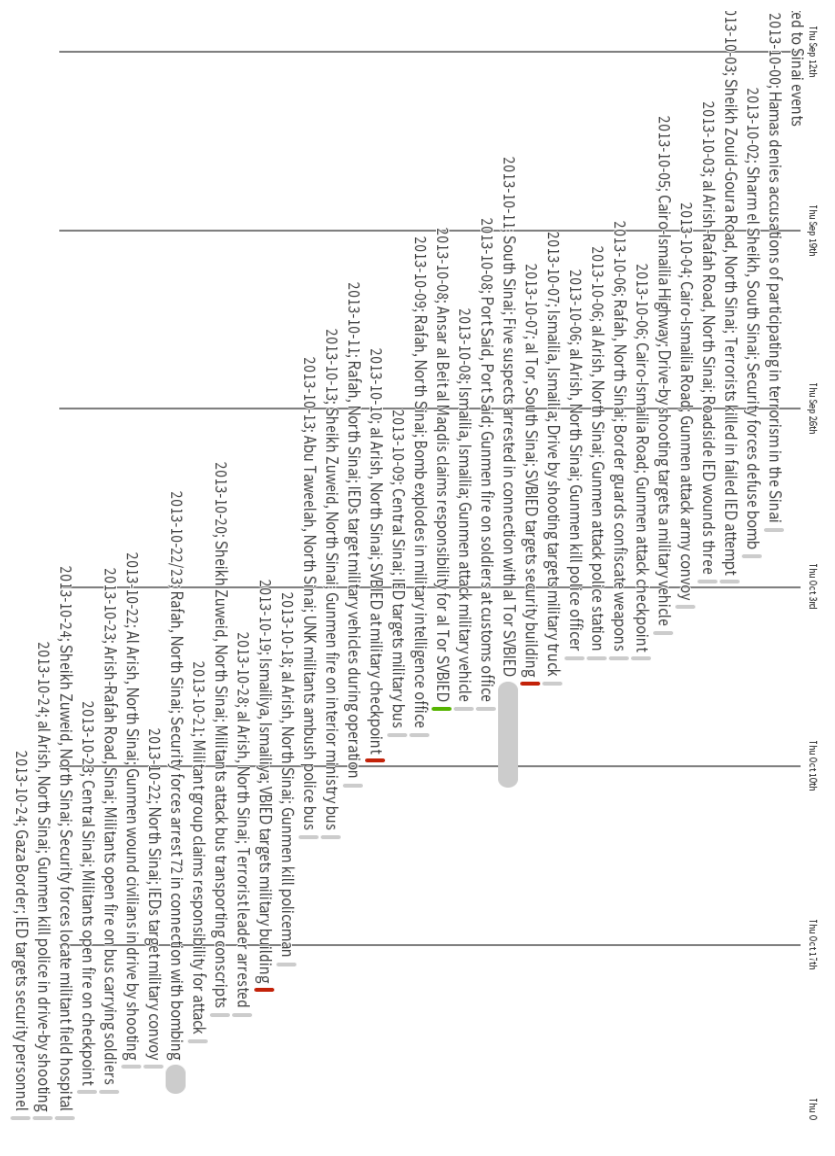


Figure 9: Major Attacks in the Sinai, October 2013



Figure 10: Major Attacks in the Sinai, November 2013

On July 24, a suicide car bomber (SVBIED or suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device) attempted to target a police station in al Arish.<sup>96</sup> This was the first known suicide attack in Egypt since 2011. Suicide attacks in the country are historically

<sup>96</sup> “Bomb, attacks hit Egypt's Sinai as army calls for rallies,”

rare; there were six suicide attacks in the thirty years between 1981 and 2011<sup>97</sup> but six suicide attacks in the *five months* following Morsi's ousting. There were no casualties in this attack apart from the four suicide bombers in the vehicle.<sup>98</sup> It appears that there may have been a munitions failure before the bombers reached their destination and the explosives detonated in a desert area.<sup>99</sup> It was an attempt at a complicated attack; unfortunately there would be more successful attacks in the coming months.

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<sup>97</sup> Cunningham, "Egypt now fighting 'an enemy it doesn't know' as attacks by militant cells rise," 2013

<sup>98</sup> "Bomb, attacks hit Egypt's Sinai as army calls for rallies," 2013

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

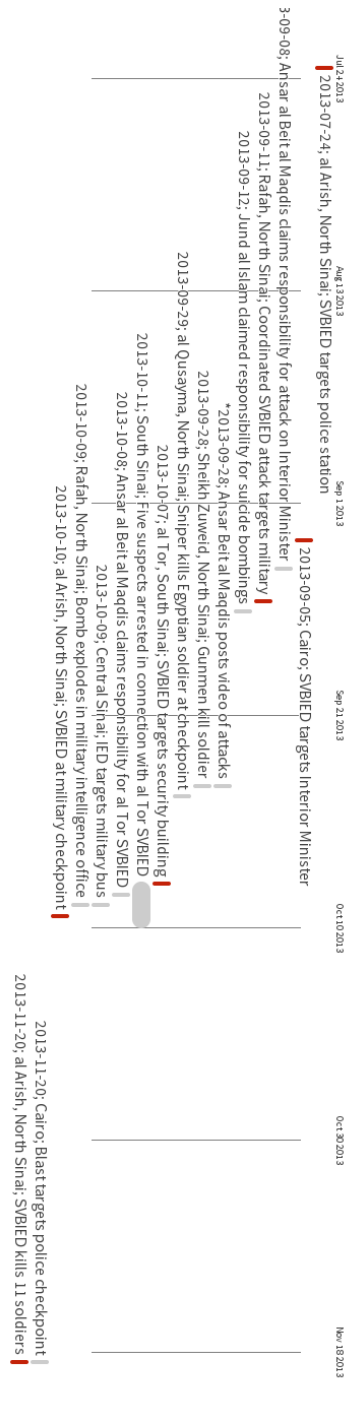


Figure 11: Suicide Attacks and Related Events, July 2013-Nov. 2013

*Suicide attacks denoted in red.*

Ansar Jerusalem has claimed responsibility for at least two of the suicide attacks, but is likely tied to, or has carried out, some of the others. Another group, Jund al Islam, carried out a coordinated dual-suicide bombing on two targets in September 2013.<sup>100</sup> The increase in suicide attacks represents the development of a tactic largely foreign to Egypt. These suicide bombings all follow the same signature: a suicide bomber drives an explosives-laden vehicle next to (or in to) the target. These SVBIEDs have been uncommon in Egypt, but suicide tactics are common among the al Qaeda network. SVBIEDs are also much more sophisticated attacks than shootings. The nature of the attack requires knowledge of bomb making and the ability to move through military checkpoints in order to avoid being detected on the way to the target.

Ansar Jerusalem epitomizes the changes in tactics and target that are reflected in the general trends in the peninsula. These changes indicate a connection to the global al Qaeda network. In the last few months, Ansar Jerusalem has not claimed responsibility for any attacks on Israel and instead have almost exclusively targeted Egyptian security personnel.

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<sup>100</sup> Barnett, "Jund al Islam claims credit for Sinai suicide car bomb attacks," 2013

## Chapter 6: Who Is and Who Is Not Behind the Terror

### EGYPTIAN MILITARY CLAIMS ABOUT SINAI TERRORISM

The Egyptian military and other government officials have made a number of claims about the causes of the recent outbreak of terrorism in the Sinai. However, these accusations are contradictory to the statements made by Israeli intelligence and other observers. It seems likely they are making particular claims for political objectives and ignoring – at least publically – the true driving forces behind the violence.

The military insisted during the fall of 2013 that militants from Gaza were carrying out the terrorist attacks. In a September 2013 interview, the Egyptian Foreign Minister, Nabil Fahmy claimed that Gazan militants had worked with militants based in North Sinai to carry out joint-attacks.<sup>101</sup> The minister called on Hamas to do more to secure the Gazan border but did not directly accuse Hamas of carrying out attacks.<sup>102</sup> However, in a previous press conference, a military official claimed the military had found grenades stamped with the logo of Hamas' military wing.<sup>103</sup> State-run TV also alleged in September 2013 that Hamas trained the terrorist groups who had carried out recent attacks.<sup>104</sup> The state-run paper *Al Ahram* also reported that Hamas had been

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<sup>101</sup> Reuters, "Egypt army warns Hamas over Sinai Border," 2013

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> "Hamas denies training Egypt militant groups," 2013

“involved” in the attempted assassination of the interior minister.<sup>105</sup> These allegations have been consistently denied by Hamas.<sup>106</sup>

The military is not just saying that Hamas is behind the attacks; they have acted on these accusations. Since removing Morsi from office, they have destroyed hundreds of smuggling tunnels between the Gaza strip and the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>107</sup> Only a few tunnels remain. These tunnels provided an “economic lifeline” to Gaza,<sup>108</sup> but also provided economic opportunities for residents of the Sinai. The military has claimed that militants were using the tunnels to carry out attacks on security forces.<sup>109</sup>

The military has also pointed fingers at the now-disbanded Muslim Brotherhood. During a November 23 press conference, Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim alleged that the Muslim Brotherhood had drawn on its international finances to mobilize ““a number of terrorist extremist elements...and spurred them to carry out villainous terrorist attacks.””<sup>110</sup> He claimed the government had “found documents, seized weapons, and foiled various attack attempts against public figures, police and army personnel.”<sup>111</sup> Ibrahim’s evidence, however, is thin at best. The Muslim Brotherhood has consistently denied participating in the violence.<sup>112</sup> Other groups, however, have adopted responsibility for the attacks and praised them. The Muslim Brotherhood has little to lose

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*; for more on this attack, see below

<sup>106</sup> “Hamas denies training Egypt militant groups,” 2013

<sup>107</sup> “Closing of Smuggling Tunnels Hits Gazans Hard,” 2013

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>110</sup> Barnett, “Egyptian Minister: Muslim Brotherhood ‘ mobilized a number of terrorist extremist elements,” 2013

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*.

from claiming responsibility for supporting a “war” against the military. On the other hand the military has everything to gain from exaggerating or fabricating their accusations. If they can convince the population and the international community that the Muslim Brotherhood is behind the terrorist attacks, the military can eradicate their largest political rival with few objections.

### **THE BROTHERHOOD**

The Muslim Brotherhood is not well understood. Its goals and ideology are often conflated with that of al Qaeda. However, despite a shared desire to implement Islamic law, the groups have little in common. The Brotherhood is first and foremost a political organization, committed to working within the system instead of violently destroying it from the outside. The Brotherhood does not officially condone violence. Al Qaeda has argued that elections are un-Islamic by nature and are unable to bring about Islamic governance. Violence, of course, is their preferred method to “fix” the government. The current emir of al Qaeda, Ayman al Zawahiri, left the Brotherhood in the 1990s and joined the violent Egyptian Islamic Jihad.<sup>113</sup>

Hassan al Banna, a young teacher, founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928.<sup>114</sup> The organization began as a religious and social organization but after ten years, the group’s founder announced the Brotherhood’s entry into politics.<sup>115</sup> Four years later, in 1942, the group attempted to participate in its first national elections as an opposition

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Kramer, 2010, 27.

<sup>115</sup> Lia, 2006, 202



group.<sup>116</sup> The government, still a monarchy at the time, objected to the Brotherhood's participation.<sup>117</sup> Al Banna struck a deal with government to allow the Brotherhood more freedom in its operations in exchange for withdrawing from the elections.<sup>118</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood continued to clash with the government and was banned in 1948.<sup>119</sup>

During the 1952 Free Officers revolution, the Brotherhood teamed up with the military.<sup>120</sup> Their alliance, however, did not last and the group was banned once again in 1954, after they were accused of staging an assassination attempt on President Gamal Abd al Nasser.<sup>121</sup> This marked the beginning of a violent phase in the Brotherhood's history while Sayyid Qutb, often cited as the ideological founder of Salafi Jihadi movements, led the organization.<sup>122</sup>

At the demand of Anwar Sadat, the Brotherhood renounced violence in the 1970s.<sup>123</sup> Although still technically illegal, the group's members returned to politics and participated in parliamentary elections as independent candidates in 1984. The Brotherhood continued to work within the political system as an opposition group into the 2000s. Their greatest success during the Mubarak regime came in 2005, when they won eighty-eight seats in parliament.<sup>124</sup> By the end of the Mubarak regime in 2011, the Brotherhood was the largest and best-organized political opposition group in the

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 268

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 269

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Mitchell 1969, 58

<sup>120</sup> Said Aly et. al, "Islamic Reform Movements: The Muslim Brotherhood and Contemporary Egypt," 1982

<sup>121</sup> Laub, "Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," 2014

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> Abou Al-Magd, "Egypt's Elections Turn Violent; 1 Killed." 2007

country.<sup>125</sup> The Brotherhood achieved this position while being illegal, although tolerated. The organization had an extensive grassroots organization to draw upon and a history of working with communities across the country. They were in a prime position to take control of the new government. They were able to take control of the new post-revolution parliament and eventually the presidency.

On July 3, 2013, the military began systematically crippling the Brotherhood. After installing an interim president, the military has worked to exclude the Brotherhood from the political scene. In addition to President Morsi, six other high-ranking MB officials were arrested on July 3: the head of the organization's political party, the Deputy Supreme Guide and four of Morsi's top aides.<sup>126</sup> The military continued to arrest leaders in the MB, including the Supreme Guide on August 20.<sup>127</sup> They arrested more than one hundred leaders in the organization between July 3 and September 17.<sup>128</sup> While the military primarily targeted the leadership, they police reportedly had orders to arrest 300 members in all.<sup>129</sup> At the same time, the government shut down a Brotherhood television station.<sup>130</sup>

While arresting MB members, the government also seized the assets of the organization, its members and any associated organizations. On September 23, a court

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<sup>125</sup> Laub 2014

<sup>126</sup> Messieh, "Muslim Brotherhood Leader Arrests," 2013

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Spencer, "Egypt's army drives Mohammed Morsi from presidency and power in dramatic coup," 2013

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

issued a ruling banning the Brotherhood and ordering its assets seized.<sup>131</sup> This ruling affecting not just the Brotherhood itself but also organizations associated with it such as its political party and non-governmental organization.<sup>132</sup> On December 31, the courts went further, seizing the personal assets of more than 500 members of the Brotherhood.<sup>133</sup> The list of members included group leaders already arrested, such as Mohamed Morsi and family members of leaders.<sup>134</sup>

At the time of the September 23 ruling, al Jazeera reported that “most senior members [of the Brotherhood] are in prison or on the run.”<sup>135</sup> Since then, the situation for the Brotherhood has only gotten worse, with more and more of its leaders and lower level members getting arrested or killed. More than 1,000 members have reportedly been killed during protests in support of the Brotherhood.<sup>136</sup> Remaining members have been driven underground and are attempting to regroup in hiding.<sup>137</sup>

On December 25, the government designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group.<sup>138</sup> The government accused the Brotherhood of being behind the December 24 attack on a security building in Mansoura, where a suicide bombing killed 16 people and wounded more than 100. Despite the fact that Ansar Jerusalem claimed responsibility for the bombing, the government stubbornly pointed the finger at the

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<sup>131</sup> "Egypt bans *Muslim Brotherhood* activities, seizes assets," 2013

<sup>132</sup> "Egypt court rejects Muslim Brotherhood ban appeal," 2013

<sup>133</sup> *Al Jazeera America*, 23 September 2013

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Al Jazeera America*, 23 September 2013

<sup>136</sup> "Egypt accuses Brotherhood of forming military wing," 2014

<sup>137</sup> Fahim, "The Muslim Brotherhood, Back in a Fight to Survive," 2014

<sup>138</sup> "Egypt designates *Muslim Brotherhood* as terrorist group," 2013

MB.<sup>139</sup> The government can now arrest anyone who belongs to the Brotherhood, provides financial support or promotes it on charges of belonging to a terrorist group.<sup>140</sup>

The Egyptian government has argued that the Brotherhood is ultimately behind the outbreak of terrorism in the Sinai. Although there have been some arrests of Brotherhood members in relation to specific terror attacks, the evidence to support the military's assertion is thin. Officials have not released any evidence that the Brotherhood is linked to the Mansoura bombing, despite using the attack as the prime rationale for designating the group as a terrorist organization.<sup>141</sup> What little evidence has been uncovered does not necessarily support the government's argument:

- On September 9, the former leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad claimed that the Muslim Brotherhood was funding Ansar Jerusalem as part of a deal mediated by Mohamed al Zawahiri, brother of the emir of al Qaeda.<sup>142</sup> The former leader did not present any concrete evidence and could have had political reasons for making such a statement.
- On October 15, security forces arrested a "supporter" of Morsi who was allegedly involved in an October 7 attack on a state satellite station in Cairo. However, "supporting" Morsi does not necessarily equate with being a member of the Brotherhood. Even if this person was a card-carrying member of the Brotherhood, his actions were not necessarily official actions of the organization.

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<sup>139</sup> Fahim, "Egypt, Dealing a Blow to the Muslim Brotherhood, Deems it a Terrorist Group," 2013

<sup>140</sup> *Reuters*, 25 December 2013

<sup>141</sup> Fahim 2013

<sup>142</sup> Al Masry al Youm, "Islamic Jihad Founder: Brotherhood has been funding Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis," 2013

- On December 10, two Muslim Brotherhood members were arrested in North Sinai on charges of inciting and financing terrorism.<sup>143</sup> The government only released the initials of the men who were arrested so it is difficult to assess the veracity of the claim, namely whether or not they were actually Brotherhood members. Furthermore, the government did not offer an explanation of how these two men were “inciting” terrorism.
- On December 30, a former leader in the Muslim Brotherhood claimed that Ansar Jerusalem and another Sinai terrorist group, the al Furqan Brigades, were branches of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>144</sup> This statement is particularly problematic. The man who made it is Tharwat al Kherbawy, a lawyer who may have been forced out of the organization and has published a book “exposing the secrets” of the MB.<sup>145</sup> This does not automatically mean his statement should be discounted, but it is difficult to accept it as true without additional supporting evidence.

It is nearly impossible to say conclusively whether or not the Muslim Brotherhood is fueling the terrorist outbreak, however it is notable that there is an absence of reliable evidence that ties the Brotherhood to the terrorist groups. The military crackdown has severely reduced the ability of the organization to function. With more than one hundred high-ranking Brotherhood officials in jail, including the Supreme Guide and important

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<sup>143</sup> "Arrest of two Muslim Brothers on charges of inciting violence in northern Sinai," 2013

<sup>144</sup> "Tharwat Kherbawi: Ansar Jerusalem and al Furqan Brigades are two branches of the Muslim Brotherhood," 2013

<sup>145</sup> Abou Bakr, 2012

political figures, it is unlikely that the Brotherhood has the organizational capacity to support terrorist attacks. They also have a limited ability to finance any terror – the organization’s assets have been frozen since September 2013 and personal assets have been under scrutiny as well.

There may be some radical individual elements within or tied to the Muslim Brotherhood that are also involved in recent terrorist attacks. However, because of the way in which the military has crippled the Brotherhood, it is unlikely that the organization as a whole is sponsoring terror.

#### **ANSAR JERUSALEM**

In a short time, Ansar Jerusalem launched itself from a relatively obscure militant group conducting sporadic bombings of the natural gas pipeline to a major security threat across Egypt. Although there are not many details known about the group, their mission and support base can be ascertained from the attacks they have carried out and the statements they have made.

Analysts report that Ansar Jerusalem’s membership is drawn primarily from Sinai Bedouin. Their initial base of operations was in the north of the Sinai Peninsula. The army has targeted their strongholds in the village of al Mahdiya, outside of Rafah.<sup>146</sup> A great deal of militant activity has also been localized in the city of al Arish and the village of Sheikh Zuweid. During the winter of 2013-2014, the group established a base of

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<sup>146</sup> Barnett, “Egyptian raid in Ansar Jerusalem stronghold fails to achieve goals,” 2013

operations in mainland Egypt. They are carrying out more and more attacks in Cairo and the Nile Delta.

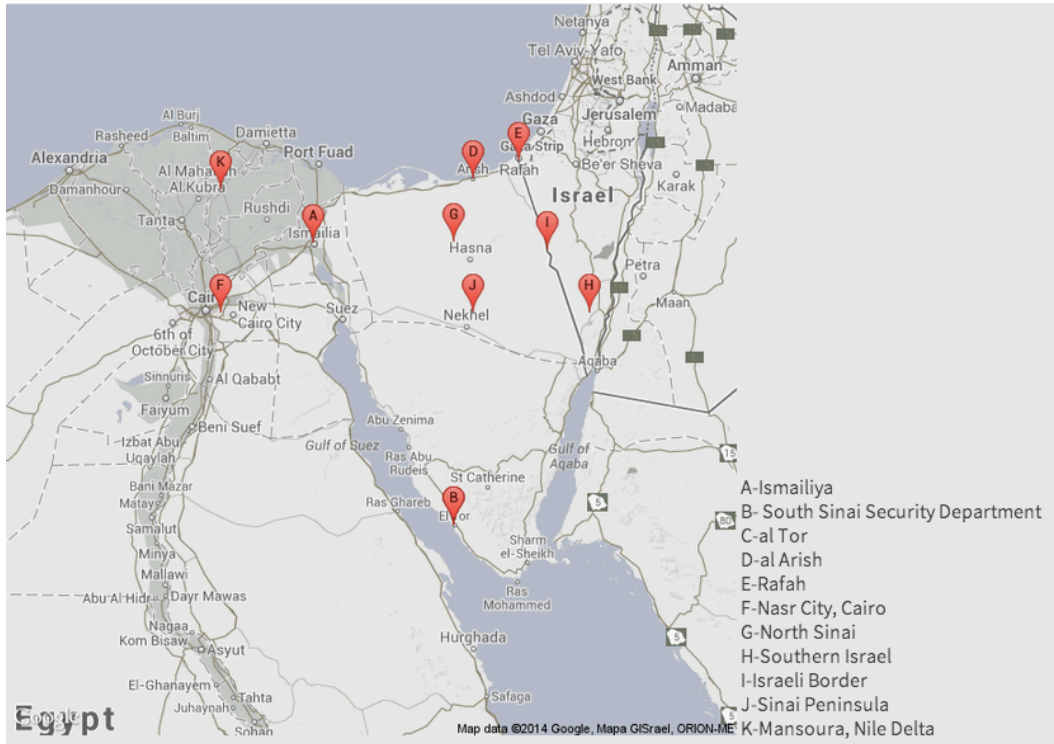


Figure 12: Map of Known Ansar Jerusalem Attacks

One of the first clues as to the make up of the membership of the group came in August 2013. Ansar Jerusalem attempted an attack on Israel August 9, 2013.<sup>147</sup> During this attack, a team of five terrorists attempted to launch rockets over the border into Israel.<sup>148</sup> Four of the five terrorists were killed in an alleged “drone” strike on their position.<sup>149</sup> A few days later, the group released a statement claiming responsibility for

<sup>147</sup> “Sinai group says it was Israeli drone target,” 2013

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

the attempted attack and eulogizing its members who were killed.<sup>150</sup> The statement identified the four members killed: one was from the Tiyaaha tribe and the remaining three were from the Sawarka tribe.<sup>151</sup> A few months later, it was reported that there was also a cell leader with the four men at the time of the attack, also from the Sawarka tribe and related to two of those killed, Shadi al Menai.<sup>152</sup> Al Menai has been identified as the “group’s leader,” but it is unclear if he is *the* leader or *a* leader of the group.<sup>153</sup>

As of March 2014, Ansar Jerusalem has identified 19 deceased members by name.<sup>154</sup> One of the latest eulogized members was Tawfiq Mohammed Freij.<sup>155</sup> Ansar Jerusalem referred to Freij as a “founder” of the organization. Neither Ansar Jerusalem nor the Egyptian government has identified Freij’s nationality, but the group has previously reported that Egyptians founded it.<sup>156</sup> Ansar Jerusalem also reported that Freij was tied to terrorist leaders who were active during the tourist bombings in Sinai in the 2000s.<sup>157</sup> Freij was reportedly intimately involved in some of the group’s most important attacks, including the September 2013 assassination attempt on the Egyptian Interior Minister (*see below*).

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> Barnett, “Ansar Jerusalem claims credit for Sinai attacks, challenges army claims,” 2013

<sup>152</sup> Barnett, “‘It is possible’ Ansar Jerusalem is tied to al Qaeda, brother of group’s leader says,” 2014

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Barnett, “Ansar Jerusalem confirms deaths of 2 members, including founder,” 2014

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*



Ansar Jerusalem appears to draw most of its members from natives of the Sinai Peninsula but also elsewhere in Egypt. The group operates at the nexus between more longstanding radical jihadis and people local to the Sinai.

Between July 2013 and January 2014, Ansar Jerusalem carried out several complicated attacks outside of their base of operations against high-level targets. On September 5, an SVBIED targeted the Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim outside his home in Cairo.<sup>158</sup> The minister survived the attack, but the bomb was large enough to cause significant damage and injure more than twenty bystanders.<sup>159</sup> A few days later, the group published a statement claiming responsibility for the attack.<sup>160</sup> In the statement, they apologized for failing to kill their target and stated that their goal was to “break the security system” by killing Ibrahim.<sup>161</sup> They also echoed previous calls from across the al Qaeda network, condemning democracy and calling for the establishment of “the religion of Allah.”<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> “Egypt’s Minister Mohammed Ibrahim survives bomb attack,” 2013

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> “Statement of adopting the assassination attempt against the Interior Minister,” 2013

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

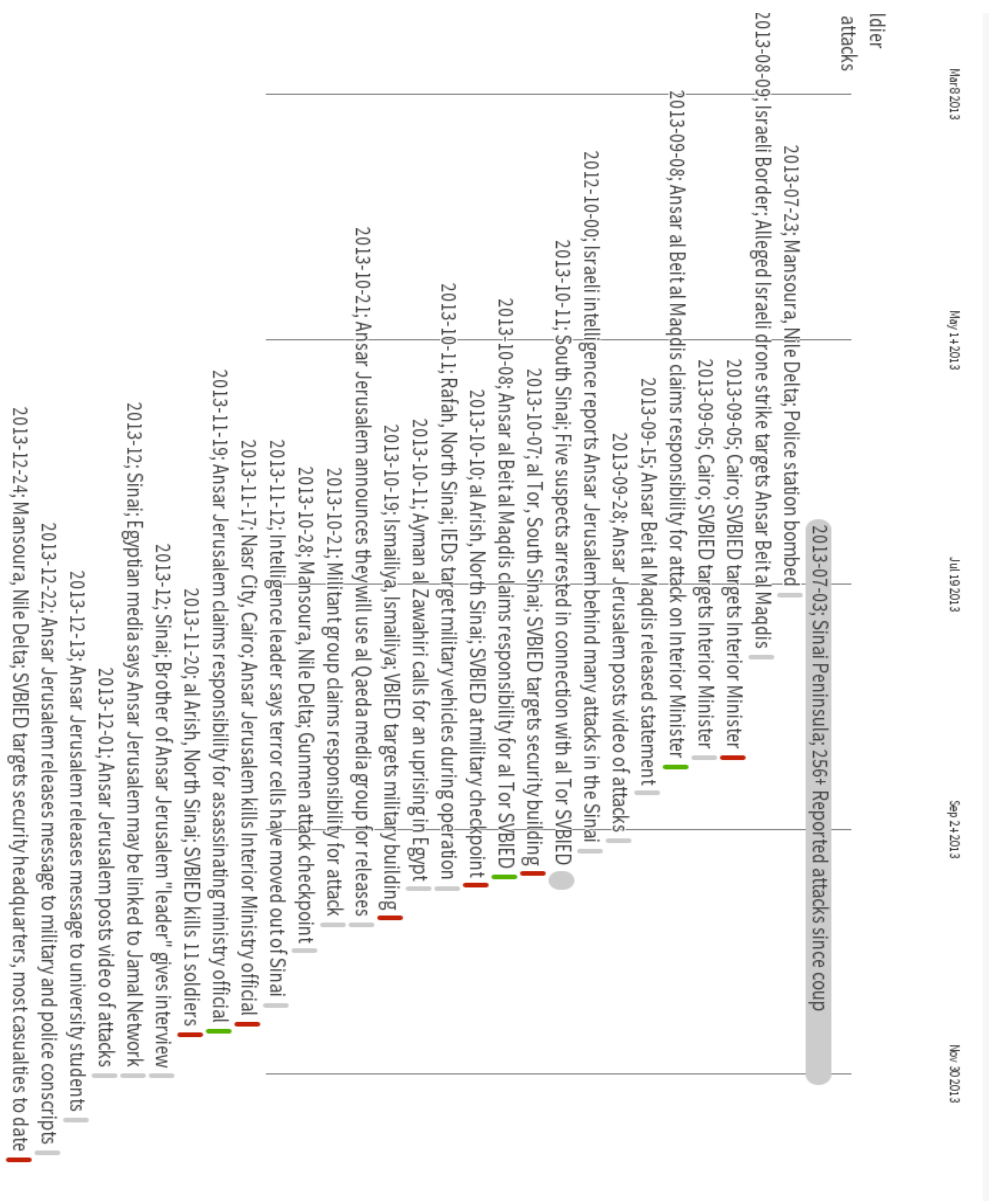


Figure 13: Attacks Carried Out by Ansar Jerusalem, Jan. 2011 to Dec. 2013

The significance of this attack cannot be overstated. Ansar Jerusalem carried out a major attack well outside their base of operations in North Sinai. This required moving men and materials through numerous military checkpoints and into the capital city. This attack also required a high level of information and skills. They had to successfully set up

the explosives in the car and be able to get the vehicle to the home of the interior minister. They were able to time the explosion such that the bomb detonated as the minister left his house. This attack represents a dramatic increase in the capacity of the organization from the previous months. This increase in capacity is the result of increased resources and knowledge Ansar Jerusalem acquired from the jihadi network operating outside of Egypt.

Since that assassination attempt, Ansar Jerusalem has carried out several more major attacks outside of North Sinai. On October 7, the group carried out another SVBIED attack, this time targeting the headquarters of the South Sinai Security Directorate in al Tor.<sup>163</sup> The attack killed three people and wounded about fifty.<sup>164</sup> Later that month, on October 19, the group carried out a car bombing in Ismailiya targeting a military compound.<sup>165</sup> Six were wounded in the attack.<sup>166</sup> On November 17, the group carried out another attack in Cairo. This time they shot and killed an Interior Ministry official.<sup>167</sup> The victim, Lieutenant Colonel Mohamed Mabruk, was responsible for conducting investigations against the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>168</sup> Ansar Jerusalem targeted him because of his involvement in the arrest of twenty-two women at a pro-Morsi protest.<sup>169</sup> The group reported that a cell local to Cairo, the Muatassim Billah Brigade,

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<sup>163</sup> Egypt State Information Service, 2013

<sup>164</sup> AFP, "Egypt soldiers wounded in Sinai bombings: security," 2013

<sup>165</sup> "Jihadists claim Egypt canal city car bombing, 2013"

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> "Jihadists claim murder of Egypt investigator of Islamists," 2013

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

carried out the attack.<sup>170</sup> Ansar Jerusalem is not just getting better at carrying out complicated attacks, but is also spreading into mainland Egypt.

There was a definite shift in the nature of Ansar Jerusalem following the coup that removed Morsi from office. Their target changed from Israel to Egyptian security personnel and their tactics became more complex. These changes are indicative of an influx of assistance from the global jihadi network. The group has received training and financial support from an outside group. The Egyptian government has blamed Hamas and accused them of training the local terrorist groups. However, if Hamas were supporting the terrorist groups, it seems unlikely that there would have been such a dramatic shift away from targeting Israel. A connection to the al Qaeda network is most likely.

Ansar Jerusalem's last known attempted direct attack on Israel was the August 9, 2013 attempt to fire rockets across the border.<sup>171</sup> The group hosted a very public funeral for the four Bedouin tribesmen killed after Israel retaliated.<sup>172</sup> Notably, the funeral for the four dead members featured al Qaeda flags draped over the coffins.<sup>173</sup> Of course, it is easy enough to acquire a particular flag, but the presence of those flags in conjunction with the subsequent changes in tactics and targets of Ansar Jerusalem suggests a stronger connection between the group and the al Qaeda network.

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<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> "Sinai group says it was Israeli drone target," 2013

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> Barnett, "Ansar Jerusalem announces deaths of 3 fighters, including commander," 2013

Ansar Jerusalem has also publically stated that they would be using an al Qaeda media outlet to release their statements.<sup>174</sup> They announced on October 21 that the group would not use any social media outlets to release statements and would instead only use al-Fajr Media Center.<sup>175</sup> This media outlet distributes al Qaeda productions on the Internet and reportedly maintains communication among the various al Qaeda affiliates.<sup>176</sup> The increased capability of the organization and the groups own statements indicate that they are in fact connected to the al Qaeda network.

#### **AL QAEDA AND AL QAEDA IN THE SINAI PENINSULA**

The al Qaeda network today looks very different from when it catapulted onto the international stage in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Even since the death of Osama bin Laden the group has continued to operate and become stronger.<sup>177</sup> The organization includes large affiliates in Iraq (al Qaeda in Iraq), Yemen (al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), North Africa (al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb), Somalia (al Shabaab) and Syria (al Nusra Front).<sup>178</sup> The network “is adaptive, complex, and resilient.”<sup>179</sup> Today a core group leads the increasingly decentralized network. Formal and informal human networks characterize the connections among members.<sup>180</sup> There are three main parts of the network: the core commanding group based in Pakistan, groups publically recognized

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<sup>174</sup> Barnett, “Ansar Jerusalem claims responsibility for car bombing in Ismailia,” 2013

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> Barnett, “It is possible' Ansar Jerusalem is tied to al Qaeda,” 2013

<sup>177</sup> Zimmerman, “The al Qaeda Network,” 2013

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

as being part of al Qaeda, and “the groups that may not publicly identify as al Qaeda but that functionally support the network and have adopted the al Qaeda ideology.”<sup>181</sup>

This third category most closely resembles the relationship between groups in the Sinai and al Qaeda. Groups in the Sinai not only support the network, but also benefit from the logistical support the network provides. There have been reports of the establishment of al Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula, but little concrete evidence of its existence until recently. In July following the removal of Morsi, the *Long War Journal* reported that a former doctor of Bin Laden, Ramzi Mowafi, was leading “al Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula.”<sup>182</sup> He reportedly appeared in Sinai in August 2011 and flyers with the name “al Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula” also appeared around the same time.<sup>183</sup> There have not been any official claims of responsibility from this group; it seems likely that they are instead providing ideological guidance, logistical support, and funding to local Sinai groups.

#### **ANSAR JERUSALEM, AL QAEDA AND SYRIA**

Evidence has suggested that Ansar Jerusalem may be connected to external jihadi networks in two distinct ways: via veterans from Syria and possible connections to the Mohammed Jamal Network. Ansar Jerusalem’s connections to veterans of the Syrian civil war became clear in October 2013. The group released a video of the September 5

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> Barnett, “Former bin Laden doctor reportedly heads al Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula,” 2013

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

assassination attempt on the Interior Minister on jihadi forums.<sup>184</sup> In this video, the group identified Walid Badr, a former Egyptian army officer, as the suicide bomber who targeted Minister Ibrahim.<sup>185</sup> The video revealed that Badr had fought against American forces in Afghanistan and more recently against the Assad regime in Syria.<sup>186</sup> Ansar Jerusalem did not identify which groups Badr fought with on these jihadi fronts, however al Qaeda had or has a major presence in both. Egyptian news sources have reported that other suspects linked to the attack also returned to Egypt from Syria, and were linked to al Qaeda's Syrian arm, al Nusra Front.<sup>187</sup>

At least two additional Ansar Jerusalem fighters have reportedly fought in Syria. One fighter, Abu Arsalan Saeed al Shahat, detonated a suicide vest in his apartment after security forces located him.<sup>188</sup> In early March, security forces arrested a suspect in January 24 bombings, some of which Ansar Jerusalem carried out, in Cairo who also reportedly fought in Syria as well as Libya.<sup>189</sup> It is probable that Ansar Jerusalem has established ties, or recruited members from amongst Egyptians returning from Syria. Syrian veterans can bring a great deal of experience in conducting operations against security personnel in addition to weapons and training knowledge. Returnees from Syria may also have ties to other international jihadi networks and connections that may facilitate the acquisition of weapons and funding.

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<sup>184</sup> Joscelyn, 2014

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> Barnett, "Egypt identifies Ansar Jerusalem leader as group announces deaths of fighter and preacher," 2014

<sup>189</sup> Barnett, "Egypt says suspect in Cairo attack fought in Syria and Libya," 2014

Egyptian news sources have also reported that Ansar Jerusalem, and Walid Badr in particular, have ties to the Mohammad Jamal Network (MJN). In 2011 and 2012, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula allegedly financed a terrorist cell in Egypt.<sup>190</sup> The leader of the cell was Mohammed Jamal.<sup>191</sup> Egyptian security personnel discovered letters directly between Jamal and al Qaeda leader, Ayman al Zawahiri.<sup>192</sup> Jamal wrote Zawahiri, reporting on his activities in Sinai and asking for assistance.<sup>193</sup> Jamal reported that his network was transporting weapons from Libya into Egypt and setting up training camps there.<sup>194</sup> Jamal has been in prison in Egypt since November 2012 but his network continues to operate. In addition to their ties to violence within Egypt, the network also is linked to the September 11, 2012 attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya.<sup>195</sup> Recently, Egyptian news sources reported that Badr trained in one of the Jamal Network's training camps, either in Sinai or Libya.<sup>196</sup>

It is unclear exactly how closely tied the Mohammad Jamal Network and other al Qaeda operatives are to Ansar Jerusalem and other "native" groups. At this point in time, it appears that al Qaeda and its network is playing a supporting role in the terror. They are providing funding, training and other logistical assistance, but are not directing activities on an operational level. Al Qaeda also serves a role as an inspiration for local groups who hope to follow in their footsteps.

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<sup>190</sup> Zimmerman, 2013, 21

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> Joscelyn, 2013

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee, 2013

<sup>196</sup> Joscelyn, 2014



## **Chapter 7: The “Why” Behind the Terror**

The reason the military has zeroed in on the Brotherhood as the party responsible for the terrorist outbreak is fairly clear. They are trying to eliminate their strongest political opposition. By declaring the MB to be a terrorist organization the military can remove the group from the political sphere without major objections from the international community or domestic population. However, their focus on the Muslim Brotherhood to the exclusion of the terrorist groups who are directly carrying out the attacks and those who support them is extremely problematic. While the military has focused on consolidating political control of the country, the terrorists who are actually behind the violence have had the opportunity to increase their resources and membership and carry out increasingly violent attacks.

This willful omission ignores the actual perpetrators of the terror and obscures the true motivation behind the violence. If the idea that the Brotherhood is behind the terror is taken at face value, then the “why” behind the terrorism, and the subsequent solution, seems obvious: the expulsion of Morsi is the primary driving force behind the violence reinstating him to the presidency would bring an end to their insurrection. Without knowing who is carrying out the attacks and why, it is nearly impossible to develop an effective counterterror strategy.

The causes of the terrorism ongoing in Egypt and terrorism throughout the world are much more complex than the military argues. To understand the driving factors and to answer the ultimate “why” question, we must examine who is carrying out the attacks

and what they are trying to accomplish. Although what the terrorists are trying to accomplish is not always abundantly obvious, it can be determined from the statements of the groups and the targets they seek.

In Egypt, the primary purpose of the terrorism is to disrupt the military's actions, particularly in the Sinai. The militant groups view the military's presence in the Sinai as fundamentally illegitimate. The groups are targeting the military in order to prevent their operations and possibly to force the military out of the Sinai. Ansar Jerusalem has even expanded their operations and aspirations well outside the Sinai. This group in particular has much more ambitious goals, hoping to bring about the fall of the military government or at least significantly limit its ability to function.

There has been violence in the Sinai since 2011, but it was primarily directed towards Israel. Most of the violent attacks were directed towards the gas pipeline to Israel or were cross-border attacks targeting tourists or the Israeli Defense Force. There were some shootings that targeted Egyptian security personnel but few notable attacks. The vast majority of these attacks were fairly simple – they did not require a great deal of advance planning or the ability to transport people and weapons through checkpoints. These attacks also did not require coordinated timing. The militants were not targeting specific personnel; they most often targeted checkpoints that are consistently manned.

Following the coup that removed Morsi from office, the target of the terrorism shifted from Israel to Egyptian security forces. Since 2011, there had been a steady stream of attacks on the pipeline to Israel. These attacks came to almost a complete stop in the summer of 2013. The targets of the terrorists have been almost exclusively

Egyptian security personnel since July 2013 and dozens of police and military officials have been killed.

Ansar Jerusalem has proved itself as the foremost Sinai-based terrorist group by carrying out highly complex attacks such as the attempted assassination of Interior Minister Mohamed Morsi, the assassination of Interior Ministry official Mohamed Mabruk and the bombing of the security directorate in Mansoura on December 24. These attacks required the technical knowledge to properly build bombs and the coordination and ability to detonate those bombs at the correct moment. Ansar Jerusalem has expanded the targets of its violence to include government officials that are working with the military. Their goal is not just to expel the military from the Sinai, but also to bring down the government.

Ansar Jerusalem has released a number of public statements that offer an interesting insight into the motivations and goals of the group. They have adopted the typical al Qaeda ideology, rejecting democracy and secular governance. In addition to this overarching motivation, the group has also identified more proximate causes of its violence.

Ansar Jerusalem has over and over again pointed to the actions of the military, and the mistreatment of the Egyptian people at its hands as the reason for its attacks. In an English version of the statement they released claiming responsibility for the September 5 attempt to assassinate Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim, they accused the military of a number of crimes:

...we have been shocked by what we saw from massacres against the ordinary Muslims ... and burning of the location with those in it from dead and injured, and assaulted the women and children and the freewomen of the land of Kinanah were taken to the prisons ... and the series of assaults continued against the mosques of Rabia, Ramses, Alexandria and other and ... shelling the houses of Allah in Sinai in a blatant attack against everything that relates to Islam.<sup>197</sup>

The statement continues with a promise to get revenge on the military on behalf of the Muslim people.<sup>198</sup> Ansar Jerusalem made similar claims in several other statements released throughout the fall. They are particularly outraged by perceived crimes against women – especially the arrest of female protesters. They point to this as the reason behind the assassination of the Interior Ministry official in Cairo in November 2013.<sup>199</sup>

Ansar Jerusalem has specifically targeted security personnel and avoided killing civilian, several times calling on civilians not to go near security installations.<sup>200</sup> It is difficult to say how successful they have been in this endeavor, as many reports of attacks do not differentiate between civilian and security casualties. Civilians have certainly been injured in attacks – at least eleven were wounded in the attempted assassination of the Interior Minister – but they have not been targeted. Ansar Jerusalem has even sought to minimize casualties of drafted soldiers.<sup>201</sup> In a December 2013 statement directed towards military personnel, the group asked military conscripts to leave their posts.<sup>202</sup> In the statement they declared that the entire Egyptian army was non-Muslim (a religious

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<sup>197</sup> Ansar Jerusalem, 8 September 2013

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> Ansar Jerusalem, 19 November 2013

<sup>200</sup> For example, *see* Ansar Jerusalem, 8 September 2013

<sup>201</sup> Egypt has a mandatory conscription policy, all young men are required to serve in the military for at least two years.

<sup>202</sup> Ansar Jerusalem, 22 December 2013

ruling that legitimizes violence against the military) and warned that he who remains in the service “only blames himself.”<sup>203</sup>

Ansar Jerusalem has issued a critique of democracy,<sup>204</sup> but the bulk of their attention is focused on the military. They view the military and its actions as fundamentally illegitimate and harmful. By launching numerous attacks and specifically targeting military installations they are attempting to make it impossible for the military to function. They are also trying to convince the population, who has a generally high regard of the military, to abandon their support and thereby delegitimize the military’s actions. Although they might have a broader goal of eventually establishing an Islamic government, their most immediate goal is to disrupt the activities of the military.

Ansar Jerusalem also sees itself as protecting the population. The group views the military and their actions in the Sinai as fundamentally illegitimate and threatening to their families. They have taken it upon themselves to defend the population, at first of the Sinai and now of Egypt as a whole from the unjust actions of the military. This reasoning helps explain why joining Ansar Jerusalem and other terrorist groups might be an attractive option for Egyptians. When joining a terrorist group is equated with protecting one’s community, it offers a sense of purpose for a frustrated populous.

Those driven to commit acts of violence may also view the presence of the Egyptian military in the Sinai as a sort of foreign occupying power due to the peninsula’s longtime alienation from the rest of the country and the military’s absence from the

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<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> Ansar Jerusalem, 8 September 2013

region. As Pape argued, foreign occupation – or in this case – perceived foreign occupation can be a powerful motivator for suicide attacks.

The most recent outbreak of terrorism in the Sinai has a similar pattern of terror to other countries, for example Algeria, Yemen and Mali. Where terrorists target domestic security forces, their primary goal is to disrupt their operations and delegitimize the institution. On an individual level, members are attracted to terrorism because of the opportunity to seek defend their loved ones. They feel that both their lives and the lives of their families are being threatened. Although the methods and actions are abhorrent, it is important to understand the personal motivation behind terrorism. With such a powerful appeal to participate in terrorism, it seems unlikely that the terrorists will renounce violence anytime soon.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

Terrorist attacks in the Sinai and the rest of Egypt have continued throughout the writing of this project and are likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Ansar Jerusalem has only grown in strength as the al Qaeda network has gained a foothold in Egypt. In an audio message released on April 18, 2014, Ayman al Zawahiri said that, “We bless every jihadi operation against the Zionists and the Americanized army that protects their borders and the criminal of the Interior, and fights the American interests that assault the Muslims.”<sup>205</sup> The leader of al Qaeda has taken a strong interest in Egypt and has spoken out in support of the terrorists operating there. Evidence suggests that his support is not only verbal but also material.

The al Qaeda network has infiltrated the country and given assistance to the local terrorist groups while the Egyptian military has been consolidating their political control of the country. Instead of focusing on conducting counterterror operations against Ansar Jerusalem and other Sinai-based terror groups, the military has devoted its energy to isolating and destroying the Muslim Brotherhood. The military has used the Brotherhood as a scapegoat in order to distract the restless population from the real security threat. The military has sought to hide the fact that they might not be capable of combatting this new terrorist threat and in the meantime the problem has gotten exponentially worse.

The main underlying cause of the violence is the underdevelopment of the Sinai. The government has isolated the region and ignored its residents for decades. Egyptians

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<sup>205</sup> Barnett, “Ajnad Misr claims 3 more attacks in Cairo area,” 2014

native to the Sinai have watched while tourist hotels were built along the coast and workers from mainland Egypt were brought in to benefit from the tourist industry. The rest of the country benefited from economic development while the Sinai governorates remained among the poorest. The perceived inequality in development has motivated residents to participate in violence.

It is too late to fix this error of history but it does not mean that the military cannot make steps to mitigate the damage. The military can focus on developing the Sinai and providing opportunity for its residents in order to give people an alternative to violence. Improving the quality of life in the Sinai is the first step to combatting the terrorist outbreak.

Unfortunately, the Egyptian military has very little experience in the Sinai Peninsula. They are not familiar with the terrain and do not know how to navigate the mountainous desert region. The local population has been marginalized under decades of military rule and has no incentive to assist the military in their operations. The military has mostly embarked on a collective punishment strategy, arresting hundreds of locals after a terrorist attack. This does little to encourage the population to work with the military. The military needs to build trust and a working relationship with the people if they are going to successfully isolate the Sinai-based terrorists.

The military must recognize that it is facing another front in the war on al Qaeda. They must therefore work to cut off ties between the peninsula and the global al Qaeda network. The military also has to develop a better working relationship with the local population in the Sinai. This will require both a cessation of collective punishment



methods and also providing economic and political opportunities for Sinai residents. The military cannot hope to defeat the terrorist threat unless they enlist the local population. If they fail to do so, the Sinai Peninsula could become a launching pad for terrorists to carry out major terrorist attacks outside of Egypt.

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## **Vita**

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This report was typed by Robin Nicole Richards.